Radaptation:
Adapting ancient Greek tragedy in the twenty-first century

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Abstract

This practice-led PhD examines the relationship between ancient tragedy and the contemporary moment from the dual perspective of playwright and critical commentator. The creative submission comprises three new plays, *My Boy*, *Electricity* and *Fed*, 'radaptations' of Euripides' tragedies *Medea, Electra* and *Hippolytus* respectively. These are accompanied by a critical analysis of how new theatre writing employs and reconfigures theatrical conventions usually associated with ancient Greek tragedy. This analysis focuses upon adaptations of *Medea* produced between 1996 and 2015 in the UK and Ireland, and includes discussion of plays written by Mike Bartlett, Marina Carr, Rachel Cusk, Liz Lochhead and Simon Stephens. It examines how these contemporary plays rework ancient form to revision the tragedy of *Medea*, with particular focus on the issues raised by the conventions of chorus, mask and messenger speech. This analysis considers what these conventions signify in the twenty-first century and how playwrights have responded to the creative opportunities they offer. The thesis reflects upon my own critical and creative findings, drawing on research by James Barrett, Helen Eastman, Simon Goldhill, Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and David Wiles, among others, in order to present a consideration of the relationship between the classical world in which Greek tragedies were originally created, and the context in which contemporary playwrights are now working.

Dedication

This PhD is dedicated to Mary Evans and Frank Smith, whose love, generosity and endless support enabled me to undertake this wonderful exploration of craft, and to all the working-class female playwrights out there who have not been given an opportunity to develop their full potential.

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Contents

MY BOY

A ‘Radaptation’ of Euripides’ *Medea*

PROLOGUE – BEDROOM

Moonlight floods into a child's bedroom on a council estate. A pet rat can be heard scuttling around in its cage.
It is a boy's bedroom, though you'd hardly know it. This place reeks of poverty. A dirty duvet is bunched on top of a stained mattress, no sheets or duvet cover.

The CHORUS (MOTHER's children who are or have been in foster care; these siblings should number three or more and be different ages) inhabit the stage as if they are ghosts. They will occasionally play, tease, fight and also look after each other. They are unheard and unseen by the other characters, unless otherwise indicated, though their presence may be felt.

A haunting soundscape bleeds over the bedroom, containing snatches of news items: 'Unidentified body of child', 'semi-naked boy', 'man walking his dog', 'wasteland'.

MOTHER enters the house - frantic. Doors open and clash shut and she searches for…

MOTHER
(voice off)
Kyle!

CHORUS
Hide.

The CHORUS pretend to hide, but are in full vision.

MOTHER
(voice off, more panicked)
Kyle!

MOTHER bursts into the bedroom. She spots the bunched duvet; he could be hiding.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Kyle?

No answer. Maybe he's not there. He's got to be there. Softer…

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Kyle?

She tentatively approaches the duvet, though hardly dares touch it. Steeling herself, she snatches the duvet back; the bed is empty. She stands staring at the bed with the worst running through her head: oh fuck, it's him.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Oh Kyle.

CHORUS
Ma?

A vixen cries - or it could be a mother's grief-stricken wail.

CHORUS (CONT'D)
Mum
Mummy.

LIGHTS FADE

ACT 1 - SAME BEDROOM - ONE YEAR LATER.

MOTHER is asleep on the mattress. She looks more unkempt than before, knackered actually, and now, heavily pregnant, but we won't know this until she gets up.

WOMAN, dressed smart-casual, stands watching her, silent. She could have been there for some time. A neatly wrapped present lies on the floor.

The CHORUS are singing a lullaby to MOTHER as she sleeps. When CHORUS stop singing, MOTHER wakes and gets a fright at WOMAN's presence.

MOTHER
Jesus Christ! What the fuck…

WOMAN
The door was open.

MOTHER
Who the hell…?

WOMAN
I did knock.

CHORUS
We didn't hear you.

MOTHER's eyes on WOMAN - sussing her out.

WOMAN
There was no reply.

CHORUS
Don't believe her.

MOTHER
So you just walked in? I don't care if you're from social services, the nash or the fucking police. You've no right to come into my house, my home, without being asked - OK?
(beat)
You got any snouts?

WOMAN
(doesn't answer)

MOTHER
Tabs, fags?

WOMAN
I don't smoke.

MOTHER
Fucking typical.

MOTHER gets up and starts looking for fags, WOMAN sees she is pregnant.

WOMAN
You're... pregnant.

MOTHER
(wince, as she feels a kick)
It's him that wants one.

WOMAN
It's a boy?

MOTHER
Fucked if I know.

CHORUS
Course it's a boy.

MOTHER
Police liaison always carry fags.
You new?

CHORUS sniff the air around WOMAN making pig snorts.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Nah, bit long in the tooth for a
trainee pig.

CHORUS
Look at her shoes, plod, plod, plod.

MOTHER
Should have taught you to carry snouts at Hogwarts. Lesson one: bribe the bastards, and if that doesn't work give them a good kicking with your sensible shoes.

CHORUS
Dead giveaway.

MOTHER
Clarke's passion killers. Plods, social workers and nurses. Your eyes are hard, so I'm guessing plod. And I've never been wrong yet.

WOMAN
You're wrong this time.

MOTHER
Fuck off am I.

WOMAN
You're very…

CHORUS
Cheeky.

WOMAN
Observant.

MOTHER
Knew it, police liaison. Your average copper doesn't use big words - only the do-gooding victim support type.

WOMAN
I am not from Police Liaison.

CHORUS
Big words.

Big Social Worker handbag.

CHORUS hide.

MOTHER
I've already telt you lot, I'm not interested in kissing and making up with the little nonce. He can rot in hell for all I care. My boy is dead. And no amount of bleeding heart bullshit is going to change that.

WOMAN lets this information filter.

WOMAN
Is this his bedroom?
(beat)
It is, isn't it?

MOTHER
It was.

WOMAN
But you sleep here now? Tell me about Kyle.

MOTHER starts to hear snatches of what the CHORUS say.

CHORUS
Kyle was ten
when…

MOTHER
Shut up.

WOMAN
It might help. To talk.

MOTHER
Help who?

WOMAN
You.

MOTHER
Bollocks.

WOMAN
To understand.

MOTHER
You think I'm to blame?

WOMAN
Mothers always blame themselves.
I do it all the time.

MOTHER
Well I don't.

WOMAN
You should.

CHORUS
She's not a social worker.

MOTHER
Eh?

CHORUS
What's she doing in Kyle's bedroom?
Bet she's got a pen in her bag.
Scribble, scribble, rag.

MOTHER
You're a hack aren't you?
(beat)
You lot are scum. Dragging up dirt.

WOMAN
Can't drag up dirt that isn't
there. Apparently, it's what the
public want.

MOTHER
Sick bastards.

WOMAN
Maybe they want to know why it
happened.

MOTHER
They're just looking for someone to blame.

CHORUS
(low chant under dialogue)
Name and shame.

WOMAN
Understandable, so it doesn't happen again, doesn't happen to their child.

MOTHER
It was just bad luck. Wrong place, wrong time.

WOMAN
Wrong kid.

MOTHER
No-one could have stopped this from happening. What's meant to be is meant to be. Life's shit and then we die. I didn't ask for any of this, I didn't ask to be born into a shithole, but I was. So I've just got to suck it up and get on with it. Make the best of a bad fucking job.

WOMAN
And are you making the best of it?

MOTHER
Is that what you're going to write?

CHORUS
Bun, bun, bun in the oven.

MOTHER
Who tipped you off?
(indicates bump)
About this.

WOMAN
I didn't know.

CHORUS
Bullshit.
Nana.
Bet she spilt the beans.

MOTHER
How much did you pay her?

CHORUS
Nana's a grasssssssssss.

MOTHER
Me ma?

WOMAN
What is that awful smell?

MOTHER
Take your fucking pick.

WOMAN spots the rat cage.

WOMAN
What's that?

MOTHER
What's it look like?

WOMAN
Like it could do with a good clean.

MOTHER
It's not a fucking crime.

CHORUS
What you gonna do...
Lock her up?

MOTHER
I wish I had me own little cage.
At least I'd get some peace.
Nice warm bedding, three square
meals, no bills to pay, no fucker
hassling me.

WOMAN
Can you really not smell that?
It's disgusting.

MOTHER
Roland won't mind.

CHORUS
Aw poor Roland.

MOTHER
It's a rat.

WOMAN
You've got a rat in there?

CHORUS
We wanted a dog.

MOTHER
Don't worry it doesn't bite.

WOMAN
Roland?

MOTHER
Me Mother named him. Fancy giving
kids a rat for Christmas!

WOMAN
Small pets are supposed to teach
children responsibility, humanity.

CHORUS
Is she taking the piss?

WOMAN
It needs cleaning out.

MOTHER
Feel free.

WOMAN
Rats carry disease.

MOTHER
Pet ones don't, it's house-trained.

WOMAN
It doesn't smell house-trained.

MOTHER
That'll be because it's dead.

CHORUS pick up the wrapped present and place it in front of WOMAN. WOMAN picks it up and hands it to MOTHER, MOTHER backs away. CHORUS watch and listen.

WOMAN
Is it your birthday? A special occasion? Anniversary maybe? It's got your name on. Aren't you going to open it?
(pause)
Go on, open it.

MOTHER
Is this from you?

WOMAN
It was on your doorstep when I arrived. Aren't you curious?

MOTHER
I know what it is.

WOMAN
I'd like to see it. Go on, open it. I've got that Christmas feeling.

MOTHER
Dog shit. That's what it is. People leave dog shit on my doorstep. Go on, write that down.

WOMAN
Still, it's nicely wrapped.

MOTHER
Are you taking the piss?

WOMAN
Why do you think people leave dog shit on your doorstep?

MOTHER
Because they're bastards. They don't know me. My family has been torn apart. I've lost my son.

WOMAN
You didn't lose him though, did you?

MOTHER
I fucking did.

WOMAN
Your son isn't dead.

MOTHER
(beat)
No. But I wish he was.

A moment.

WOMAN
And you thought bringing another child into this world was a good idea, after what your son did?

CHORUS
(low chant under dialogue)
Kyle's a nasty pasty.

MOTHER
What he did has got nothing to do with me. I want you to make that clear.

WOMAN
You're his mother.

MOTHER
I didn't do anything, you can't blame me. I didn't kill anyone, I didn't torture that little laddie.

WOMAN
That 'little laddie' has a name.

CHORUS
(whispered)
Jack. Jack. Jack.

MOTHER
I know his name.

WOMAN
Well say it.

CHORUS
Little Jack Horner,
sat in a corner,
eating a Christmas pie.
He put in his thumb…

WOMAN
Jack.

CHORUS
And pulled out a plum…

WOMAN
His name was Jack.

MOTHER
You lot are scum. Why don't you go and harass the fucking social workers, or the foster parents.

CHORUS
Ker-ching.

MOTHER
They were supposed to be looking after him.

CHORUS
Five hundred quid a week.

MOTHER
Kyle wasn't even with me when it happened, so how can it be my fault. He was in care!

WOMAN
Mothers are supposed to care for their own children.

MOTHER
What about Jack's mam, why don't you lot go hounding her?

WOMAN
You think it's in the public interest to chase the mother of a murdered child?

MOTHER
It's as much her fault as it is mine.

WOMAN
You're not even sorry.

The CHORUS opens the present and are amazed at the contents.

MOTHER
Course I am.

WOMAN
For yourself.

MOTHER
You think I wanted that little laddie, Jack, to... course I'm fucking sorry.

WOMAN
Prove it. Get down on your knees.

MOTHER
Fuck off!

WOMAN
Get down on your fucking knees and say sorry.

MOTHER
Is this what your readers want?

WOMAN
Repeat after me: I am sorry.

CHORUS
I am sorry.

MOTHER
Shut up.

WOMAN
For being.

CHORUS
For being.

MOTHER
Shut the fuck up.

WOMAN
A pathetic mother…

CHORUS
A pathetic mother.

WOMAN
An irresponsible…

CHORUS
Irresponsible…

WOMAN
Piece of dog shit mother.

CHORUS write 'mother' in dog shit on the bedroom wall.

MOTHER
Who are you?

WOMAN
What did Kyle say when he was interviewed and arrested?

CHORUS
No comment.

MOTHER
Where's your ID?

CHORUS
She's no hack.
Watch your back.

MOTHER
I want to see your ID.
(off her silence)
I'll call the police.

WOMAN
We're just having a chat. Just two women chatting. It happens all the time. Over coffee, over wine.

MOTHER
I'd like you to leave.

WOMAN
You're awfully polite all of a sudden.
(pause)
You don't recognise me, do you? No, course not, you didn't attend the court case, probably couldn't face that either, were you too depressed? Aw, was it too difficult for you? Maybe you'll recognise my name… Laura. Laura Anderson. Jack's mother.
(beat)
Jack Anderson was my son. My boy.

MOTHER is stunned.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Your boy tortured, sexually abused and murdered my boy.

MOTHER
I think you should leave.

WOMAN
And I think you should shut the fuck up.

MOTHER
I'm expecting…

WOMAN
Yes. Shame. That does change things.

MOTHER
I'm expecting someone. My ma's coming round for tea.

WOMAN
Your 'ma' isn't coming round, your mother doesn't give a shit about you. And you know something, that makes me sad, the thought of a mother not caring for her child.
(pause)
I, myself, am a very caring person, a very forgiving person. My problem is that I am too forgiving. But that's because I believe in forgiveness, not in the religious sense, I'm not a believer. I don't believe in God, least not now. But I do believe in forgiveness as part of the therapeutic process. I forgave my husband. I forgave him for fucking another woman. That was tough, really tough, but I did it because that's the type of person I am. I am understanding, empathetic, I always try to see things from the other person's point of view, put myself in their shoes, in their filth ridden rotten scummy shoes.

I'm doing it with Kyle, trying to see the bigger picture, consider what shaped him, his childhood, what drove him to do what he did? Is it in his DNA, is he rotten

inside? Is it his parents' fault, his mother's fault? I need to forgive, and I'm nearly there, I'm working really hard, nearly at the point of forgiving the murdering fucking cunt. Because that's the type of person I am.

But the hardest thing I have to do is forgive myself. A mother shouldn't have to forgive herself for letting her little boy out to play.

MOTHER lets out an unearthly groan; she's in labour.

WOMAN stands watching MOTHER in pain.

CHORUS play-act being midwives as MOTHER gives birth.

MOTHER
Owwww.

CHORUS
Now, now!

Breathe.

Remember the exercises you saw on the tv.

MOTHER
Fuck!

CHORUS
Did you do a birth plan?

Got any music?

You need to relax.

MOTHER
The bastard's coming early.

CHORUS
We should put her in the paddling pool.

We haven't got a paddling pool.

Fill the bath then!

MOTHER
Owwwww!

CHORUS
Stop screaming, ma.

It's just like having a massive shit.

Like squeezing a giant football out your Mary.

Like shelling peas.

Pip, pop, don't stop.

You'll forget all this when the little angel's here.

Now push!

MOTHER
Owwwwwwwwwwwwwww!

A baby (doll) is born.

CHORUS
Pip, pip, pop
Easy as
one two three.
Pop it out
scoop it up
pass it on.
Going, going, gone.

CHORUS throw baby to one another like a hot potato. Then they throw it to MOTHER. She puts it in a buggy and starts pushing it back and forward.

WOMAN
(to MOTHER)
I was a good mum, granted, Jack was a bit clingy, well, more than a bit, but that's just his nature. Some children are. I tried to address it, but he wanted to be with me. And, well, he was happy, and I wanted him to be happy. He was an only child so he wasn't as well socialised as some of his friends.

He never went out to play by himself. That day was different. He was pestering me. He wanted to play on his bike, his new bike that his father had bought him for Christmas. He'd only just learnt to ride. I didn't like him going out... but... well... I wanted him out of the house that afternoon.
(pause)
His father was calling round.

CHORUS
A witness saw Jack on his bike.

WOMAN
He wanted to tell me in person not over the phone.

CHORUS
Crossing the dual carriageway.

WOMAN
It was going ahead. They'd set a date. His fiancée wanted Jack to be pageboy.

CHORUS
Definitely him.

WOMAN
I said I'd think about it.

CHORUS
He didn't look old enough to be out by himself.

WOMAN
I opened a bottle of wine.

CHORUS
Not near such a busy a busy road.

WOMAN
I drank the whole bottle.

During the following choral section WOMAN and MOTHER join the CHORUS to recount the event and play the parts of JACK and KYLE.

CHORUS
Kyle is living with his foster parents. At 12.30, they send Kyle, aged ten, to his room. For being naughty. He'd kicked the dog so hard it's limping. Poor doggy. They're used to difficult children. They've been fostering for years. When something like this happens, it's best to give them some cooling off time. But our Kyle isn't cooling off. He climbs out of the bedroom window onto the garage roof.

Jack is struggling to pedal up the hill. I'll show mum. He gets off and starts to push. I'm a big boy.

Kyle steals a rock. From a neighbour's garden. He throws it at a pensioner's greenhouse. Bullseye! Run, Kyle, run! The old lady recognises him. 'One of the foster pests.'

Jack, aged six, is seen talking to a boy fitting Kyle's description. The boy is admiring Jack's bike.

Gis a go.

No.

Arrh go on.

It's new.

That's why I want a go.

It's a present from Daddy.

Daddy!

Kyle hasn't got a daddy. CCTV footage shows Kyle taking the bike off Jack and riding it away. Jack gives chase. A witness thinks it's just two friends playing a game.

Mammy's boy.

I'm not.

Gay boy. Little puff. Catch iz if you want it.

I'll tell mum.

Mammy's boy.

I am not.

Are so.

Not.

Prove it.

What?

Bet you can't.

Can.

Can't. I know where there's a dead swan. Down in the woods. A fox has

ripped its throat out. If you touch it...

I'll have to ask mum.

Scaredy cat. Mammy's boy.

I'm going home.

Go on then.

Please may I have my bike back?

CHORUS start circling 'Jack'.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Not until you touch the dead swan.

I want to go home.

Tough. Tough titty.

'Kyle' starts poking Jack's 'titties'.

'Jack' starts to cry.

CHORUS (CONT'D)
The social work report said Kyle was known for his highly sexualised language.

He was disciplined at school for exposing himself to the girls in the playground.

A broken paving slab was found at the scene.

Cry baby, cry baby. Cry. Cry. Cry. Baby. Fucking cry!

CHORUS takes baby doll out of the pram and hands it to WOMAN

MOTHER
Take the kid.

CHORUS
An eye for an eye,
a boy for a boy.
Hold him.
Take him.
He's yours.

WOMAN cradles doll in her arms looking lovingly, longingly at the little baby.

WOMAN
I can't take him.

MOTHER
You have to.

WOMAN
He's not mine.

MOTHER
Please.

WOMAN
He's yours.

MOTHER
I don't want him. And he won't want me.

CHORUS
Give him a chance, give him a good life.

WOMAN
I need to leave.

MOTHER
Don't go.

CHORUS
Bet you can cook.
And sew.

WOMAN
This was a mistake.

CHORUS
No.

Please...

Miss...

MOTHER
Look at him.

WOMAN
He is beautiful.

CHORUS
Take him. Love him. Smother him
with kisses.

WOMAN
What is his name?

MOTHER shrugs.

CHORUS
You'll have to guess.

WOMAN
He looks like a Henry or a Harry.

MOTHER shakes her head.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
George? Joshua? Benedict?
Benjamin?

CHORUS shake their heads.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Walter!

CHORUS
Walter?!

WOMAN
Jordan? Connor? Kenzie? I give up.

MOTHER
Call him what you like.

CHORUS
You can't give up.

WOMAN puts baby back in buggy and starts to leave without him.

MOTHER
That's it, walk away. Like all the fucking rest!

CHORUS
Take him.

WOMAN
It's for the best.

CHORUS
Take us too!

MOTHER
He's an innocent. A blank page. You can shape him whichever way you like. Mould him, make him good.

CHORUS
Mould us!

WOMAN
He'll look like Kyle.

MOTHER
Different dads. Different natures. No one need ever know.

WOMAN
I'd know.

MOTHER
He'll end up like Kyle if you leave him.

CHORUS
Feral brat.

WOMAN
Your child is not my problem.

CHORUS
Skip rat.

WOMAN
You know something, you are a very lucky woman.

MOTHER
Lady luck shat on me the day I was born.

WOMAN
You're lucky that I'm walking away. I flipped a coin this morning, to see whether I should come here. I flipped a coin to see what shoes I should wear. I flipped a coin to see… whether I should bring a knife.

Pause, as this information filters. Both women stare at each other for what seems like an age. WOMAN picks up her bag, and then goes to leave...

MOTHER
You've lost one child, boo hoo, I've lost all of mine.

CHORUS
We're still here!

WOMAN
You gave your children away, you threw them away. Like they were rubbish.

CHORUS
Mam isn't well.
When she gets better...

MOTHER
I love all my kids.
(goading)
But Kyle was my favourite.

WOMAN opens her bag and takes out the knife.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Kill me. Go on.

CHORUS
No!

WOMAN
You don't think I would?

The CHORUS surrounds WOMAN and hug her so she can't move.

MOTHER
Think of Jack. Think of your beautiful boy.

WOMAN thinks of Jack.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Dead.

WOMAN looks MOTHER straight in the eye; WOMAN drops the knife, frees herself from the CHORUS and exits.

CHORUS sees MOTHER eyeing the knife. Concerned about what she might do, they bring baby to MOTHER singing him a lullaby - the same lullaby they sang to MOTHER earlier. MOTHER looks lovingly at them and the baby.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Once upon a time there was a little boy, my boy, and he lived in a beautiful house. And he had a nice garden to play out in where he could run around and be safe. And his mammy and his daddy were happily married and both had jobs and worked hard and paid their way, and they could afford to buy their little boy nice things, because he deserved the best, lovely clothes, decent gear, nice designer stuff, not the fake shit off the market. And he went to school and learnt to read and write and felt good about

himself, felt he could do anything he wanted to do, could be an astronaut or a doctor or a teacher, or just get a job. And he passed all of his exams because he had his own room where he could go and study and his own bed which was comfortable with pillows as soft and fluffy as clouds and a fresh sweet smelling duvet. And my boy would never be afraid in his room, in his bed, and he'd never have to pretend to be asleep... My boy would be surrounded by lots of friends, good friends, people who cared about him.

MOTHER picks up the knife and gets in bed with the baby.

CHORUS

Someone...
Anyone...
Help!
Help her.
Stop her.
Someone...

MOTHER kills the baby and the duvet turns red. The CHORUS watch on, now impassive. They look to the audience.

CHORUS (CONT'D)

Please!

LIGHTS FADE

ELECTRICITY

A ‘Radaptation’ of Euripides’ *Electra*

SCENE 1 - BYRE

The byre is dimly lit by an old oil lamp. MAC, in farm overalls and beany hat, is shifting around small bales of straw.

MAC

There's three types of farm dogs:
your working dog, your guard dog
and your pet dog. Your collie's a
working dog, for rounding up sheep
or cattle. A Rottweiler or Alsatian's
best for guarding the place. And then
there's the wee terrier type, a Border
or Jack Russell - good with kids and
for killing rats.
(pause)
I love dogs. Faithful. Trusting.
Obedient. They need training mind.
Nowt worse than an untrained dog.
My advice? Learn to whistle. Oh, and,
always carry a stick, you never know
when you might need it.

He picks up an axe, examines it and practises swinging.

They say farming's in the blood.
That farmers have a special
connection with the land. Aye,
well farmers tell themselves a whole
heap of shite to help cope with the
daily slog. My old man knew the score,
he'd say, 'there's only two things
you need to know about farming:
when you want sun it'll rain;
and where there's livestock there's
dead stock.' Disposing of carcasses
isn't easy, rules and regulations
for everything these days.

He chops a piece of wood.

Farming's dangerous, accidents just waiting to happen, slurry tanks, agricultural machinery, bulls on the turn.

He buries the axe into a block of wood.

Not here mind. Just a little sheep farm this. Cattle long gone.
(he looks around the byre, disapproving)
Left to wrack and ruin. Miles from anywhere.

He finds an old blanket and makes up a bed.

Me, I like the peace. The quiet life ain't for everyone mind. Can send you a bit… loopy.

He howls like a dog, smiles, turn off the oil lamp and settles himself down for the night.

SCENE 2 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN, LATE OCTOBER.

The dilapidated kitchen is in darkness, except for the light of the hunter's moon silhouetting ESTHER (late 60s, bitter, controlling matriarch) reading Farmers Weekly wearing a head torch. KATH (40, dowdy, downtrodden daughter, but with a spark in her eye) is in the byre - attached to the house - trying to fix a problem with the electricity.

KATH
(from byre)
It's dead.
(beat)
Mam?

ESTHER
(ignores her)

KATH
(from byre)
You there?

ESTHER
(ignores her)

KATH
(from byre)
You're supposed to be helping.

ESTHER
(grumbles to self)

KATH
(from byre)
I can't see a bloody thing.
(beat)
Have you seen my head torch?

ESTHER
(ignores her)

KATH
(from byre)
This was your idea.

Loud banging - metal on metal - then grumbly old generator starts; electricity and lights flicker on.

ESTHER takes off the head torch and hides it down the side of the armchair. She pretends to be asleep. KATH enters.

KATH (CONT'D)
Happy now?
(long pause)
Mam?
(beat)
You alright? Mam?

ESTHER snores loudly. KATH guesses she's being played.

KATH (CONT'D)
Aw, bless, poor mam, sound asleep. Those sleeping tablets I put in her tea must have worked. Now she's sparked out I can do as I please.

KATH picks up Yellow Pages and flicks through. ESTHER opens one eye.

KATH (CONT'D)
A B C D E-lectrician man.

ESTHER
Over my dead body!

KATH
Oh, you're awake?

ESTHER
Put that down.

KATH
You were supposed to be helping!

ESTHER
No man crosses this threshold. You hear?

KATH
I can't keep mending it myself.

ESTHER
We've managed all these years without a man.

KATH
The electricity's buggered. The rats have been at it. The whole place needs rewiring.

ESTHER
Needs a new fuse, that's all. You can mend a fuse.

KATH
Use your savings.

ESTHER
I haven't got any savings.

KATH shakes her head - rubbish!

ESTHER (CONT'D)
The old generator will do fine.

KATH
It'll cost us more in diesel.

ESTHER
We'll switch it off when we don't need it.

KATH
The problem isn't only with the generator it's... it's... this place. It's falling apart.

ESTHER
Then move out!

KATH
I will.

ESTHER
See if I care.

KATH
One day you'll come down those stairs
and I won't be here. You'll have
to find another donkey.

They stare at each other.

ESTHER
Did you hear it?
(beat)
You did, didn't you? Last night.
A man.

KATH
Where's the housekeeping?

ESTHER
There was a man outside

KATH
I need money for diesel.

ESTHER
Outside my window.

KATH
Mother!

ESTHER
Howling.

KATH
I've already siphoned the pick-up
for the generator.

ESTHER
The man was howling. I was scared.
I shouted for you but you never came.

KATH
There was no man.

ESTHER
Maybe it was a dog?

They both take in the possibility of this information.

KATH
(...)

ESTHER
Kathleen?

KATH
Don't call me that.

ESTHER
Why didn't you come? It sounded like a big dog. Did you really not hear it?

KATH
(...)

ESTHER
I swear on your sister's life.

KATH
She's already dead.

ESTHER
On your life then. Have you taken your tablets?

KATH
Just let me call a man to sort it.

ESTHER
We don't need a man.

KATH
A woman then. Someone qualified.

ESTHER
You can't just stop taking them tablets.

KATH
What tablets?

ESTHER
The tablets that make you not daft.

KATH
You're the dafty.

The generator gurgles, lights dim and flicker.

KATH (CONT'D)
There isn't much diesel.

ESTHER
There's plenty candles under the sink.

KATH
I can't take candles into the barn.

ESTHER
Then you'll just have to fix the electricity.

KATH
It's dangerous.

KATH makes a show of sitting down, huffed. Silence. A dog howls. The women look at each other, both scared but hiding it.

KATH (CONT'D)
Probably a dog from the village.
(beat)
Maybe I'll give the electricity another go.

ESTHER
I'll give you hand.

KATH
Best stay here.

ESTHER
I want to come.

KATH
I need you here. I'll shout

through to see if the lights
are working. OK?

ESTHER
OK. You'll need this.

She gives her the head torch.

KATH
(angry, but says nothing)

KATH exits to fix the electricity. ESTHER picks up the poker from the fire. She sits in the chair trying to relax, but clearly ready for action. The dog howls again.

ESTHER
It's getting nearer. Kath?
Did you hear that?

There's a huge bang from the direction of the electricity box.

ESTHER sits frozen with panic - this could be serious.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Kath?

KATH
(doesn't answer)

ESTHER
You alright?

KATH
(doesn't answer)

ESTHER
Are you ignoring me?

KATH
(doesn't answer)

ESTHER
(seriously worried)
Kath? You winding me up? It's not
funny. Please be winding me up.

After a few moments a blackened KATH emerges, in pain, nursing a badly damaged wrist. ESTHER is hugely relieved she's alive but doesn't betray it.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
You could have answered.

Dog howls. Generator grunts. Lights go off.

SCENE 3 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN, NEXT DAY

The kettle whistles sharp and shrill on the kitchen range. ESTHER is frozen to the spot staring at MAC.

MAC
I could murder a cuppa.

ESTHER
Who are you?

Her eyes are fixed on him as she removes the kettle from the heat.

MAC
You've a fine place, missus.
Very rustic. Very homely.

ESTHER still staring.

MAC (CONT'D)
The door was open.

ESTHER
I told her, no electrician.

MAC
I'm not an electrician.

MAC moves around the room looking at the place. ESTHER waits for him to make one false move.

ESTHER
You don't scare me.

MAC
I don't mean to scare you. I'm concerned about you. You need to protect yourself, protect your property. No security, no CCTV. Anyone could walk in, help themselves.

ESTHER
Are you a salesman?

MAC
Do I look like a salesman?

ESTHER
I don't like salesmen.

MAC
I'm not a salesman.

ESTHER
You're a man. We don't like men.
We don't want men around here.

MAC
We?

ESTHER
You shouldn't be here.

MAC
I'm looking for work.

ESTHER
There's none.

MAC
Plenty needs doing. Pointing, painting,
slating…

ESTHER
I know you.

MAC holds her gaze.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Your type. The type that takes
advantage of poor old women. Say
the roof needs fixing when there's
nowt wrong with the slates. Fiddles
them out of their savings.

MAC
I'm not after money. I'm just
looking for a place to park my
caravan for a week or two.

ESTHER
We're not a campsite.

MAC
In exchange for a bit of work, obviously.

ESTHER
You're lucky I don't march you off my land at gunpoint.

MAC
Well that's nice. You threaten me after your stupid dog nearly ran me off the road.

ESTHER
Dog?

MAC
Vicious brute of a beast.

ESTHER
What dog?

MAC
You should keep it locked up. It'll do those sheep a mischief.

ESTHER
We don't have a dog.

MAC
You've got a stray.

ESTHER
(...)

MAC
I could get rid of it if you like?

ESTHER
(...)

MAC
In exchange for a cup of tea?

ESTHER
(considers)

MAC
Please yourself. Best get your husband to deal with it.

ESTHER
He's dead.

She throws a tea bag in a mug, scalds it with water.

MAC
I'm sorry.

ESTHER
Don't be. It was a long time ago.

MAC
Still, it's a sad thing to lose a loved one.

ESTHER
(hint of a smile)

MAC starts to whistle a tune while scanning the place.

MAC
You never remarried?

ESTHER
You don't put your head in the noose twice.

She hands him the mug.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
The man ruined my life.

MAC
Shame. Damned shame. How did he…
[DIE] if you don't mind me asking?

ESTHER
Suddenly.

MAC
That must have been a shock.

ESTHER
It was for him. I poisoned his tea.

MAC spits out tea, ESTHER laughs. MAC laughs. The atmosphere now a little more relaxed...

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Do you believe in fate?

MAC
I believe we make our own fate.
My mother taught me that.

ESTHER
Wise woman.

MAC
She was a tyrant.

ESTHER
All good mothers are.

MAC
Doesn't stop kids from loving them.
Human nature. Mother nature.
I'd kill for her.

ESTHER
Some woman then?

MAC
Good cuppa missus.

ESTHER
What's your name?

MAC
Mac.

ESTHER
Mac what?

MAC
Just Mac.

ESTHER
It's a good name, simple, solid, dependable.

MAC
It's just a name.

ESTHER
Names are important.
(beat)
Bet you can wield an axe.

MAC
You can tell that from my name?

ESTHER
From your hands. Hands tell you a lot about a person. Here, feel mine.

She puts her hands to his cheeks.

MAC
They're cold.

ESTHER
Very cold.

MAC
What does that say about you?

ESTHER
I need warming up.

MAC takes her hands in his and removes them from his cheeks.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Big strong farmer's hands. Strong shoulders, thick forearms, powerful thighs. Size doesn't always equal strength though. Bet you couldn't

lift me.

MAC
Sorry?

ESTHER
Well…?

MAC
Well what?

ESTHER
Lift me up.

MAC
You want me to lift you up?

ESTHER
Yes.

MAC
No.

ESTHER
No you can't or no you won't?

MAC
Could lift you no problem.

ESTHER
I'm heavier than I look.

MAC
Thrown calves bigger than you over my shoulder.

ESTHER
Prove it. Throw me over your shoulder.

MAC
No.

ESTHER
Why not?

MAC
Because.

ESTHER
Because…?

MAC
This is ridiculous.

ESTHER
You don't like touching women.
Are you… one of them gays?

MAC laughs.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
You see all sorts on a farm.

MAC
You're heading up the wrong track.

ESTHER
Is it my age?

MAC
It's just weird.

ESTHER
Rubbish! You can't do it.
You're just a big jessie.

MAC sweeps ESTHER up in his arms. She loops her arms around his neck, securing herself so that he can't let go.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Well Mac, you've proved me wrong.
Now, what do you want?

MAC
I've told you.

ESTHER
What do you really want?

MAC
I like it here. Reminds me of home. Nice big hearth.

ESTHER
There hasn't been a fire in this hearth for a while.

MAC manages to put ESTHER down but she still has her arms around his neck. MAC pushes her away.

MAC
I've had enough of women, and I'm certainly not looking for any romantic liaisons if that's what you're after.

ESTHER
Not even if I was younger?

MAC
No.

ESTHER
If I was prettier?

MAC
Absolutely not.

ESTHER
Good. Then we might have a deal. Are you any good with electrics?

MAC
I know my way round a circuit board.

ESTHER
You'll earn your keep.

MAC
I can stay?

ESTHER
On one condition. You keep away from my daughter.

MAC
You've got a daughter?

ESTHER
She likes sheep, not men. And that's the way I want it to stay.

MAC
You have my word.

ESTHER
Promise.

MAC
I swear.

ESTHER
On your mother's life?

MAC smiles.

SCENE 4 - BYRE

MAC sits in the low light of the byre. He is playing a home-made video of a couple having sex on his phone - audience cannot see images but hear audio. He watches it.

At the same time, in the kitchen, KATH bangs her head against the wall, a dull constant thud.

MAC
(stops video, disapproval)
I'm a man of the world. Been on the road most my life, seen everything there is to see when it comes to women... nothing surprises me. Bored farmer's wives, school girls painted like whores, drunk lasses throwing themselves at fellas, groped in grotty pub car parks, banged in the back of cars. Cheap. Shameless. Not for me.

Banging stops.

MAC (CONT'D)
Guess I'm a romantic at heart, I believe in courtship. The man does the running and the woman fights him off. Not the other way round. My mother brought me up right. Always had us in clean clothes, especially the girls.

He watches video again, more disapproval.

SCENE 5 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN

KATH enters laughing. She's soaked wet through and is closely followed by MAC chasing her around the kitchen table with a wet sponge. They are having water fight.

MAC
You little...

KATH
You started it.

MAC
I'll get you.

KATH
You'll have to catch me first.

MAC
When I do…

KATH
You'll what?

MAC
You won't be laughing when I get hold of you.

KATH
Promises, promises.

MAC
I'm warning you.

KATH
I'll tell me ma.

MAC
She'll be on my side.

KATH
You're not quick enough.

MAC
You're right. I give up. You win.

KATH
I don't believe you.

MAC puts wet sponge down.

KATH (CONT'D)
Repeat after me. Kath is the best.

MAC
Kath is the best.

KATH
Kath is the queen.

MAC
Kath is the queen.

KATH
Kath is the best lass I've ever seen.

MAC
Kath is the best lass I've ever seen.

He holds out his hand so they can shake on it. She's not sure if it's a trick.

MAC (CONT'D)
You won fair and square.

She shakes his hand, quick as a flash he's immobilised her and is dragging her to the sink, she's squealing with delight.

KATH
No. No. I'll tell me ma.

MAC
You wouldn't dare.

He grabs the sponge and soaks her with it.

KATH
Let me go.

MAC
Repeat after me.

KATH
No way.

MAC
Mac is the best.

KATH
Mac is a pest.

MAC
I won't let you go until you say it.

KATH
You're hurting.

MAC lets her go. She laughs at him.

MAC
You wee minx. Make out butter wouldn't melt. Get them off.

KATH
What?

MAC
Don't tell me you're shy.

KATH
You get them off.

He starts to strip. Hesitation, then she starts to strip.

MAC
(genuine)
Kath is the best. Kath is the queen.

KATH
Shut up.

MAC
Kath is the best I've ever seen.

KATH
I mean it.

MAC
You gonna stop me?

KATH launches herself at him putting her hand over his mouth. He tears her hand away; they are in an embrace.

MAC (CONT'D)
You are beautiful, do you know that?

KATH
Shut up.

MAC
You are.

KATH
Kiss me.

He's thinking about it when they hear ESTHER approach.

KATH (CONT'D)
Mam.

MAC
Shit.

KATH
Quick.

MAC gathers up his clothes.

KATH (CONT'D)
Hide. Quick. Just go.

ESTHER enters and takes in the scene. She picks up the wet dress.

ESTHER
Feeling the heat?

KATH
I was cleaning the water troughs.

ESTHER
In your best dress?

KATH
My only dress.

ESTHER
It's nearly winter.

KATH
It's warm out.

ESTHER
It's ruined.

KATH
It was an accident.

ESTHER
You're an embarrassment. Running around the farm half-dressed trying to catch his attention. Trying to engage him in conversation.

KATH
I'm just being polite.

ESTHER
He isn't interested.

KATH
What's wrong with talking to the man?

ESTHER
Talking leads to other things.

KATH
Not in my experience.

ESTHER
Take my word for it.

KATH
I'm not interested in him.

ESTHER
He's got plenty women on the go.

KATH
I don't care.

ESTHER
Better looking than you. I've seen pictures.

KATH
He showed you pictures?

ESTHER
(doesn't answer)

KATH
Have you been snooping?

ESTHER
Not my fault he doesn't lock his caravan. You've been warned.

KATH
I'm not interested.

ESTHER
Good.

KATH
Good.
(long pause)
What did they look like?

ESTHER
Fancy. Like models.

KATH
You're lying.

ESTHER
Didn't have much on. Dirty whores.

KATH
Mac wouldn't be interested…

ESTHER
He's a man.

KATH
I hate you.

ESTHER
I'm not the one leading you up the garden path. I'm not the one trying to get their hand into your knickers, playing with himself in his caravan at night lusting over photos of dirty slags. He needs to go.

KATH
(long pause)
Just the two of us again?
(ESTHER nods)
It's probably for the best. Like you said. We don't need men. If he wants to whore his way across the country it means nothing to me. He's served his purpose round here. Nowt but a nuisance. I don't like his stupid face. I want him to go. Probably best if I tell him.

ESTHER exits. MAC reappears.

MAC
She's lying.

KATH looks at him and says nothing.

MAC (CONT'D)
Please tell me you don't believe her?

KATH
She's my mother.

MAC
She's jealous.

KATH
She's trying to protect me. She wants what's best for me.

MAC
She wants what's best for herself. She wants to turn you against me.

KATH
I know.

MAC
And I can't believe you're going to…

KATH starts to laugh.

KATH
Your face!

MAC
What?

KATH
Wish I had a camera!

MAC
I don't...

KATH
Aw, poor Mac. Serves you right for eavesdropping.

MAC
So… you don't want me to leave?

KATH
Course I don't want you to leave.

MAC is confused.

KATH (CONT'D)
If I said I wanted you to stay, she'd have marched you off the place straight away.

MAC
She's going to make me leave anyway.

KATH
You really don't know my mother.

MAC
You think she'll let me stay now?

KATH
I'd bank on it, if she thinks I want you to go.

MAC
And what if she doesn't let me stay?

KATH
Then we'll just have to bump her off.

MAC doesn't know if she's being serious. Laughs. She keeps a straight face.

MAC
You're wicked!

KATH
You only just worked that out!

MAC
And beautiful.

KATH
But not as beautiful as your other women?

MAC
There are no other women.

KATH
Promise.

MAC
I promise.

KATH
I don't care.

MAC
Then why make me promise?

KATH
To see if you're as good a liar as me.

MAC
And what's the verdict?

KATH smiles.

KATH
No.

MAC
How can you tell?

KATH
Your cheek twitches. My dad's used to do the same.

MAC
I need to get out of these wet clothes.

KATH
You better had.

A moment. He walks away.

KATH (CONT'D)
Mac?

He stops.

KATH (CONT'D)
Keep your door open tonight.

He walks off.

LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 6 - BYRE - WINTER

MAC chops firewood with an axe.

MAC

This farmer I once knew liked to go shooting. So he gets himself this hunting dog. He loves this dog, rather be out with it than in with the missus. The wife wants rid of it, but the farmer says no. He keeps the dog in an old stable, with both doors bolted shut, away from the house. Keeps it hungry. Still it's a powerful beast. More like a bear than a dog. They've three kids, a boy of ten and two girls, a wee whingy baby and an older lass, apple of her mother's eye.

This one day, farmer's up the field checking the ewes. It's lambing time, and this brute of a dog's going mental, throwing itself at the stable door, barking, howling, scratching. The little girl's dressed all fancy, playing in the yard with her doll. It's a hot spring day and her brother starts splashing her with water from the hose, she's running around, laughing and shrieking. Nobody notices that the dog's gone quiet. The dog's gone quiet because he's busy. Busy digging. Digging his way out, through the dirt floor that the farmer's been meaning to slab.

The mother's in the kitchen and she's shouting at the boy to quit it with the hose, he'll ruin the bairn's lovely dress, but that's what he wants to do. Why should she get all his mam's attention? So he sprays water into the dust making

mud splatter on the little lass, who starts screaming. And the lad's laughing and his mam's running, and she grabs him and brays him all the way back into the house. And the baby's whinging, and the dog's digging, and the little girl's still crying, all alone in the yard. The dog's been locked up and hasn't been fed, it wants to run, it wants to hunt. A big rat would do, or a chicken, or a baby lamb. All the animals have scattered, they sense the danger in the air, as the dog claws its way out, gripping the earth with its huge paws, heaving its massive body out under the stable door.

SCENE 7 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - LATE WINTER

MAC and KATH enter from a night at the pub, both tipsy, giggling, trying to keep the noise down.

MAC
Shush!

KATH
You shush!

MAC
You'll wake your Ma!

KATH
Fuck me ma!

MAC
Now that's not nice, Kathleen.

KATH
Well maybe I'm not nice.

MAC
You can't change your nature.

KATH
Maybe I've been taking lessons from the old bitch.

MAC
You shouldn't be calling her names.

They both laugh, KATH long and hard.

MAC (CONT'D)
(serious)
Shush! I mean it. You'll wake her up.

KATH
She'll not be waking.

MAC
She's always up through the night.

KATH
How do you know?

MAC
I see from the caravan.

KATH
Do you now? What else do you see?

MAC
I see it all.

KATH
All?

MAC
Everything.

KATH
Do you see me? I bet you do.
In my nighty.

MAC
(...)

KATH
Are you blushing?

MAC
I don't blush.

KATH
I don't wear a nighty.

MAC
Well you should, you'll catch your death.

KATH
Do you like what you see?

MAC
You're drunk.

KATH
And you, you sit in your caravan watching my mother going for a piss. Kiss me. Just fucking kiss me.

MAC
No.

KATH
She'll never know. Not tonight. She's taken some of my sleeping tablets. Slipped them into her cocoa. Was that wrong of me?
(listens for noise upstairs)
Seem to be working.

MAC
(...)

KATH
They're harmless. I take them all the time.

MAC
(...)

KATH
She's always saying she could do with a good night's sleep. Drink?

MAC declines, she pours herself a whisky.

KATH (CONT'D)
We can do what we like. What would you like to do?

MAC
Get to know you.

KATH
(amused)

MAC
What was your dad like?

KATH
(...)

MAC
Well?

KATH
He was a bastard. Abandoned us when I was baby. Took my brother. What type of man does that?

MAC
Maybe he had his reasons?

KATH
(...)

MAC
Your ma isn't the easiest of people.

KATH
She was grieving for my sister. He left. End off.

MAC
What happened to her?

KATH
I don't want to talk about it.

MAC
Might do you good.

KATH
Spilling me guts? No thanks.
(off MAC's shrug)
Look, Mam blames me. Apparently, I was a whingy baby.

MAC looks confused.

MAC
She can't blame you for…

KATH
For what?
(off MAC's silence...)
You know how she died? Did Mam tell you?

MAC
She mentioned something.

KATH
Like what?

MAC
About hating dogs.
(beat)
Whatever happened, you're not to blame.

KATH
Kiss me.

MAC
What?

KATH
Kiss me.

MAC
No.

KATH
Mac.

MAC
This is…

KATH
This is what?

MAC
It's wrong.

KATH
It wasn't wrong the other night.

MAC
We should never have…

KATH
I'm glad we did.

MAC
I shouldn't have…

KATH
Please don't say that.

He goes to leave.

KATH (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

MAC
Kathleen.

KATH
Don't call me that.

MAC
I'm going to the caravan.

KATH
Make sure you lock your door. Better still pack your bags. Mam was right we're better off without you.

MAC
Is that what you really want?

KATH
Yes.

MAC
I came here for a reason.

KATH
To make my life a misery.

MAC
(pause)
It's to do with your brother, Kath.

KATH is taken aback.

KATH
Daniel?

MAC nods.

KATH (CONT'D)
You know Daniel?

MAC
(...)

KATH
If you know where he is you'd
better tell me.

MAC
I'm sorry, Kath. Daniel's...
(beat)
He's... dead.

KATH is stunned.

KATH
Dead?
(struggling with information)
When?

MAC
Last summer.

KATH
You've known all along?

MAC
(...)

KATH
Does Mam know?

MAC
No.

KATH
How...? How did he...?

MAC
It was sudden. Heart attack.

KATH
He was only... he couldn't have been much older than you. Jesus Christ. Daniel? Please tell me you're making this up.

MAC
(...)

KATH
You should have told us...

MAC
I've struggled to...

KATH
Was he a good friend? I never knew him. I was a baby when dad took him

MAC
Friendship's different with men.

KATH
And he talked about us?

MAC
A bit.

KATH
What did he say?

MAC
(...)

KATH
What?

MAC
Nothing. Not much. He didn't say much.

KATH
He must have said something otherwise you wouldn't be here.

MAC
He told me about the farm, that he had a baby sister.

KATH
(...)

MAC
That he missed you. That he wished he'd seen you grow up. That he wondered what you looked like.

KATH
Then he should have come back.

MAC
Yes, he probably should've.

KATH
What did he look like?

MAC shrugs. KATH starts pulling at her hair, an old habit. This gradually becomes more violent through...

KATH (CONT'D)
Tall, short?

MAC
Tall, dark, handsome. Bit like me.

KATH
Not funny.

MAC
Sorry. Men don't really take notice

of what other men look like. He was kind of average, average height, average weight, brownish hair.

KATH
What about dad... did he say... is Dad still alive?

MAC
No. I don't think so. He didn't really mention a dad. I thought you hated your dad?

KATH starts banging her head with the heel of her hand.

KATH
I hated him for taking my brother away.

MAC
I should go.

KATH
No.

He tries to stop her hitting herself.

MAC
Kath...

KATH
Take me with you.

MAC
This is your home. You can't leave.

KATH
Can't I?

MAC
It's your... inheritance.

KATH
It's a fucking prison.

MAC
Someone needs to look after the land.

KATH
It can rot for all I care.

MAC
You don't mean that.

KATH
Don't I?

MAC
What about your sheep?

KATH
I'm not interested in sheep. Not anymore.

The implication of what she's saying sinks in.

KATH (CONT'D)
Take me with you. Please.

MAC
We can't run away.

KATH
Then you'll have to stay.

MAC
Esther won't stand for it.

KATH
She'll have no choice.

SCENE 8 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN, LATE WINTER.

KATH is preparing the lambing kit. ESTHER looks on critically.

ESTHER
Where's your sharp knife?

KATH
It'll be in here somewhere.

ESTHER can't hide her derision.

KATH (CONT'D)
You haven't prepared the lambing kit for years, don't know why you're suddenly interested now.

ESTHER
You should have packed it away properly last year.

KATH
I did pack it away properly. I always do.

ESTHER
(...)

KATH
(...)

ESTHER
You weren't at your best last spring.

KATH
(...)

ESTHER
Disappearing in the middle of the night. Missing for days on end.

KATH
(...)

ESTHER
Coming back in a right state.

KATH
I was fine.

ESTHER
Half-dressed, black and blue?

KATH
Stop exaggerating.

ESTHER
You were a mess.

KATH
I'll buy a new knife.

ESTHER
You can't just replace everything.

KATH
No?

A stand-off stare.

KATH (CONT'D)
Mam, I'm in love.

ESTHER taken aback by the declaration, but tries not to show it...

ESTHER
That'll explain your ridiculous behaviour.

KATH
We're leaving. After lambing. You can't stop us.

ESTHER
Good luck.

KATH
What?

ESTHER
Good luck.

KATH
Is that it?

ESTHER
Make sure you pack that kit away properly after lambing this time.

KATH
Aren't you going to try and stop me?

ESTHER
No point. You're in love. Like talking to someone with a hole in the head. Where you going to live?

KATH
In the caravan.

ESTHER
It leaks.

KATH
It's fine.

ESTHER
In the bedroom, like a sieve. The mattress is fusty.

KATH
How do you know?

ESTHER
(...)

KATH
We'll get a new mattress.

ESTHER
What you going to do when he's sick of you?

KATH
He won't get sick of me.

ESTHER
He's a man. Course he's going to get sick of you.

KATH
This is different.

ESTHER
Oh he's good.

KATH
It is different.

ESTHER
He won't be as tolerant as me.

KATH
Mac loves me.

ESTHER
Is that what he told you?

KATH
(beat)
Yes.

ESTHER
It's just words. Anyone can say nice words.

KATH
Except you. We're going to get married.

ESTHER
You'll be telling me next you'll have kids.

KATH
We're going to be happy.

ESTHER
Until you start with your craziness.

KATH
I am not crazy.

ESTHER
Make sure you pack your tablets.

KATH
You should be happy for me.

ESTHER
Happy?
(laughs)
See how happy you are when he boots you out.

KATH
I'd hate to be you. Sitting here. All alone. Waiting. Hoping.

ESTHER
We can't all run off when the mood takes us. Someone's got to look after the land.

KATH
Daniel's not coming back.

ESTHER
Turned psychic have you? Or has your boyfriend got a crystal ball in his caravan?

KATH
He's dead, Mam. Daniel's dead.

BLACKOUT

SCENE 9 - BYRE, LATE WINTER/EARLY SPRING

MAC whistles as he skins a newborn lamb.

SCENE 10 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN, LATE WINTER/EARLY SPRING

A dog howls.

ESTHER sits on the rocking chair, rocking and thinking. Handpicked early spring flowers, watered and in a jam jar, are on the kitchen table.

Howling stops. MAC enters whistling.

ESTHER
I know what you're up to.

MAC
Good evening, Mac. Thanks for the lovely flowers. Not a problem, Esther. Thought they'd cheer the place up.

ESTHER
She might be easily conned, but I'm not. What do you want?

MAC
A civil conversation would be a start.

ESTHER
I know it's you.
(beat)
Howling.

MAC laughs.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Don't deny it.

MAC
You've some imagination.

ESTHER
You don't scare me.

MAC
You scare me.

ESTHER
I won't let you do this. I won't let you take her.

MAC
You're the one driving her away.

ESTHER
She is not leaving this farm. I won't let her.
(pause)
How much?

MAC
Sorry?

ESTHER
How much money you after?

MAC
Are you bribing me?

ESTHER
Name your price.

MAC
You don't have any money.

ESTHER
I've got savings.

MAC
Huh...
(MAC looks around at the state of the place)
Really?

ESTHER
No point being frivolous. You never know when you might need it.

MAC
Like now?

ESTHER
Like now.

MAC
I don't want your money.

ESTHER
She's crazy.

MAC
Crazy about me.

ESTHER
Properly mental. Violent.

MAC
And you want her to stay?

ESTHER
She won't cope with the outside world. She needs looking after. It's best she stays, best for everyone.

MAC
Nice try.

ESTHER
If you get on the wrong side of her... [SHE'D KILL YOU] You'd be better to take the money and run and keep on running and never look back.

A dog howls outside. Lights fade and flicker off. Darkness.

SCENE 11 - FARMHOUSE KITCHEN, LATE WINTER/EARLY SPRING

MAC is in the byre fixing the electricity from the dim light of the oil lamp.

KATH is in the dark kitchen wearing the head torch.

MAC
(from byre)
Problem's nearly sorted.

KATH
About time.

MAC
(from byre)
Just need to…

Lights come on. KATH stands in the kitchen with blood on her hands, her face, in fact she is covered in blood.

MAC (CONT'D)
(from byre)
I'm a genius! Tell me I'm a genius.

MAC enters and stares in disbelief - what has she done?

KATH
Everything's fine.

MAC
You haven't... hurt yourself,
have you?

KATH
No. I haven't hurt myself. Why
would I want to hurt myself?
I've told you, everything's fine.
Everything's more than fine. Never
been finer. I'm starving. I'm really
starving. A good fight always makes
me feel ravenous.

MAC
A fight?

KATH
More of a tussle. Battle of wills... got out of hand. Tough old ewe didn't want to give up her lamb. We'll need a pit digging.

MAC
A pit?

KATH
For the ewe. Best make it deep. And remote. In the copse. Probably best. Don't want foxes digging it up.

MAC
You'll have a job getting the carcass up to the copse.

KATH
It's a shame really. Ewes killed by their own lambs. Bringing a life into the world.

MAC
The lambs survived?

KATH
Yes. Male and female. Poor little orphans. Mother was old, she wasn't going to be much use to anybody.

MAC
Sometimes the old have to die for the young to thrive.

KATH
You're very wise. You're like a wise old owl.

MAC
Twit twoo.

KATH
Twit twoo. You make everything seem right. Natural.

Their eyes are locked on each other. Long pause.

MAC
People will notice she's gone. People don't just disappear.

KATH
My dad did. And my brother. Nobody said a word. Mam always wanted to go on a cruise. Maybe she just upped and offed. Maybe she's got a fancy man, met someone on the internet and sailed off into the sunset.

MAC
She hasn't got a computer.

KATH
More likely put an ad in the lonely hearts. In the Farmers Weekly. Mature lady with own farm would like to meet solvent gent, for company on a cruise. She's probably taken all her savings with her.

MAC
No doubt. Aw well, good luck to her, hope she spends it wisely.

KATH
She might have left a little for us.

MAC
She won't have left anything for me.

KATH
For me then. She might have left a little for me. A legacy. If she has left something, I'd like to share it with you.

They kiss.

SCENE 12 - BYRE - FOLLOWING WINTER.

A winter storm howls outside. A figure wearing MAC's farm overalls and beany hat chops wood by the light of the gas lamp. It is KATH and she's whistling a tune similar to MAC's.

KATH
The quiet life's not for everyone.
Shame he had to go.

KATH howls like a dog.

BLACKOUT

FED

A ‘Radaptation’ of Euripides’ *Hippolytus*

SCENE 1 – MANSION – VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Overworked MAID (a sixteen-year-old) collects crisp white bed linen, makes bed and does housework - dusting, polishing and sweeping.

MAID

First, hands need be clean. No dirty marks on fresh sheets. Next, move old sheets, pillows and duvet. Place pillows and duvet on chair, so no get dirty. If mattress no with base, turn mattress. You need be strong to flip. Watch you no damage things. Lamps on bedside table, no, no, no.

Now ready to make bed fit to lie. Good bed need proper linens. 100% cotton, white, nice and fresh. Check you have all: Mattress pad, fitted sheet, flat sheet, pillowcase and duvet cover. Place mattresses pad on bed and smooth, smooth, smooth. Take fitted sheet. Start at corner top, and work round, nice tight, tuck each corner tight, tuck, tuck, tuck and smooth. Take flat sheet, good side face down and shake, shake, shake, so even all way round bed. Start corner bottom and tuck sheet in by mattress and base bed. We make hospital corner. Tuck bottom of bed in. Tuck, tuck, tuck. Pull spare sheet to the side. Take finger and run line from corner mattress top to bottom mattress at side. Let flap fall and tuck, tuck, tuck. Nice clean fold.

Take cover duvet and make sure inside out. Iron inside out laundry day and fold. Place hands in top cover corner, find duvet corner, grip tight, pull, throw and shake. Shake, shake, shake. Fasten at bottom. And smooth, smooth, smooth. Duvet spread even on bed. Pull back duvet and top sheet back and tuck, tuck, tuck, two side and smooth, smooth, smooth. Put pillow cases on like duvet. Plump, plump, plump and arrange nice. Nothing better than a nice bed into which lie.

I make bed in three minutes when I work as chambermaid in hotel. Lots and lots of beds. Every day. Dirty hotel rooms, dirty beds, dirty guests. Lots and lots of dirty guest. Now I work here. Better than hotel, better than back home. At home everybody poor. Here, people have more money than horse can shit. Too much money, too many clothes. Back home we not even have bed. Brothers, sister all sleep on floor. Bed is real luxury. I take pride in making bed. Miss say I the best maid ever at beds.

Sometimes, when she away, I get into bed and sleep in day. When I wake, I have to make bed all over again so she no find out. But it worth it. My bed not like her bed. My bed have spring stick up, poky, poky, poky. It hard to sleep. I tired and sleep very important. But much

better than hotel. Not as tired. Work not as hard. Not as many men.

(she yawns)

Her bed lovely bed, look so good, make me want to sleep, sleep, sleep.

MAID starts dusting and polishing.

To be maid you need best eyesight. I have. I see everything. I see tiny dust. No smear on mirror. No hair in plughole. Even with tired eyes I see all. But double check with white glove test. Run finger like so.

(she demonstrates)

see, no mark, I good, I keep house nice clean.

I dust spendy things. Bone china. It made from real bone. Mostly from cows but many years from human. So pretty and yet... uggh. Some things in house cost more than I earn in life. I very careful not drop. Bone china like marriage, if you break, no fix. Glue no good, always see crack and worthless. Best throw out and buy new. I like to be married one day. I be good wife, I keep vows, respect husband, stay away from stepson. They think I stupid. I not stupid. I see everything. I know all lady secrets.

SCENE 2 - MANSION – VARIOUS LOCATIONS

STEPMUM (mid-forties, well-maintained, glamorous) and STEPSON (mid-thirties, handsome, slick) pose together for a Hello type magazine feature.

What follows are separate interviews. STEPMUM and STEPSON address the audience as if speaking to an interviewer. When not speaking they change outfits and pose for photos, occupying the same space.

MAID continues to do housework and gets in the way of the photoshoot. She attends to STEPMUM and STEPSON when needed: picking up clothes and providing new ones.

STEPSON

Hey, she's hot, what can I say?
My father has good taste in women.
He worships her, every inch. Have you
seen the painting in the lounge?
The naked lady, that's her.

STEPMUM

He's a lot like his father...
handsome, intelligent, driven.

STEPSON

She's not just a pretty face, she's
a very smart lady, super determined.
Had a rough start in life, came to
this country and made a go of it,
made a success of her life. That's how
it should be. Working people
contributing to the economy. People
criticise my father's policies, but how

can he be a racist when he's married to my stepmother? She's a foreigner, their housemaid's an immigrant for God's sake.

STEPMUM
Max is a very good son.

STEPSON
My father is not a racist.

STEPMUM
He's very close to his father.

STEPSON
He's a good man. And she's a loyal and devoted wife.

STEPMUM
Max and I have a great relationship. Course there were tensions at first. He was a teenager when I married his father.

STEPSON
She's only a few years older than me.

STEPMUM
As he got older we became closer, he grew up and I guess I did too.

STEPSON
She never tried to replace my mother and I admire her for that.

STEPMUM

(in unison)

There's a mutual respect.

STEPSON

(in unison)

There's a mutual respect.

At some point during the following they inadvertently make physical contact, a slightly awkward moment that they both try to mask.

STEPMUM

I think he'd like to settle down and have kids, eventually.

STEPSON

There’s time enough for all that.

STEPMUM

He'd probably like a whole football team.

STEPSON

It's such a shame my stepmum isn't blessed with children.

STEPMUM

Don’t tell him I said that!

STEPSON

Best not ask her about it.

STEPMUM
It didn’t work out for us. Not yet anyway.

STEPSON
She loves babies.

STEPMUM
Max loves the thrill of politics.

STEPSON
You should see her on the campaign trail she’s a natural.

STEPMUM
He worked very hard on his father's campaign.

STEPSON
The public love her outfits. She designs them herself. Mine too. This shirt is one of hers.

STEPMUM
Thank you. They’re from my his and her spring Femme Power range.
(low)
The company will be credited in the photos?
(waits for response)
Perfect.

STEPSON
She’s done wonders for my father’s image.

STEPMUM

His father would be lost without him.

STEPSON

My father would be lost without her.

Beat. Both smile.

STEPSON

(in unison)

A photo together? We'd love to.

STEPMUM

(in unison)

A photo together? We'd love to.

They pose for the camera, fake smile and flash. They relax and the public mask drops.

SCENE 3 – MANSION – STEPMUM'S BEDROOM

MAID admires herself in mirror as she wears one of STEPMUM's dresses.

MAID

My colour, so Mumma always tell me. Perfect fit. Could been made for me, my colour, but no my dress. Still. I love. It fun, it flirty, it sexy. I put on and feel different. Feel special. Not maid. I be other person. If I no speak, I be... film star, model, I be her.

She say I look like her. When she younger. She show photo, she very pretty when smile. She no smile now. I smile. Maids need smile. Be polite and say yes. Maids never say no. Maids not ever say no. It hard to be maid. Face ache with smile. No-one smile back. She on pills to make happy. She on so many pills. I be happy if I her. I no take pills. I beam from ear to ear if I her. She one lucky lady. This dress belong her. She say I take. Say it last season. Cast-off. She make me try on. She say it look good. She say it look better on me. She smile but her eye no smile. Jealous eye. I have nothing and she jealous. I swap places with her if she like. I want what she has. One day I get. One day I be like her.

(she picks up a magazine with Max on the front cover)

Mr Max he a good-looking man. Magazine say he most eligible bachelor. Girls go crazy for hot body. He work out every day. I make him smoothie early morning before he go gym. He very strict about what go in body. He say things we put in show on outside. I no tell him about pizza. He guess. He say my skin bad from poor diet. Mr Max skin very smooth, like lady skin, silky hair, shiny. He say it from all health food. He obsessed with organic. Every day fruit and veggies delivered. He teach me prepare 'special Max super smoothie'. First put on glove

to make sure no disease. Sometime he watch me make. Banana need be hard, soft banana bad. I wash, peel fruit and veg, and chop, chop, chop. Two handful kale, one carrot, handful goji berry, one big spoon chia seed, one hemp seed, two flax seed, one fish oils, one cacao, one honey, and last, jug pure coconut water. Mr Max say coconut bitch to crack. He right. All in, lid tight, and blend, blend, blend. It look like slime but Mr Max love it. Mr Max love lots things. He such good man. He do good thing for girl charity. He deserve special smoothie. Mr Max he a special smoothie.

(she giggles)

MAX enters behind MAID and looks at her appreciatively as she reads magazine unaware of his presence. He moves closer to her and blows on her neck. She jumps, sees it is him and giggles, slightly embarrassed. He looks at her in dress and whistles approval. She flushes, flattered and a little scared.

SCENE 4 - GYM

STEPMUM aggressively works out in the gym.

SCENE 5 - PLUSH HOTEL – MONTHS LATER

STEPSON addresses men at a sportsmen's ‘stag’ dinner.
STEPMUM addresses women at a charity lunch.

STEPSON

Good evening, Guys! Great to be here.

STEPMUM

Ladies, it is such a privilege to be addressing so many wonderful women at this special charity lunch.

STEPSON

It's a dream come true. Standing in front of all my sporting heroes…
And some deadbeats.
(pause for laughter)
Security! How'd this guy get in?
(laughs)

STEPMUM

I appreciate how difficult it is to carve out time when you’re CEO of a busy company, when you’ve staff relying on you for instruction, when you’re managing a family home, doing the school run, working out, when you’ve got a husband who needs his ego massaging. Believe me I know the pressures!

STEPSON

My secretary, sorry, not allowed to say that, my PA. She said this was gonna be

a classy affair, strictly no risqué material. And boy is she strict, checks up on me all the time, monitors my every move, I'm always having to debrief her.

(fake admonishment, at audience's reaction)

Now boys, stop that, that's not what I meant.

STEPMUM

There's been a lot of things written about me in the media lately, quite nasty things about me personally and using this charity to promote my company brand. But this charity lunch isn't about me. Today is about you and the girls you're helping by being here. I am proud to be part of such a wonderful caring community of generous, successful women. Respect, ladies, RE-SPECT!

STEPSON

Only this morning my…

(emphasised)

PA... was sitting at her desk working hard, feet up, reading a magazine, and she says.

(dumb ditzy secretary voice)

Hey Max, says in here drinking's bad for you, eating's bad for you and sex is bad for you. Well I was shocked, so I said, right, I'm definitely giving up. And she says...

(dumb voice)

So what you giving up Max? And I say, fucking listening to you.

(waits for laugh)

STEPMUM

This charity is so special to me. Helping young women in need is what I'm all about. Some of these girls have had tough lives, been trafficked, raped. I know how it feels to be alone and vulnerable in a strange country. I moved here when I was just a teenager. I had three cleaning jobs to make ends meet. I was working in a big hotel chain as a chambermaid when I was spotted by a talent scout from a top model agency. They gave me my first modelling assignment. And, well, the rest is history. Luckily, I inherited my mother's good looks and I used my assets wisely. But not everyone is as blessed. So it's our duty to help.

STEPSON

Hey, I'm just your average boy next door. Yes, I've got this playboy reputation, which is fake news by the way.

(he takes a drink and laughs)

I'm telling you! I like a quiet night in and a kiss and a cuddle as much as anyone. Between you and me, guys, I've even been known to shed a tear or two.

(reacts to audience response)

It's true, I'm in touch with my feminine side. I don't have a beef with women. I love women. And they love me right back.

(pause for laughter)

The media vipers make out I hate women, hate feminists, not true. Feminists know what they want and they go for it, and I admire them for that. They don't play silly chase me games. They're unashamed, very adventurous, and like my daddy always told me, if a girl's giving it away then why pay for it? That would just be rude, bad form, I'm a gent after all.

(winks)

STEPMUM

My friend says to me ‘you’re so good, Sofia.’ And I say, ‘I’m not good, I’m selfish’. I’m doing this for me. I want to live in a better society. I want everyone to perform to the best of their ability, to look their best, improve themselves and move on up the ladder, to pay their taxes and put something back. And that’s where you ladies come in. The proceeds of this charity lunch will help support these girls. Every penny raised.

STEPSON

(drink starting to have an effect, to audience member)

Hey, if you're off to the bar, tell that cute barmaid mine's a large one!

(pleased with himself)

Seriously, that girl’s a stunner,

(to audience)

Now boys, calm down.

STEPMUM

We are currently looking for host families to welcome these girls into their homes. In return, they’ll do a bit of light domestic work and will be trained so that they can eventually enter the job market. Our family has led the way in trialling this arrangement. I won’t lie to you it’s been hard work. You welcome these girls into your family and they’re not always grateful. Sometimes they do things that they shouldn’t. They lie, they steal, they behave in ways they shouldn’t. Let’s just say things don’t always work out. You’ve no doubt heard of the tragedy we experienced in the last few months.

(beat)

Please don’t believe everything you read in the papers. The girl in question, she came to us and she had nothing. We welcomed her into our home and she became almost one of the family. I saw a lot of me in her. I guess she looked up to me, wanted to emulate me.

(beat)

Forget what you’ve read. This is the true story.

(emotional pause)

About three months ago...

My husband was away working. I... came home early from the gym... In the hall... I heard water running... in my ensuite.

(beat)

There shouldn’t have been anyone in my rooms. The bedroom door was open... and the room was empty... just as I'd left it... except for the bed.

(beat)

I push the door open... and... my... maid... my sixteen-year-old maid... she is bent over the bath... half-dressed... sobbing... she knows she shouldn't... well... she shouldn’t be there. She says, 'sorry miss', she is... wiping tears from her eyes... trying to gather her underwear out of the bath.

(beat, gathers herself)

When I ask what is wrong, she keeps apologising and shaking her head... she keeps saying, 'nothin happen, please no sack', over and over. I tell her to stop crying... to get dressed.

(beat)

It turns out that she’d... she’d had a man, a boy, she was sleeping with at my home, in my bed. I had to replace the bed. As you well know, the girl’s no longer with us. The silly girl...

(beat)

he dumped her. It wasn’t the fairytale ending she’d banked on.

(beat)

I’m sorry... sharing this was difficult for me... but hopefully this will end speculation...

(gathers herself)

A few weeks after... I received a letter. It was from... the girl’s mother. She thanked me for looking after her daughter. She told me how much Effie loved working for our family. She said that her little girl felt safe with us, probably for the first time in her life.

(pause)

She apologised for what Effie had done, for the shame that her daughter had brought on our family. Her mother...

(holding back tears)

couldn't make it over for the funeral.

(tears come)

Sorry.

(pulls herself together)

We’ve got a new maid now and it’s working out brilliantly. Martha is not just our maid, she’s now part of our family. She’s such a good girl, she goes to church every Sunday. She sings in the church choir. I’m mentoring her very closely.

(gestures to Martha)

She’s here somewhere here in the audience wearing a dress I designed especially for her. Come and join me on stage, Martha. Martha? Don’t be shy.

SCENE 6 - GYM

MAX is in the gym aggressively working out, lots of grunting.

SCENE 7 – MANSION - KITCHEN

NEW MAID (MARTHA, same actress that played previous MAID), a dowdier version, makes smoothie for STEPSON.

NEW MAID

Two handful kale, one carrot, handful goji berry, one spoon chia seed, one hemp seed, two flax seed, one fish oils, one cacao, one manuka honey, and last, four hundred mil pure coconut water.

(switches blender on)

It look like slime but Mr Max he love it. I like make him special smoothie.

(She clears her throat, spits it in blender and gives one final whizz, then pours it into his glass and smiles.)

He deserve.

SCENE 8 – GYM - LOCKEROOM

STEPSON has just finished at the gym. His phone rings. He sees who’s calling, smiles, answers it.

STEPSON

Hello sexy, how’s it going? What are you wearing?

(listens)

Hmmmmmm. You’re making me hard just talking about it.

(listens)

You want me to what?

(listens)

Hey, I can do rough if that’s what you want. How rough?

(listens)

Whatever turns you on baby girl. I'm just here to please... you’ve some imagination...

(listens)

I’m going to come over there and give you such a good fucking you won’t know what day of the week it is. Is that making you wet, you dirty little whore?

(dirty laugh)

SCENE 9 - POLICE INTERVIEW ROOM

STEPSON and STEPMUM are being interviewed separately and at different times by the police, but may be in the same space.

STEPSON

Is someone going to tell me why I'm here?

STEPMUM

I was having an afternoon nap.

STEPSON

Is this about that traffic offence?

STEPMUM

He's got his own key.

STEPSON

Look, have it your way, I'll pay the damn fine.

(sits back)

Then I'd like to go home. I've got a big today tomorrow.

STEPMUM

I heard something, I was still half asleep, but could sense someone was in the room.

STEPSON

I don't need a solicitor, I've done nothing wrong.

STEPMUM

He was looking at me. Strangely.

STEPSON

What the fuck is this?

STEPMUM

I asked him what was wrong.

STEPSON

No, I'm not going to tell you.

STEPMUM

I thought something had happened to my husband. I started to panic.

STEPSON

You're messing with the wrong guy.

STEPMUM

I asked him what he doing in my bedroom.
He just... smiled.

STEPSON

Look, I'm a reasonable guy.

STEPMUM

He pulled off the bedsheets.

STEPSON

Tell me what the problem is and
we can sort it.

STEPMUM

I was naked.

STEPSON

This is bullshit.

STEPMUM

Then he...

STEPSON

I'll need to check my diary.

STEPMUM

He started to...

STEPSON

I was with someone.

STEPMUM

He loosened his belt and...

STEPSON

I'm not telling you.

STEPMUM

Unzipped his...

STEPSON

Because.

STEPMUM

I tried to get up, but he forced me down.

STEPSON

She's married.

STEPMUM

I struggled.

STEPSON

A swab?

STEPMUM

He was too strong. And very rough.

STEPSON

What exactly am I being accused of?

STEPMUM

He forced himself on me.

STEPSON

Sorry?

STEPMUM

He... he raped me.

STEPSON

Is this a joke?

STEPMUM

After... he... was so normal.

As if nothing happened.

STEPSON

You've got this wrong.

STEPMUM

He just got dressed and left.

STEPSON

Who's made this accusation?

STEPMUM

I just lay there.

STEPSON

I've a right to know.

STEPMUM

I didn't know what to do.

STEPSON

I want a lawyer.

STEPMUM

It could have been hours.

STEPSON

She said what?

STEPMUM

My maid's usually in the house with me.

STEPSON

No! You've got this wrong.

STEPMUM

Martha. Effie’s no longer with us. She took her own life

STEPSON

She said it was her fantasy. I swear.

STEPMUM

Martha’s Effie’s sister.

STEPSON

Why else would I do that with my own stepmother?

STEPMUM

Yes, you can take a swab.

STEPSON

It was her that wanted to.

STEPMUM

I guess it's his word against mine.

STEPSON

Evidence? What fucking evidence?
I'm not denying we had sex.

Cameras flash over following dialogue, as...

STEPSON has his mugshot taken.

STEPMUM has her bruises photographed.

STEPSON

When I left she was fine.

STEPMUM

How am I going to tell my husband?

STEPSON

She's lying, trying to teach me
some fucked up lesson.

STEPMUM

Why would I lie about this?

STEPSON

My father will fucking kill me.

STEPMUM

Yes, we've flirted in interviews.
What are you trying to say?

STEPSON

She wanted it.

STEPMUM

Flirting is not a crime. Flirting

does not mean it's OK to rape someone.

STEPSON

This is a fake fucking rape. We were having an affair. Ask the maid, she knew.

STEPMUM

I just want justice.

STEPSON

I demand justice.

SCENE 10 – POLICE INTERVIEW ROOM

MAID

An affair? Miss would never. Miss go church with me. Miss love husband. Miss no tell lie. Miss good woman. Miss very kind to me and my sister.

SCENE 11 – PLUSH HOTEL – PRESS CONFERENCE

STEPMUM is dressed conservatively.

STEPMUM

Thank you ladies and gentlemen of the press for coming here today. As you know, this past year has been very difficult for my husband and I, but today is a new beginning. I am here to launch this new rape crisis centre. I

have had the privilege today of meeting fellow survivors, and it was a truly humbling experience.

(fights back the tears)

Some of these women will never see justice for the crimes committed against them. I know from personal experience that this is often the case. My husband is facing an election shortly and I don't want what happened to me or the speculation in the press about our marriage to affect his chances of success. We are as strong as ever. He is not responsible for the actions of his son. I realise that I am lucky. I am in a position where I can speak and my testimony will be taken seriously. Not everyone is as blessed as me. Not everyone will be believed.

(beat)

I hope in some small way that my actions will help change things. That this rape crisis centre will help educate people around issues of consent and support victims of this terrible crime. I'll be happy to take questions at the end of the tour and there will be an opportunity for photos.

A camera flashes. STEPMUM strikes a modest pose. Another camera flash.

Blackout.

Radaptation:
Adapting ancient Greek tragedy in the twenty-first century

Thesis

Introduction

My decision to explore contemporary adaptation of Greek tragedy can be traced back to a chance comment from fellow writer Jimmy McGovern about a pitch I had submitted for the television series *The Street*. He told me that my proposal was 'a bit too Greek'.[1] Not understanding Jimmy's feedback, I started to research what he meant by 'Greek'. My reading opened up a world of mythic narratives and theatrical conventions with which I was unfamiliar, and revealed that I had unwittingly pitched a version of Oedipus told from Jocasta's point of view. It is well documented that the foundations of western theatrical tradition lie within the ancient Greek, or more specifically ancient Athenian, culture, and that stories and myths have been passed down through the ages, sometimes without the tellers' awareness of their origins.[2] So perhaps it is unsurprising that I found myself reworking an old story incognizant of the fact. But this experience left me keen to deepen my own understanding of this aspect of my writing; to investigate the connections and differences between my own plays and the tragedies of ancient Greek dramatists; and to use these findings to inform and further develop my craft.

Tragedy offers contemporary playwrights, and other theatre practitioners, an artistic and philosophical framework, as well as a critical and creative tool with which to explore human suffering and causation in all its complexity.[3] Many of our modern assumptions about plot, emotion, spectatorship, action and character, to name a few, can be traced back to ancient tragedy and Aristotle's fifth-century meditations on the subject.[4] In *Poetics*, the seeds of tragedy's noble reputation can be found, as evidenced in the following definition:

> A representation of an action of a superior kind – grand, and complete in itself – presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by

[1] Jimmy McGovern, Email correspondence (15 April 2008).
[2] For origins of Western theatre in ancient Greece, see Paul Cartledge, '"Deep Plays": theatre as process in Greek civic life', in *The Cambridge Companion* to *Greek Tragedy*, ed. by P.E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 3-35 (p. 3); Oliver Taplin, 'Greek Theatre', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of The Theatre*, ed. by John Russell Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 13-48 (p. 13); and David Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1, 26-27. Hereafter referred to as Wiles 2000. For myths, archetypes and the collective unconscious, see Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (London: Pan Books, 1999), p. 29. Hereafter referred to as Vogler; and C. G. Jung, 'The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious', *The Collected Works*, ed. by Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. by R.F.C. Hull, 2nd edn, vol. 9, no. 1 (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1991), pp. 3-5.
[3] Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 6. Hereafter referred to as Hall 2010.
[4] Jennifer Wallace, *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 117. Hereafter referred to as Wallace; Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. by Erik Butler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 19-20. Hereafter referred to as Lehmann.

> actors rather than told by a narrator, effecting, through pity and fear, the purification of such emotions.[5]

It is little wonder that Ancient Greek tragedy and subsequent forms of tragedy are often perceived as elite art, especially given that tragic heroes have, through the ages, been presented as men of rank and distinct from ordinary people.[6] This was certainly my subjective view, having been prevented from studying ancient history and English literature at secondary school.[7] Friends and peers would talk about the about the Greeks and Shakespeare, kings and royal households, while I was excluded from full participation in their cultural conversations. Given its reputation as the 'most blue-blooded of literary forms', it is perhaps surprising to see tragedy used for work that is radical and explicitly political.[8] This use of tragedy is especially surprising when considering 'katharsis', the Greek word often translated as purification, deemed by Aristotle a vital component of tragedy.[9] There has been much deliberation on the meaning of katharsis, variously interpreted as refining, cleansing, or purging.[10] The issue of emotional purgation in drama and its effect on the audience is often viewed as antithetical to critical engagement. Indeed, it is central to the question of whether tragedy, an art form often viewed as reactionary, can ever assimilate with radical theatre, which usually demands a form of Brechtian alienation, an anti-illusionary technique encouraging objective spectatorship, reason over emotion.[11]

Why then is tragedy used so often today for politically engaged theatrical work? And why should someone like me who was prevented from engaging with this apparently exclusive artform, someone who aligns herself with a socialist feminist ethic, be drawn to a theatrical genre shaped within an ancient patriarchal society and traditionally defended by the bastions of the establishment?[12] The answer is multi-faceted. It could be argued that preoccupations with exclusion, gender and class already exist in many tragedies, so it offers

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[5] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xviii-xx. Hereafter referred to as Aristotle. For quotation, see Aristotle, p. 23.

[6] Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, 3rd edn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. x-xi; 84-85. Hereafter referred to as Dollimore. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 18-19. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, ed. by Pamela McCallum (Ontario: Broadview Encore Editions, 2006), p. 116. Hereafter referred to as Williams.

[7] During my time at secondary school, I was in a midrange academic group. Only pupils in the top two groups could study English Literature and Ancient History.

[8] For discussion of rank in the 'tradition' of tragedy, see Williams, pp. 43-48. For quote, see Terry Eagleton's introduction in Dollimore, p. x.

[9] Aristotle, p. xxv.

[10] Aristotle, pp. xxv-xxvi.

[11] Wallace, p. 145; Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism & Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 73 & 93.

[12] For a definition of a 'socialist/materialist-feminist position', see Aston, p. 73. For reference to the establishment, see Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2003), p. 16. Hereafter referred to as Eagleton. For views on tragic theory, see Wallace, p. 152.

an appropriate paradigm for exploration of these issues.[13] But some would caution against this, especially feminist critics, on the basis that its use mainly serves to support the dominant hierarchy.[14] Nevertheless, some theatre practitioners choose to use a more traditional aesthetic to assert a social point, even if the original form may initially seem contrary to their agenda. As Melinda Powers notes in *Diversifying Greek Tragedy on the Contemporary US Stage* recent American adaptations of Greek Tragedy have served to 'rupture the archive in ways that negate the elitist associations with the genre to address instead cultural, sexual, and racial formations in diverse communities.'[15]

Adapting tragedy for the stage places writers in a relationship with a theatrical 'tradition'; it allows playwrights a dialogue with other contemporary playwrights, and artists, who have adapted similar material, as well as with earlier dramatists who themselves adapted from the work of others or, in the case of the fifth-century tragedians, from myths.[16] Tragedy can also act as a creative shorthand between playwright and those in the audience acquainted with the form and associated narratives, and offers a level of familiarity for audience members who have subconsciously imbibed mythic tales and structures. Most importantly though, tragedy can act as a kind of Trojan horse, a historical 'high art' form, enabling us to find a way of 'holding' challenging contemporary material through relation to a different time and space.[17]

Raymond Williams' investigation into modern tragedy focuses on the social, political and historical context of tragedies and tragic theory. He draws attention to the separation and elevation of what has become the 'tradition of tragedy' – a symbiosis of theatrical form and theory – from the tragic experiences of ordinary people.[18] He traces this deep-rooted hierarchical differentiation from Aristotle through to post-modern critics, and presents a rigorous yet deeply subjective response to tragedy:

> I have known what I believe to be tragedy, in several forms. It has not been the death of princes; it has been at once more personal and more general. I have been driven to try to understand this experience, and I have drawn back, baffled, at the distance between my own sense of tragedy and the conventions of the time. Thus I have known

[13] Dollimore, pp. lviii-lxi & 222-30.
[14] Wallace, pp. 152-53. For discussion of feminist resistance to realist plays and feminist engagement with tragedy, see Kim Solga, *Theatre and Feminism* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 42-54. For a nuanced reading of Ancient tragedy both serving the ideology of the polis and inscribing resistance, see Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women* (London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 12-13.
[15] Melinda Powers, *Diversifying Greek Tragedy on the Contemporary US Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 2.
[16] Williams, p. 37.
[17] For the myth of 'The Wooden Horse' at Troy, see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. II (London: The Folio Society, 2000), pp. 625-29.
[18] Wallace, pp. 1-5; Williams, pp. 33-35 & 37-38.

> tragedy in the life of a man driven back to silence, in an unregarded working life. In his ordinary and private death, I saw a terrifying loss of connection between men, and even between father and son: a loss of connection which was, however, a particular social and historical fact: a measurable distance between his desire and his endurance, and between both and the purposes and meanings which the general life offered him. […] I have seen the loss of connection built into a works and a city, and men and women broken by the pressure to accept this as normal, and by the deferment and corrosion of hope and desire.[19]

Williams highlights the need to analyse tragedy, both theory and action, in its historical context, thereby providing a means to investigate specific social causation. In terms of theatre practice, he is less interested in tragedy as vehicle for universalities of character but in the historicization and interrogation of action. He states that Greek tragic action is 'rooted in history' and argues that from it 'what we learn is not character but the mutability of the world'.[20] This could explain why playwrights repeatedly return to tragedy as framework for investigating the complexities of the world in which we live. It is particularly relevant to my practice, as ordinarily I would have prioritised character over action as a way to investigate aspects of society that were of interest. Like Williams, I am advocating a non-elite 'co-existence of meaning' between theatrical 'tragedy' and tragedy as personal disaster in my creative radaptation project.[21]

The selection of classical source material used for my creative adaptations was driven by my own artistic interests. Before embarking on this PhD, my theatrical work could broadly be described as character and issue-driven heightened realism.[22] After preliminary readings of work of the three great fifth-century tragedians – Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – I found myself drawn to the work of Euripides. Classicist Edith Hall describes him as the most accessible of the fifth-century BCE tragedians, a playwright whose work has been perceived and interpreted as radical.[23] Women feature prominently in his plays and he takes a particular

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[19] Williams, p. 33.
[20] Williams, pp. 113-14
[21] Williams, p. 34.
[22] My definition of realism here is 'dramas which […] approximate in speech and situation to the social and domestic problems of every day', see *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, ed. by Phyllis Hartnoll, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 789-90. My previously published and professionally produced work for theatre includes: *We Love You Arthur* (London: Josef Weinberger, 2005), in which two teenage girls' friendship is put to the test during the 1984-85 miners' strike; *Scarborough* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2008), a fly-on-the-wall look at an illicit relationship between a teacher and pupil; *The Price of Everything* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), which explores family annihilation; *Geoff Dead: Disco for Sale* (unpublished, professionally produced in Newcastle: Live Theatre, 2008), about the deaths of four young recruits at Deepcut Barracks and their families' fight for justice; and *Geordie Sinatra* (London: Samuel French, 2013), a comedy with music about dementia.
[23] For Hall's view on Euripides' accessibility, see *Edith Hall on Euripidean Tragedy*, dir. by Tom Mackenzie, (2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdLJ9JybBFs> [accessed 22 January 2018] Hereafter referred to as Hall interview Euripidean Tragedy; Hall's introduction in Euripides, *Bacchai*, trans. by Colin Teevan (London: Oberon, 2012), p. 9. Hereafter referred to as Teevan. For Euripides' work viewed as radical, see Hall's

interest in marginalised people or those from the lower classes. Barbarians and slaves are given prominent roles in his dramas.[24] *Medea* and *Electra* each have female protagonists and this also, arguably, applies to *Hippolytus*.[25] Given my interest in exploring and presenting the lives of working-class people on the stage, particularly complex female characters, it is unsurprising that I was drawn to these plays whose leading female tragic characters are controversial and provoke challenging questions about the role of women in classical society and acceptable modes of behaviour.[26] Medea commits filicide as an act of revenge against her husband and the constraints placed on her as a woman in society; Electra is party to matricide to avenge her father's murder; and Phaedra falls in love with her stepson, falsely accuses him of rape and commits suicide to cover her shame.[27] These characters, actions and issues relating to the role of women in ancient Greek society are clearly applicable to women in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[28] They also presented challenges to a twenty-first century female playwright – especially one who considers herself a feminist – about how to represent these women in a retelling as more than simply dangerous transgressors.

The methodological approach to the critical study is dramaturgical, in that it 'relates to the internal structures of a play text and is concerned with the arrangement of formal elements by the playwright'.[29] I have chosen to engage with the work of Mike Bartlett, Marina Carr, Rachel Cusk, Liz Lochhead and Simon Stephens through what they offer the reader of their texts, just as I have with Euripides when reworking my own versions, rather than seeking dialogue with living playwrights through bespoke interviews about process and methodology. This decision was taken for a number of reasons. The study is not primarily concerned with questions of authorial intention, so an enquiry which mined the playwrights'

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introduction to Euripides, *Medea and Other Plays*, trans. by James Morwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xi. Further references to this edition will be given in parenthesis after the quotation and for clarity will be referred to as Euripides, unless cited in footnotes where no parenthesis will be used.

[24] Medea is a 'woman from Colchis', classed as a 'barbarian land', Euripides, p. 4, l. 132; p. 36, l. 1331. Also see Hall interview Euripidean Tragedy.

[25] Each Euripides' play that I adapted as part of this study, *Medea*, *Electra* and *Hippolytus*, was taken from James Morwood's translation, see footnote 4. I chose the Oxford World's Classics edition because Edith Hall wrote the introduction. Hall is a respected classicist and founder member of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD), so her endorsement influenced my decision to use this translation. For Euripides' *Hippolytus* having two protagonists, see Charles Segal, 'Euripides, Hippolytus 108-112: Tragic Irony and Tragic Justice', *Hermes* 97 (1969), 297-305 (p. 301).

[26] Foley draws attention to the fact that tragic female characters are more controversial than their mythic counterparts, see Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 6. Hereafter referred to as Foley 2001.

[27] For Medea, see Euripides pp. 33-35. For Electra, see Euripides, pp. 114-15. For Phaedra, see Euripides, pp. 58-66.

[28] Edith Hall, 'Introduction', *Dionysus Since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium* ed. by Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Amanda Wrigley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 1-46 (pp. 13-15). Hereafter referred to as Hall *Dionysus*.

[29] For this and other definitions of dramaturgy and the role of dramaturgs, see Mary Luckhurst's 'Introduction' in Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2006; Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 1, p. 10.

conceptualisation of their work would have been of limited relevance. However, detailed critical analysis of their texts can help me reflect on my own work and approach. As a playwright, I find writing an intensely individual experience, and prior to undertaking this PhD, found it very difficult to articulate how I produced a piece of work, usually claiming a nebulous romantic impetus, a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', with artistic or gut instinct driving my decisions.[30] I also appreciate that many writers may be guarded about sharing detailed information about processes, judging it unwise to give away tools that they have worked long and hard to develop over the course of their creative lives.[31]

This study does not explore the ways in which contemporary directors have staged these plays. As a playwright, I am primarily concerned with what dramatists have presented to directors in the text as a creative provocation, rather than investigating how issues raised within the text have been addressed by theatre companies as they stage the work.[32] Also, I know that my own work may be staged in future without my input into its direction, so what exists on the page may be the only influence I have on its dramatic realisation.

My decision to focus on the work of Bartlett, Carr, Cusk, Lochhead and Stephens followed a period of prolonged consideration of other theatrical adaptations of Greek tragedy. I worked initially in the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD), at the University of Oxford Classics Centre, which proved an invaluable resource, enabling me to locate and select contemporary productions.[33] It quickly became clear, however, that I would need to find a way to delimit the parameters of this enquiry, as the recent proliferation of theatrical adaptations of Greek tragedy led to the problem of how to narrow down my field of study.[34] As a result, I focused on adaptions of one play, *Medea*, which linked directly with my creative work. It was the first Greek play I adapted: it is structurally simple, yet the content remains profoundly shocking.[35] I also limited my search to a time period of no more than twenty years before the commencement of my research, as I wanted to understand how

[30] William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads', in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, 3rd edn (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2004), pp. 482-92 (p. 490). For a general definition of romantic, see Paul Driver, *Romantic Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. Back cover.
[31] For reasons that playwrights may be reluctant to analyse and share processes and 'trade secrets', see Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013), pp. 5-7.
[32] The subject of production and how what is on the page is interpreted by directors and actors could form the subject of a whole other thesis.
[33] APGRD, *Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama* (2018) < http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/> [accessed 21 January 2018] Hereafter referred to as APGRD.
[34] Simon Goldhill, *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 2. Hereafter referred to as Goldhill.
[35] Edith Hall, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 242-44. Hereafter referred to as Hall 2010.

my contemporaries – other playwrights working in the UK and Ireland in the last twenty years – have addressed the process of adapting this work.

Finding an appropriate term to describe my own approach to reworking ancient Greek tragedies required engagement with theories of adaptation and the mushrooming field of adaptation study, which now includes consideration of this subject across a wide range of media.[36] For some commentators, this involves finding new ways of not only describing the process, but of critiquing adaptation. In her 2013 essay, 'Theorizing adaptations/adapting theories', Kamilla Elliott calls for adaptation theories to radically respond to the ever-expanding forms of reworkings that they consider, claiming an inter-disciplinary approach to theorising adaptation is necessary, creating theories which will 'talk, write, film, dance, sculpt, game, compose, costume, photograph and computer program'.[37] While my research concerns itself with 'intramedial' adaptations, new work interpreted from the same medium, stage to stage; and broadly the same genre, tragedy to tragedy; I, as others before me, recognize Elliott's need for theory and indeed language to adjust in order to describe the shifting relationship between source material and adaptation.[38] Adrian Poole lists the variety of words already used in this field in his book *Shakespeare and the Victorians*: 'borrowing, stealing, appropriating, inheriting, assimilating; of being influenced, inspired, dependent, indebted, haunted, possessed; of homage, mimicry, travesty, echo, allusion and intertextuality.'[39] Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* cites Poole's examples and 'continue[s] the linguistic riff, adding into the mix: variation, version, interpretation, imitation, proximation, supplement, increment, improvisation, prequel, sequel, continuation, afterlife, addition, paratext, hypertext, palimpsest, graft, rewriting, reworking, refashioning, re-vision [and] re-evaluation.'[40] Poole and Sanders' lists indicate the range of cultural values that are invested in the terms which are associated with adaptation, and help us understand why writers may seek new, more nuanced language to describe their approach. Poet Adrienne Rich found it necessary to add the hyphen to the word revision to fully express the radical feminist politic of her work, explaining: 'Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter

[36] Kamilla Elliott, 'Theorising adaptations/adapting theories', in *Adaptation Studies: New Challenges, New Directions*, ed. by Jørgen Bruhn, Anne Gjelsvik and Eirik Frisvold Hanssen (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) pp. 19-45 (p. 24). Hereafter referred to as Elliott. For 'What is Greek Tragedy?', see Hall 2010, pp. 1-11.
[37] Elliott, p. 37.
[38] Margherita Laera, 'Introduction: Return, Rewrite, Repeat: The Theatricality of Adaptation', in *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat*, ed. by Margherita Laera (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 1-17 (p. 6). Hereafter referred to as Laera.
[39] Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians*, Arden (London: Thomson Learning, 2004), p. 2.
[40] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 5. Hereafter referred to as Sanders.

in cultural history: it is an act of survival.'[41] Rich's stance is laudable, though the inherent contradiction in attempting to challenge the politics of a source by adapting it is noted by Margherita Laera in *Theatre and Adaptation: Return Rewrite, Repeat*. Laera believes that adaptors inevitably reiterate associated customs, if only momentarily, when the intention is to discredit.[42] However, Rich believed that we 'need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us'.[43] For Rich using the source material was an essential part of reprocessing, of reframing and renaming.[44]

I, like Rich, have found it necessary to adapt a word to fully express my formal and ideological approach to my work. This portmanteau is radaptation, which can be readapted to use as noun, verb and adjective to describe both 'process and the product', a twofold definition outlined by Linda Hutcheon in *The Theory of Adaptation*.[45] Radaptation, simply and, I hope, playfully conveys a radical approach to the craft and artwork, in this case my writing of these new plays. Being explicit about this approach is important. Hutcheon, for example, notes contempt within academic criticism and media reception of adaptation, arguing that it is often perceived as imitative. Yet she mounts a robust defence of the art form, stating that 'adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.'[46] I hope my re-vision of the word adaptation suggests, as Hutcheon does, a non-hierarchical relationship between the 'hypotext' and 'hypertext', one not defined by the need for fidelity but that instead expresses the contradictory nature of connectedness to and emancipation from the source text.[47]

My study of the transfiguration of fifth-century stage conventions in the work of British and Irish playwrights focuses on works that could be described as 'radaptations'. I

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[41] Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, Women, Writing and Teaching (1972), 18-30 (p. 18). Hereafter referred to as Rich.
[42] Laera, p. 10.
[43] Rich, p. 19; also cited in Sanders, p. 12.
[44] Rich, pp. 18-19, 23.
[45] I first started using the term radaptation as part of my PhD research in 2015. At the time, a general internet search revealed no other references to this word. Recently, another internet search revealed two writers, Eric Lee and Thomas Stapleton, using this term to describe their comedy musical work 'A movie writing comedy podcast […] where we take your suggestions for movies and write the next Oscar winning flick for those fat cats in Hollywood!', see Eric Lee and Thomas Stapleton, *Radaptation* (2017) <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/radaptation/id1217130699?mt=2> [accessed 22 January 2018]
Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 7. Hereafter referred to as Hutcheon.
[46] Hutcheon, pp. 2-9. For quotation, see p. 9.
[47] For definitions of 'hypotext' and 'hypertext' used in the context of adaptation, see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p. 5. Sanders raises the questions of a 'fundamental contradictory impulse towards dependence and liberation implicit in the majority of adaptations and appropriations', Sanders, p. 6. Whereas Laera sees adaptation and appropriation as synonyms, see Laera, p. 5.

avoided plays that did not significantly depart from Euripides' *Medea*, as these would not necessarily support my ambitions to analyse and creatively rework ancient theatrical conventions.[48] I wanted to confine my investigation to adaptions that had similarities to my own work and in some cases could be described as heightened realism. Surprisingly, the existence of these was quite limited. Eventually, I selected Mike Bartlett's *Medea,* co-produced by Headlong, Glasgow Citizens Theatre and Watford Palace Theatre, which premiered at the Glasgow Citizens Theatre, 27 September 2012, before touring the UK; Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*, initially produced at the Abbey Theatre on 7 October 1998; Rachel Cusk's *Medea*, which premiered on 25 September, 2015, at the Almeida Theatre, London, the final production in a trio presented as part of the Greeks Season; Liz Lochhead's *Medea,* produced as part of Theatre Babel's 'Greeks' project, which previewed at Glasgow's Old Fruitmarket on 17 April 2000, and premiered to rave reviews at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2000 before commencing a national tour; and Simon Stephens' *Blindsided*, which was first performed at Manchester's Royal Exchange on 23 January 2014.[49]

Each of these plays has qualities which speak directly to the preoccupations of my own creative work. Bartlett's *Medea* is an ultra-modern realist reworking, which has a suburban setting and a female protagonist struggling to cope with social pressures and isolation resulting from her divorce; Carr's 'Celtic Medea' in *By the Bog of Cats…* has a marginal status, that of a settled traveller in the rural middle Ireland setting, and the play uses colloquial language; Cusk's *Medea* has a modern chorus of self-obsessed metropolitan women, a messenger speech that draws upon ancient convention, and an ending that offers a change in mythic narrative; Lochhead's *Medea* uses a near-traditional chorus and colloquial Scots lyric dialect; and Stephens' *Blindsided* is set in a working-class location in the north of England and uses a dual casting device which suggests notions of masking. [50] Overall, these plays were chosen because collectively they depict marginalised people, explore representations of class, specificities of accent and dialogue, and use heightened realism, all of which connect with my plays and encourage reflection on my own work.

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[48] Tom Paulin, *Medea* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010); Ben Power, *Medea* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).
[49] For details of texts used in this study and references for first production dates, see Mike Bartlett, *Medea* (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), p. Back cover; Marina Carr, *Plays 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 259. Rachel Cusk, *Medea* (London: Oberon, 2015), p. 6; Liz Lochhead, *Medea* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2000), p. Title page; Simon Stephens, *Blindsided* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p. Back cover.
Further reference to these editions will be given in parenthesis after the quotation and for clarity will be referred to as Bartlett, Carr, Cusk, Lochhead, and Stephens, respectively.
Also, see *Blindsided* programme (Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre, 2014), p. 4; Richard Russell, 'Talking with Ghosts of Irish Playwrights Past: Marina Carr's By the Bog of Cats…', *Comparative Drama*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 149-68 (p. 149).
[50] Matt Wolf, *By the Bog of Cats* (2004) <http://variety.com/2004/legit/reviews/by-the-bog-of-cats-2-1200529166/> [accessed 22 January 2018] (para. 2 of 10)

My critical analysis of these plays focuses on three ancient traditions associated with Greek tragedy: chorus, mask, and messenger speech. It is concerned with how my contemporaries have negotiated the problems and opportunities posed by these conventions in their work. This focus enables reflection on what these choices tell us about these particular conventions, and what they may mean for audiences today. There are many other conventions which would bear further consideration, such as the unities of action, time and place; representation of deities; and the use of poetic language.[51] Exploration of how these have been dealt with in recent adaptations would no doubt prove equally fruitful and I would like to investigate them further at some point in the future. However, I have selected chorus, masks, and the messenger speech to focus on here, as these conventions have been deemed theatrically problematic for contemporary performers, directors and audience, so I am particularly interested in how playwrights creatively transform these conventions, which are also areas of interest in my own work.[52]

Chapter 1 explores the convention of the chorus in ancient Athens, and its importance as both a theatrical and democratic device.[53] It asks what role the chorus can play in contemporary western theatre, which prizes the primacy of the individual over the well-being of the wider community.[54] By looking at representations of the chorus in contemporary adaptations of *Medea* by Bartlett, Carr, Cusk and Lochhead, this chapter explores whether the size and identity of the chorus needs reformulating in order to serve the same function and hold similar authority. The physical mask in classical tragedy is explored in Chapter 2. This chapter asks the broader question of what masks and masking have come to mean in today's society, especially in the context of performance. The chapter draws on research conducted by David Wiles into masks and uses this to frame discussion of character and metaphor in the texts of Cusk, Bartlett and Stephens.[55] Chapter 3 looks at how images of violence and death were reported and represented on the ancient tragic stage. Drawing on Fiona Macintosh's theory of 'death as a process' , and broader notions of managed spectatorship, I investigate the differing representations of violence and death in these modern adaptations of *Medea*, and ask whether in these plays it is more powerful to show or tell violence to twenty-first century

[51] For unity of action, see Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 27, 48-49. Hereafter referred to as Aristotle. For unity of time, see Aristotle, p. xxxvi. For deities, see Goldhill, pp. 189, 204-23. For language, see Goldhill, pp. 153-87.
[52] Goldhill, pp. 45, 100-02.
[53] Goldhill, pp. 48-49.
[54] Hall 2010, p. 43; Goldhill, p. 47; J.R. Green highlights ancient Greek society's interest in the individual and parallels this with the separation of the actor (Thespis) from chorus to create shift from epic poetry and lyric verse to tragedy, see J.R. Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society*, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 16-17. Hereafter referred to as Green.
[55] David Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy: From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 261-85. Hereafter referred to as Wiles 2011.

audiences who are all too familiar with violent images reported in the media.[56] Chapter 4 analyses how I have negotiated the problems posed by the Greek chorus, mask and messenger speech and radapted them as creative opportunities in my own plays: *My Boy*, *Electricity* and *Fed.*

When undertaking the process of adaptation, one is forced to engage – consciously or unconsciously – with the conventions associated with the source material. Via my investigation of how the conventions of chorus, mask and messenger speech have been transformed in contemporaneous versions of *Medea*, the work of other playwrights serves as a framework to navigate and reflect upon my creative enquiry.

Foregrounding working-class female characters in these radaptations is undoubtedly related to my class and gender intersectional identity.[57] And whilst these plays are not explorations of feminist theory, nor do they solely prioritise feminist theatrical methodology, they are influenced by my 'double marginalization', the experience of being a working-class female playwright, a woman restricted by financial circumstances and cultural barriers associated with class and gender, working in the arts.[58] The whole radaptation project is a starting point, a means for me to engage in a cultural conversation about tragedy, whilst practically contributing more female roles for actors working in theatre, characters which explore aspects of material and financial dependence that bear relevance to my own class and gender experience.

The desire to create these roles in this project also relates to my deep frustration at rarely seeing working-class women's experiences the foci on stage, a frustration which has become more acute as I have become increasingly aware of the limited range of representations of working-class female characters. Not only this but that when working-class female characters are presented their inclusion is carefully curated. A recent controversy highlights this issue, when depictions of female working-class characters created by Andrea Dunbar in *Rita Sue and Bob Too*, characters based on her own her own real life experiences, were deemed unacceptable by the Royal Court in the wake of #metoo.[59] Vicky Featherstone,

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[56] Fiona Macintosh, *Dying Acts: Death in Ancient Greek and Modern Irish Tragic Drama* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 127. Hereafter referred to as Macintosh. For research into the adolescent consumption of media violence, see Steven J. Kirsh, *Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research*, 2nd edn (California: Sage Publications, 2012), pp. 68-90. Hereafter referred to as Kirsh.

[57] Elaine Aston, *An Introduction to Feminism & Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 78-80.

[58] Lizbeth Goodman highlights the concept of 'double marginalization' in relation to black feminist theatre, and I find it particularly useful when exploring my own class and gender identity. For quote, see Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 148. For details of Edith Hall's feminist provocation, which inspired *Fed*. See Chapter 4, p. 197.

[59] Alexandra Topping, *London theatre axes Rita, Sue and Bob Too amid harassment claims* (2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/13/london-royal-court-theatre-axes-rita-sue-bob-harassment-claims> [accessed 13 November 2018] (para.1 of 12)

Artistic Director of the theatre, stated as part of her explanation that: 'the staging of this work, with its themes of grooming and abuses of power on young women... feels highly conflictual'.[60] The manifold reasons which culminated in this decision were linked to allegations of sexual harassment made against Max Stafford-Clark, the dramaturg and director of the original production and initially, until he was replaced, this revival.[61] However, the ensuing public outcry, which centred on the censorship of a rare working-class female voice in theatre, caused a quick U-turn and the production was welcomed back, albeit with a qualification of how Featherstone wished it to be received.[62] What this debacle highlighted was the quiet curation of images of working-class women in the UK theatre industry, where, it would seem, only a certain 'type' is judged acceptable. Rita and Sue, and by extension Andrea Dunbar, clearly fell well short of expectations set by London's theatrical elite. This frustration at lack of scope within representations of working-class female identity is similarly noted by other writers working in different disciplines. In *Landscape for a Good Woman,* Carolyn Steedman highlights the difficulty of creating her own narrative within the restrictive conventions of working-class autobiography, a form which she argues foregrounds patriarchy and places familial and social solidarity at its core.[63] She struggled to find depictions of women like her mother, a working-class aspirational Conservative party supporter and unmarried single parent, who was isolated and exiled from the 'traditional communities of class'.[64] More recently, poet and scholar Fran Lock articulates similar views on the construction of class in the world of poetry, as illustrated below:

> A post-war northern male version of working-classness is one of the few acceptable faces of working-class identity permitted to proliferate across mainstream media platforms. This is deliberate: the poetry's distance from the material realities it describes presupposes and encodes a nostalgia, a looking back that defuses potential threat (social or poetic), softens the language of experience, and makes safe what might otherwise be challenging to the cultural status-quo.[65]

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[60] Anita Singh, *Royal Court cancels Rita, Sue and Bob Too revival amid sexual harassment claims* (2017) <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/12/13/royal-court-cancels-rita-sue-bob-revival-amid-sexual-harassment/> [accessed 13 November 2018] (paras. 6 & 7 of 11)

[61] Ibid., (para. 1 of 11)

[62] Vicky Featherstone's statement following the reversal of the decision to cancel the run of the production included the following explanation: 'As a result of this helpful public debate we are now confident that the context with which Andrea Dunbar's play will be viewed will be an invitation for new conversations.' Tristram Fane Saunders, *Royal Court Theatre U-turn over cancellation of Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (2017) <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/royal-court-theatre-u-turn-cancellation-rita-sue-bob/> [accessed 13 November 2018] (paras. 5, 6 & 7 of 8)

[63] Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago Press, 1986), pp. 6-7, 72-74. Hereafter referred to as Steedman.

[64] Steedman, p. 6.

[65] Fran Lock, *Don't Mention the Word Class! The Theft of Working-class Culture* (2018) <http://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/arts/poetry/item/2901-don-t-mention-the-word-class-the-theft-of-working-class-culture> [accessed 15 October 2018] (para. 2 of 42)

In her article, Lock links this curation of class with the commodification and marketability of poetry and poets in a twenty-first century, social media driven, world. As a playwright working in this environment, I can relate to these pressures, the need for writers to now be their own producers, their own mini-Thatcher-inspired-fundraising-enterprises.[66] This PhD was driven by a desire to step outside of the industry to catch my breath and concentrate solely on the art, allowing me precious time to think, reflect and make. In creating more and varied versions of working-class experience, whether 'recasting' myths to create new narratives, as Steedman advocates, or by focusing on 'material realities', or even a combination of both, I am challenging prescribed notions of identity and artistic expression.[67] I work with an ideal in mind: a situation in which working-class writers are free to write and reconfigure content and form without restriction.

[66] During 'Common Ground', one of a series of events organised by Common ('a nationwide arts organisation which exists to support the UK theatre industry in achieving greater socio-economic diversity, and to help make theatre more accessible to the working-class; whether they be artists, audiences or communities.'), working-class artists gathered to discuss barriers to career progression in the UK theatre industry. Participants, of which I was one, discussed Open Project Funding applications to Creative Scotland, in which it was stated that 10% of the monies applied for were expected to be raised by the applicant. It was felt that the self-funding or crowd-funding models put working-class artists at a disadvantage to their peers, as they did not have the same access to social networks of people who might be able to financially invest in their creative project.
For more details about the event see Tron Theatre, *Common Ground* (2018)
<https://www.tron.co.uk/event/common-ground/> [accessed 13 November 2018]
For further information on the Common organisation, see Common, *What We Do* (2018)
<https://commontheatre.co.uk/whatwedo/> [accessed 13 November 2018]
[67] Steedman, p. 74.

Chapter 1. Chorus

This chapter seeks to explore the 'problem' of adapting the chorus from ancient Greek tragedy to the modern stage.[1] I examine how four contemporary playwrights, Marina Carr, Rachel Cusk, Liz Lochhead and Mike Bartlett, have transformed the chorus in their versions of *Medea*. I draw on the critical work of classicists in order to consider issues raised by the chorus, particularly in relation to the tension between the collective and the individual, before examining how these dramatists engage with and tackle this ancient theatrical convention for a modern, and predominantly western European, audience.

Audiences viewing twenty first century adaptations of Greek tragedies may or may not be aware of the significance of the ancient chorus within the political, religious, social and educational framework of fifth century BCE Athens.[2] Its huge significance is perhaps difficult to fully comprehend for a British twenty-first century CE audience, living in a world where the principal focus is on the well-being and success of the individual, rather than that of the community.[3] In *Greek Tragedy: Suffering Under the Sun* Edith Hall explores this point in relation to the contemporary chorus and describes how 'joint participation in festivals such as the City Dionysia, and performing together in choruses […] create[d] intense bonds between the citizens' in an ancient democratic society.[4] Simon Goldhill also supports this viewpoint in *How to Stage Greek Tragedy Today,* drawing attention to the importance Plato places on the role of the chorus in ancient society in his treatise *Laws*, '"achoreutos, apaideutos" […] "no chorus, no culture"', or, as referred to by Robert C. Pirro, 'no chorus, no education.'[5] Playwrights, however, working on contemporary adaptations of ancient plays cannot help but confront what to do with the chorus, and must address the question of how to present and transform the information and function they provide. Ultimately, this process involves acknowledging the profound differences in society and theatre between then and now.

Many of the customs governing the historical chorus ensure that today's playwrights have to decide how to deal with a series of distinct artistic choices about composition, identity

[1] Goldhill, p. 45; Helen Eastman believes that the radical shift in British Theatre from a text based tradition to one embracing the devising process and physical theatre means that the chorus is now 'less of a "problem"' and more an opportunity, see Helen Eastman, 'Chorus in Contemporary British Theatre', in *Choruses Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Joshua Billings and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp 363-76 (p. 363). Hereafter referred to as Eastman.
[2] Goldhill, pp. 49-50.
[3] Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 3-4.
[4] Hall 2010, p. 59.
[5] Goldhill, p. 48; Robert C. Pirro, *The Politics of Tragedy and Democratic Citizenship* (London: Continuum, 2011) p. 64.

and function. Decisions need to be made about number, whether the chorus is ideologically unified, if it speaks collectively or as individuals, if it has moral authority, whether it is heard and seen by other characters, is it onstage throughout the play, to what extent is it involved in the action, and whether or not the chorus plays a spectacular role affording a theatrical interlude. The ancient chorus was, in the main, present on stage throughout the entire play, and bore witness to and commented on the action taking place. It is generally accepted that the Greek tragic chorus numbered 12 preceding and including the time of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and then increased to 15 following a change by Sophocles.[6] They were a group unified by common identity and ideology, which generally represented the view of ancient society. As Edith Hall puts it, they 'represent the we.'[7] Their oneness was expressed theatrically: visually, through matching costumes and masks, and also with collective dance movements; and audibly, through the choral singing of odes that were written in lyric verse and accompanied by the '*aulos*, a double reed instrument […] like a double oboe and was said to […] be hugely expressive'.[8] The odes, which Goldhill describes as 'hinge[s]', connect the scenes in tragedy and establish what has happened in the previous scene and prepare the audience for what is to come in the next.[9] In their full fifth-century BCE theatrical choric glory, they acted as an opportunity for the audience, as Albert Weiner argues, a pre-Brechtian alienation technique, an interlude in which spectators could 'stop feeling and begin to think'.[10]

Goldhill emphasises the 'moral authority' of the choral voice in ancient times, drawing comparisons with the power of the polis in democracy.[11] Participation in the chorus, and provision of resources for it, was considered a civic duty in ancient Greece. As part of the City Dionysia festival, a wealthy male citizen would be chosen by the state to be the '*choregos',* to essentially facilitate the chorus.[12] The choregos would fund the costume, masks, training, accommodation and general living expenses of the chorus. It was an esteemed role bestowed with great civic honour, but it was also a huge financial burden for the chosen benefactor.[13] Whilst professional actors played the leading roles in tragedies, the

[6] Goldhill, p. 46; Albert Weiner, 'The Function of the Greek Tragic Chorus', in *Theatre Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2 (May 1980), pp. 205-12 (p. 211). Hereafter referred to as Weiner.
[7] Hall uses this phrase to describe choruses who are 'space defenders', see *Edith Hall on the Greek Tragic Chorus*, dir. by Tom Mackenzie (2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ7N6Ij_1u0> [accessed 22 January 2018] Hereafter referred to as Hall interview Chorus.
[8] Goldhill, p. 46.
[9] Goldhill, p. 50.
[10] Weiner, p. 211.
[11] Goldhill, pp. 49-52.
[12] Helene Foley, 'Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy', *Classical Philology*, vol. 98, no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 1-30 (p. 3). Hereafter referred to as Foley 2003. Please note that this is how Foley's name appears in this journal, whereas in other citations she is referred to as Helene P. Foley. For 'chorēgos' (with macron over e, ē), see Hall 2010, p. 21.
[13] Hall 2010, pp. 22-23.

chorus comprised ordinary citizens. Being part of the Greek tragic chorus in the classical period – and also other choruses outside of tragedy – was part of the civic duty and community education of a young man, a form of cultural national service that would benefit him in all key aspects of his life and society: war, law, politics and family.[14] It is worth noting at this point that almost all ancient performers of tragedy during the fifth century were male, and that only men had democratic voting rights and were therefore classed as citizens of Athens.[15]

Given that ancient choral practices were seen as a vital part of teaching democratic responsibility, it may seem somewhat ironic, especially from a twenty-first century perspective, that the identity of the classical tragic chorus often comprised marginal peoples disenfranchised from that same democracy – women, slaves, elderly men and foreigners.[16] Goldhill picks up on the 'social *otherness*' of the chorus being at odds with its authoritative voice, and argues that 'finding a way to reconcile these two conflicting vectors is precisely what each production of tragedy has to achieve.'[17] While Goldhill's perspective places the onus on the director to balance the often marginalised group characterization of the chorus with its communal authority, in contemporary productions of Greek tragedies, playwrights adapting such works need to carefully consider and select a suitable identity or character for their chorus, however it manifests, one which embraces or negates the dramatic tension associated with its moral status over the protagonist.[18]

The relationship between the individual and the chorus is complex. Hall states that the chorus was central to tragedy, but more crucially that the contrast between individual and collective viewpoints on the same tragic event is fundamental to the ancient form.[19] Goldhill concurs with this point, stating that 'one of the structuring principles of tragedy is the tension between the collective chorus and the individual hero.'[20] However, Goldhill and Hall do differ on a major issue central to the individual and the chorus, that of the role of the

[14] Goldhill, p. 48. Goldhill makes reference to girls also participating in ancient choral competitions and education, but females did not perform in the tragic chorus, see Sheila Murnaghan, 'The Nostalgia of the Male Tragic Chorus', in *Choruses Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Joshua Billings and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp 173-88 (pp. 174-75); Sue-Ellen Case states that 'by the fifth century, when the ceremonies were becoming what is known as theatre, women disappeared from the practice', see Sue-Ellen Case, 'Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 37, no. 3, Staging Gender (October 1985) 317-27 (pp. 318-19).
[15] Hall states that 'all the performers were male' when talking about performances in the theatre of Dionysus, see Euripides, p. xv; Hall also specifies dates 'between 472 and 401 BCE' for all male casts, see Hall 2010, p. 14; Foley states that 'Greek tragedy was written and performed by men', see Foley 2001, p. 3.
[16] Foley 2003, p. 1.
[17] Goldhill, p. 51.
[18] Goldhill, pp. 51-52.
[19] Hall 2010, p. 43; Eastman, p 376.
[20] Goldhill, p. 47.

'choruphaios'.[21] Goldhill states: 'there was always a leader of the chorus (the choruphaios), who spoke individual lines on behalf of the group.'[22] Hall, however, disputes this:

> Tragic choruses use both the singular pronoun 'I' and the plural 'we' as they shift between moods and in and out of a marked group identity. But there is no certain evidence that they ever sang in any way but collectively and in unison, despite passages where fragmentation into smaller groups or even individual voices might seem appropriate […] Nor is there any way of proving that the chorus had a recognizable leader, whose individual speaking or singing voice was ever heard in the theatre during the original productions.[23]

There has also been much debate over whether the chorus should be seen as one of the actors, a separate character, largely inspired by Aristotle's thoughts on the dramatic function of the chorus in Greek tragedy. Albert Weiner argues that mistranslation of a key passage in *Poetics* is at the heart of this misinterpretation, that '"aid…in the competition"' is the correct translation of '"share in the action"', thereby putting emphasis on the overall theatrical role of the chorus within the tragic production, as opposed to its dramatic function as another actor in the narrative.[24]

The critical response to the chorus in Euripides' *Medea* provides a measure of the complexity of the chorus's dramatic function, role and identity, and its relation to the protagonist, as scholars have reflected on the meaning of the choric response to Medea's action.[25] Debate has centred on the key dramatic moment when the children interrupt the chorus's fifth stasimon with their cries for help, and the women of Corinth's subsequent inaction, as voiced here in James Morwood's translation:

> CHORUS (*sings*)
> Should I go into the house? I think I should defend
> the children from death.
> CHILD A Yes, by the gods, defend us. We need your help.
> CHILD B How near we are now to the sword's snare.
> CHORUS (*sings*) Cruel woman, you must be stone
> or iron – for you will kill your children.
>
> (Euripides, p. 6, ll. 1275-80)

[21] Goldhill, p. 46.
[22] Goldhill, p. 46.
[23] Hall 2010, p. 43.
[24] Weiner, p. 209.
[25] Philippa Geddie, 'Running Upstream: The Function of the Chorus in Euripides' *Medea*', *Hirundo: The McGill Journal of Classical Studies*, vol. 3 (2005), 1-11 (pp. 1-3). Hereafter referred to as Geddie.

In his article 'On the Fifth Stasimon of Euripides' *Medea*', Charles Segal focuses on the playwright's remarkable creation of pathos by using children, a Euripidean dramatic device also greatly admired by Hall.[26] In particular, he draws attention to Euripides' innovation of having a regular choral ode, the communal voice, interrupted by the children's individual cries for help as they are about to die, cries driven by the action of the protagonist. He praises Euripides' manipulation of offstage violence to bring the chorus and audience closer to the boys' death, giving it 'a vividness and emotional power equal […] to the elaborately described death scene of the Princess and Creon.'[27] Segal highlights the chorus's inactivity and non-intervention in the action, arguing that the women of Corinth share some responsibility for Medea's murderous act, as he states unequivocally 'not only is the chorus the sole witness of the terrible crime, but its sympathy for and complicity with Medea (despite its vehement protest and attempts to dissuade her) have made the crime possible.'[28] In contrast, Aristides Evangelus Phoutrides argues that the women of Corinth do attempt to intervene physically when they 'rush toward the entrance, and beat helplessly on the barred doors'.[29] He also makes the point that mental struggle and vocal expression, especially that which evokes emotion, should too be read as dramatic action.[30] Helene Foley appears to support this viewpoint, more broadly in relation to tragedy, in her investigation into the identity of the chorus.[31] She draws attention to what she deems a generalised and regurgitated reading of Aristotle's *Problemata,* in which critics describe the chorus as 'marginal' because of the conventions in tragedy that preclude it from taking control or directing the action.[32] Foley states that choruses' 'effective interventions are verbal rather than physical'.[33] Edith Hall's reading of a chorus's identity in relation to the 'imagined space it occupies' provides further nuance.[34] She argues that choruses are either space invaders (*Bacchae*) or space defenders (*Medea*), and that their status – belonging to, or coming into, a particular community – determines how they behave and act within their given tragedy.[35] Hall highlights the fact that although chorus members have a unified status within each tragedy, there are

[26] Charles Segal, 'On the Fifth Stasimon of Euripides' Medea', *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. 118, no. 2 (1997), 167-84 (p. 167). Hereafter referred to as Segal; Hall interview Euripidean Tragedy.
[27] Segal, p. 170.
[28] Segal p. 170. For a reading of the chorus as Medea's 'accomplices', see Geddie, p. 5.
[29] Aristides Evangelus Phoutrides, 'The Chorus of Euripides', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 27 (1916), 77-170 (p.138). Hereafter referred to as Phoutrides.
[30] Phoutrides, pp. 138-39.
[31] Foley 2003, pp. 1-30.
[32] Foley 2003, p. 14.
[33] Foley 2003, p. 14.
[34] Hall 2010, p. 29.
[35] Hall interview Chorus; Hall 2010, pp. 29-30.

many varied identities from play to play within extant tragedies.[36] Each chorus has a unique identity and role. In *Medea* the chorus of Corinthian women are 'space defenders'.[37] The protagonist is a barbarian, therefore classed as a 'space invader', yet the chorus are sympathetic to Medea, because, as women, they too are outsiders from the polis, disenfranchised, and not, as a result, classed as citizens.[38]

Goldhill's point about the structure of tragedy being related to the tension between an individual hero's agency and the collective choral voice is particularly evident in Euripides' *Medea*.[39] The protagonist's skilful use of rhetoric builds continually, convincing the women of Corinth to be unswervingly sympathetic to her cause and escalating actions, ultimately leading to their complicity in her act of filicide. In ancient tragedy the hero is usually punished for pursuing his or her individual goals, where they transgress the collective norms of society.[40] However, in Euripides' *Medea* the heroine escapes justice and does not face the wrath of society or even the gods.[41] In ending the play like this Euripides sets an unusual precedent, but he does leave the last summation to the chorus, as tradition dictates:[42]

> and the gods bring many things to pass against our expectation.
> What we thought would happen remains unfulfilled,
> while the god has found a way to accomplish the unexpected.
> And that is what has happened here.
>
> (Euripides, p. 38, ll. 1415-19)

These final fatalistic words of the women of Corinth are repeated in several of Euripides' other plays and, given their sentiment of predetermination, they signify one aspect of the challenge of adapting the ancient tragic chorus to a modern society that largely believes in self-determination and personal autonomy.[43] Hall alludes to this in *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun*:

> In our fragmented society, which places so much emphasis on individual experience and private fulfilment, the community's response to an individual family's crises may seem an 'optional extra' that can be detached from the 'core' of the play […] But the counterpoint between the collective and individual perspectives on disaster was at the heart of the ancient experience of tragedy.[44]

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[36] Hall interview Chorus.
[37] Hall 2010, pp, 19-20; Hall interview Chorus.
[38] Hall interview Chorus; Euripides establishes the chorus's sympathy towards Medea when they declare themselves 'friends', see Euripides, p. 6, l. 181.
[39] Goldhill, p. 47.
[40] Goldhill, p. 47.
[41] Euripides, p. 38.
[42] Hall 2010, p. 242.
[43] See note for ll. 1415-19 in Euripides, p. 179.
[44] Hall 2010, p. 43.

So, when adapting Greek tragedy, and in particular *Medea*, what does a contemporary playwright do with this archaic tradition? Many chose to write the chorus out completely or replace it with a number of individual characters. Playwright Martin Crimp questions the relevance of such a collective grouping in modern Western theatre.[45] Marina Carr simply remarks 'I've never seen it work'.[46] Her statement is no doubt reflected in the absence of a traditional chorus in her mythic reworking of *Medea, By the Bog of Cats…*.

The characters that Carr chooses to replace the chorus have an analogous function and identity to Euripides' Corinthian women. Euripides' chorus declare themselves 'friends' (Euripides, p. 6, l. 181) of Medea, and Carr creates two contrasting female friends for her 'tinker' (Carr, p. 312) protagonist Hester Swane, who embody the dichotomy within her: Monica Murray, a friend and neighbour who represents all that is accepted within the bog community, and has qualities of respect, concern for the community, motherliness, and 'niceness' (Carr, p. 322) that Hester and her late mother, Josie, appear to lack; and Catwoman, a blind seer who roams the bog, and embodies Hester's feral feline personality, the restless part of her that can never settle down. Like Euripides' barbarian Medea and his chorus of Corinthian women, Hester and Catwoman are also outsiders.[47] As friends to Hester, Monica and Catwoman are in a position to function as Euripides' ancient chorus providing backstory through dramatic exposition rather than odes. The women of Corinth sing of Medea:

> You live in a foreign land,
> you have lost your marriage bed, you have no husband,
> poor woman, and are being driven from the land.
> […]
> Another royal lady has displaced you as wife
> and now rules in the house.
>
> (Euripides, pp. 12-13, ll. 433-6, 443-4)

And in her first exchange with Hester, Monica advises:

> you're goin' to have to lave this house, isn't
> yours any more. Down in Daly's doin' me shoppin' and
> Caroline Cassidy there talkin' about how she was goin'
> to mow this place to the ground and build a new house
> from scratch […] she has her heart set on everythin' that's yours.

[45] Eastman, p. 372. Eastman quotes Martin Crimp from an APGRD interview talking about his choice to replace the traditional chorus with three individual female characters in *Cruel and Tender* (Young Vic, 2004): 'There's an absence of communality in Western European culture. Therefore what can chorus mean?'
[46] Holly Williams, *The RSC's new "Hecuba": A Vengeful Queen with a Difference* (2015) <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-rscs-new-hecuba-a-vengeful-queen-with-a-difference-10513125.html> [accessed 23 January 2018] (para.11 of 14)
[47] Hall interview Chorus.

(Carr, p. 268)

Monica and Catwoman serve as a warning of what is to come for Hester, an indication to the audience of her tragic end, in much the same way as Euripides' choral odes prepare the audience for the full horror of Medea's murderous acts. Monica's own past foreshadows Hester's fate. Monica is childless having lost her only son in an accident, an event forewarned by Catwoman, a warning Monica refused to heed. Catwoman too foresees Hester's fate, certainly the damage she will have on the community, when she tells her: 'Dreamt ya were a black train motorin' […] blastin' by and all the bog was dark in your wake […] you'll bring this place down by evenin' (Carr, p. 273). This imagery is imbued with the same qualities as lines delivered by Euripides' chorus who fear that 'her grief has a terrible momentum' and will ultimately 'harm[s] those inside' (Euripides, p. 6., ll.182-83), referring to Medea's children. These comparable examples illustrate that Catwoman and Hester take on the function and identity of a chorus, despite Carr's disavowal of the convention.

Bartlett's adaptation of *Medea* also identifies two female friends to serve a similar function as the chorus, combined with elements of Euripides' Tutor and Nurse: Pam, a work colleague of Medea; and Sarah, a neighbour. Both friends have known Medea a relatively brief time and therefore encourage reflection on the transience of twenty-first century society and relationships. Pam's words 'Medea we're here to help you' (Bartlett, p. 19) echo those of the ancient chorus 'my wish to help | will never fail my friends' (Euripides, p. 6, ll. 178-79). In Bartlett's *Medea*, the friends are not socially marginalised. They are very much part of the society that Medea is becoming increasingly excluded from. Pam, an old school friend of Jason, has an invite to his wedding. Sarah is a resident of the modern, middle-class, post-Thatcher, aspirational estate where the houses are 'all the same' (Bartlett, p. 6.) but inhabited by people who value 'rugged individualism' and are isolated because there is no societal 'solidarity and cohesive aspiration'.[48] In addition to this pairing, Bartlett provides another chorally inspired character: a laconic workman who observes the events from outside the house. In the spirit of the socially and dramatically marginalised Euripidean chorus, the Workman may be considered side-lined by his class and manual profession, yet he is a functioning part of society and, notwithstanding his lack of dialogue, of the drama. The ancient chorus laid the foundations of community cohesion, of democracy and morality. The Workman literally builds the structures that ultimately confine Bartlett's aspirational and isolated community.

[48] Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 10.

Lochhead obviously sees the advantage of a more traditional chorus, while also choosing to broaden its social scope, so although the number is not specified in the text of Lochhead's *Medea*, there are indications that a number of women formed the chorus: 'WOMEN of all times, all ages, classes and professions' (Lochhead, p. 7).[49] Edith Hall insists that we must ask why an ancient playwright chose to give a chorus a particular identity, noting that had Euripides chosen a chorus of Corinthian men it would have resulted in a very different play, men of that historical period being more likely to side with Jason given their similar social position.[50] By extension, the female chorus gives us a more nuanced psychological reading of the character of Medea. She is not merely railing against a powerful male chorus of Corinthian men, but having to convince females that her planned filicide is justifiable.[51] Lochhead's Medea has to convince women from all eras, age ranges, social and professional statuses that her actions are justified. This is perhaps a signifier of Lochhead's conviction that although the position of women has advanced significantly over the past two and half thousand years, women are still outsiders irrespective of class, career and age, especially those who have lived and loved, as the chorus declare themselves:

> survivors of the sex war
> married women widows divorced
> mistresses wives no virgins here.
>
> (Lochhead, p. 7)

These women are experienced and clearly have an authoritative and unified choral voice, one that will test Medea's resolve to avenge her husband and kill her children.

Lochhead's chorus presents the audience with a more unified voice, communal in ideological terms, if not necessarily in its delivery. In Lochhead's text, the chorus always speak using the plural pronouns 'we' (Lochhead, pp. 7-10, 15-16, 20, 22-23, 27-28, 31, 35, 47), 'us' (pp. 16, 22, 27, 39) and 'our' (pp. 7, 9, 23, 29, 39), suggesting that they are talking as a collective, not as individuals with differing opinions. The first stage direction relating to their speech, although a little ambiguous, also seems to support uniform rather than individual delivery, stating that 'their initial communication is to each other and also in unison direct to audience' (Lochhead, p. 7). The first part of this sentence makes it clear that the chorus speak

[49] The chorus numbered six in the original production, see Charles Spencer, *A magnificent Medea for the 21st century* (2001) < http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4724941/A-magnificent-Medea-for-the-21st-century.html> [accessed 23 January 2018] (para. 2 of 13)
[50] Hall interview Chorus.
[51] *Professor Edith Hall on Euripides' Medea*, dir. by Tom MacKenzie (2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_xjPVQxrfo> [accessed 22 January 2018] Hereafter referred to as Hall interview *Medea*. Please note that for ease of reference this will appear in the bibliography as both *Professor Edith Hall on Euripides' Medea* and *Edith Hall on Euripides' Medea*.

intragroup, and the second part seems to suggest that they speak in unison, simultaneously directing their words to each other and the audience. The usage of 'initial' indicates that this unified delivery will somehow change during the play. However, Lochhead is not prescriptive about how the choral lines should be delivered, though the distinct spacing of the verse does suggest that individuals could speak different lines. This is particularly evident in the stanza where the chorus introduce themselves and define their identity, but could also apply to other lines of verse:

> so your man fucks another? fuck him
> loves her? tough love him do you?
> you'll grow out of that.
>
> (Lochhead, p. 7)

Within this modern chorus with its traditional influences, there is room to interpret the chorus as personages within the communal grouping, supporting recognition of their individual experiential differences of being a woman across the historical and social spectrum.

Cusk's reworking of Medea has a 'group of WOMEN holding dolls and coffee cups' (Cusk, p. 10) forming the chorus. Unlike Euripides' Corinthian women they are not present onstage throughout the play. Cusk's Chorus appear in three scenes. Their first appearance does not specify a location, the second scene takes place at the school gate and the third scene has the women, significantly, form part of the landscape. We can assume from the stage directions and dialogue that they belong to a similar social stratum as Medea. In the first scene, Woman 5 refers to seeing Medea at the school gate (Cusk, p. 16), and in the second scene the stage directions state 'The WOMEN are waiting outside the school gate' (Cusk, p. 72) when later Medea appears, an indication that their children go to same school. We might therefore assume that they, like Medea, are also 'middle class' (Cusk, p. 9). Despite this commonality, Medea's ideological separation from the chorus is clearly expressed in these first two scenes which feature them both, through proxemics and dialogue. In each scene, the chorus is an established group chatting for some time before Medea enters. In the first scene the chorus are conversing for a lengthy period – six pages worth of dialogue – when *'MEDEA [enters] at a distance'* (Cusk, p. 16). Her separateness is also expressed in the stage directions: they drink coffee, she does not, and more significantly, they hold babies, she does not. In the second scene in which they appear, however, the chorus talk for just over two pages before *'Medea enters and stands at a short distance. They look at her'* (Cusk, p. 74). The tighter proxemics in these stage directions, perhaps, represents a growing understanding of their proximity, as women, to Medea's situation. Their uniformity is also expressed

visually through shared props and synchronised movements when they '*jiggle dolls and drink coffee*' (Cusk, pp. 10-11). However, their dialogue expresses their individuation and self-obsession. When we first meet them they are having a conversation but not listening to each other, each preoccupied with their own concerns:

> WOMAN 1 I can't function this morning. I'm like, where's the caffeine IV?
>
> WOMAN 2 Shall we take off your coat?
>
> WOMAN 3 The guys were back early last night.
>
> WOMAN 2 Is it too hot in here? Shall Mummy take off your coat?
>
> WOMAN 3 Joe said hardly anyone turned up.
>
> WOMAN 4 You know I'm doing this fasting thing?
>
> WOMAN 3 He says it's really hard.
>
> (Cusk, p. 10)

Although part of a social group, these women are clearly individuals focused on their own concerns and lives. When they are not talking about themselves, their husbands and children, they are being critical of Medea, overtly in this instance, as voiced by Woman 5: 'She isn't exactly what you'd call a normal mother […] She's not, you know, one of us' (Cusk, p. 18). This criticism expresses the otherness of Medea; she is not part of their gang of mothers. In the next scene in which they feature this borders on self-obsession with the repetitive use of 'I' (Cusk, pp. 72-79) throughout the scene. Their self-styled stoic sisterhood belies steely criticism of other women, especially soon to be divorced Medea, independent and autonomous, ostracised further from this group whose membership requires 'conventional passivity.'[52] Medea's individuation and otherness is evident in the contrast between the chorus's snippy dialogue and her monologue, which stands alone at the end of the scene. At no point does she engage in their facile conversation. Though the chorus form the subject of her lengthy speech, a brutal critique of them and a certain type of woman, when she says:

> You learned it at your mothers' breasts,
> how to powder your faces, how to lie, even to yourselves,
> while the truth stalks the dark of your minds like an assassin.
> […]
> Yes, all that dissembling takes its toll,
> Fawning on men and property like the dogs you are,

[52] Rachel Cusk, *Medea is not psychotic – she's a realist* (2015) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/actors/medea-rachel-cusk/> [accessed 23 January 2018] (para. 5 of 14) Hereafter referred to as Cusk *Telegraph*.

Making a living, like any prostitute must.
I'd rather be dead than unfree.

(Cusk, pp. 18-19)

This extract reveals how Medea views her ideology as being very different to that of the chorus. Euripides' Medea attempts to draw commonalities, whereas Cusk's Medea is scathingly critical of the chorus. However, the text does not specify whether the chorus hear her words or whether this is a soliloquy. Whatever the intention, this speech demonstrates how the chorus, in the way they live their lives, challenge Medea's identity and values.
In the second scene the chorus seem to soften towards Medea, acknowledging the lot of women in comparison to men and how this is impacting on her, when they comment:

W4 She looks so –

W1 Doesn't she?

W4 – so sad.

W1 Doesn't she?

W5 She looks frightening.

(Cusk, p, 75)

This line expresses a fear of what Medea has become and signals a change in attitude that is evident in the third and final scene. The chorus are in closer proximity to Medea physically and emotionally. This is expressed in stage directions and dialogue, in which the women actually hold a conversation with Medea. This interaction signifies a recognition that they have more in common with Medea than expressed in earlier scenes, and shows a willingness to engage with her and understand her situation:

The Women start to gather around Medea.

MEDEA Once I was driving on a road in the mountains.

W1 What on earth were you doing there?

MEDEA I was going somewhere in my car.

W2 Where were you going?

MEDEA I don't remember. But I remember wanting to get there.

W3 On your own – that was brave!

MEDEA It was a very winding road but I took the bends well. I felt masterful.

W4 People are wrong about women drivers, you know.

MEDEA […] I felt free. I thought I was free.
(Pause) Then something happened. A strange noise started.

W5 Something wrong with the engine?

MEDEA The car started to lose power.

W1 That's my worst nightmare!

(Cusk, p. 82)

The women are asking questions about Medea's road trip through the mountains, a clear metaphor for Medea's independence, marriage and marital breakdown. Their questions indicate a fascination with how she coped, even going to so far as to complement Medea's courage. This is the first time that the chorus show a genuine interest in seeing things from Medea's perspective, indicating that what happened to her could also happen to them, this their ultimate fear. Medea tells them that she felt 'hope' at the same time as impending 'darkness' (Cusk, p. 84), a word which she repeats six times as chorus members individually relate to her situation, and express a unified concern and empathy for her.

Whilst there are many similarities between Euripides' chorus and those of Cusk and Lochhead in their versions of *Medea* – inasmuch as they are a group of women who either live in the same community or share similar experiences with the protagonist – there are also significant differences. Cusk's chorus speak as individuals and are less sympathetic to Medea, whom they view as a personal threat. Lochhead's women, like Euripides', appear to speak collectively and express concern for Medea's situation. However, Lochhead's chorus relate more to Medea's personal pain and are quicker to express solidarity, addressing her as 'sister' (Lochhhead, p. 7) shortly after their entrance. In contrast, Euripides' women of Corinth view Medea's grief in terms of the social institution of the 'house' (Euripides, p. 5, ll. 136-38). The shift in emphasis illustrated in both Cusk and Lochhead's chorus is a reflection of playwrights' skill in subtly adapting this group to suit the preoccupation of the society for whom they are writing, and indicates the change from ancient communal concerns with the public sphere to today's obsession with the self and private life. Ancient society consisted of and prized larger extended families, some of which exerted great public influence, whereas in

twenty-first century western society smaller nuclear family groupings and people living alone are the norm.[53]

When adapting the ancient chorus for the modern stage, the matter of which characters interact with the more traditional choral grouping is pertinent to issues relating to communal authority versus private autonomy. Lochhead specifies that none of the other characters can see or hear the chorus, thereby putting the focus on the relationship between Medea and the chorus, a signifier of the importance of the individual's experience in twenty-first century society and theatre (Lochhead, pp. 7, 11). This seems like a departure from Euripides, where several characters do hear the chorus. The nurse replies to them when they ask her to fetch Medea (Euripides, p. 6, l. 184). Also, the chorus address Jason by name and talk to him on the two occasions when he comes to Medea, but as he does not respond to them directly during his first visit it is initially unclear as to whether he can hear them. It is not until the climax of the tragedy when Jason comes to save his children that he speaks to them:

> JASON You women who are standing near this house, is Medea
> […]
> still inside this house or
> has she fled away?
> […]
> I'm not concerned about
> her so much as the children […]
> CHORUS Unhappy man, you do not know how far into cata-
> strophe you have come, Jason. Otherwise you would not have said these
> words.
> JASON What is it? Can she be wanting to kill me too?
> CHORUS Your children have died at their mother's hand.
>
> (Euripides, p. 35, ll. 1294-310)

There is no such choral interaction in Cusk's *Medea*. Jason phones his ex-wife with news of their boys' fate, this physical separation illustrating their now atomised family. In Lochhead's *Medea*, Jason enters the house and discovers the tragic events, off-stage, first hand. He then returns to face Medea, his ex-wife, giving a far more personal, nuclear family, feel to the tragedy. Carr and Lochhead's focus on Jason and Medea's relationship contrasts with that of Euripides, in which Nurse, Jason and the children all hear the pronouncements of the chorus and in turn interact with them, an indication of the reach of communal authority in ancient society. Euripides' Medea verbally interacts with the chorus throughout the play, continually working her skilful rhetoric on them. It could be argued that by having Medea manipulate the

[53] Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 1-3. Hereafter referred to as Patterson; Gary S. Becker, *A Treatise on the Family*, enlarged edn (London: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 347-49.

chorus, Euripides is in fact pandering to the communal authority of the state, the same state that commissioned him to write the tragedy, by having an outsider from the polis, a wily barbarian, influence the good women of Corinth. However, Medea not only challenges the communal authority of the chorus, she defies the very foundations of the community they are a product of and represent, the patriarchal society that has facilitated and condones Jason's behaviour.[54] Not only does she attack the state, she destroys one of their own, and then escapes without facing official consequence or justice. This tragedy is unusual, an ancient example of the individual voice triumphant against society's communal authority. Cusk and Lochhead transform Medea into a personal affair by limiting the choral interaction to between them and Medea, and also the audience, in effect making this story more of a private, rather than a public, tragedy.

While Euripides makes it clear that the chorus are fully aware of Medea's murderous intent, the knowledge of the 'chorus' in the four adaptations is varied. In *By the Bog of Cats…*, Catwoman, as a blind seer, can prophesy Hester's doom, so would surely be able to read the grim fate of Hester's daughter, but she seems more concerned with the impact on the bog (Carr, p. 273). Whilst she is keen to defend the bog by sharing her visions, her blindness prevents her from physically intervening in the action. Her situation reflects that of Euripides' chorus who can hear the children's cries inside the locked house, but are powerless to stop Medea even if they wanted to. In contrast, Monica does not know the fate of Hester and Josie. However, in their first interaction, Monica expresses worry for their future, 'ya have to pull yourself together for her, you're goin' to have to stop this broodin', put your life back together again' (Carr, p. 268). But this concern is based on Hester's behaviour rather than any knowledge about her impending murders and filicide. Therefore, Monica is in no position to dissuade or intervene in Hester's final tragic acts: killing her only daughter, Josie, and then committing suicide. In contrast, Liz Lochhead's chorus actively encourage Medea to punish Jason on their behalf, no doubt fuelled by his bullish, misogynistic and arrogant attitude (Lochhead, p. 20). But when they realise the full extent of her planned punishment, her plans to murder Glauke, Kreon and the children, they do try to dissuade her, but they do not attempt to physically intervene in the action. Medea's artful rhetoric is ultimately more powerful than their collective moral argument. Yet they do block an easy passage on her journey towards ultimate revenge against Jason and achievement of total individualism, making herself once again childfree. They call on her maternal feelings to question her actions as they state: 'your sons you suckled at your breast […] slash them to their knees? […] your daughter whose hair

[54] *From Medea to Mumsnet*, dir. by Almeida Theatre (2015) < https://vimeo.com/143266382> [accessed 23 January 2018]

you braid and plait […] will you wrap her own bright braid around her neck?' (Lochhead, p. 29). Despite their emotive argument, women to woman, they do not succeed in stopping Medea's course of action, and, as many believe is in keeping with Greek tragic choral tradition, do not intervene with the action.[55]

In Bartlett's realist reworking, the friends are not aware of Medea's murderous plans and cannot therefore even argue against her, let alone intervene in the action. Their passivity is far more insidious, a reflection of modern suburban communities, appearing to be supportive and friendly, without any serious indication of concerns with other people's affairs. This is reflected in Pam's half-hearted offer of help, that Medea can stay in her spare room for a night, a display of Pam's desire to assist, but not so much that it inconveniences her own private life. This awareness of Medea's personal problems but lack of a desire to intervene more publicly is openly discussed by Pam and Sarah:

> PAM I'd call the hospital but they might take
> him away –
>
> SARAH The hospital? You think she's –
>
> PAM They might put her somewhere and I
> don't want that on my…
>
> SARAH But if you really think she's got to that
> point –
>
> PAM I don't want anyone blaming me.
> Maybe we should just leave them for the night.
>
> (Bartlett, p. 13)

This exchange highlights Pam's self-obsession, as she continually relates Medea's problems back to herself, concerned with how her own intervention or non-intervention will impact on how she is viewed by others. Underlying Pam's words is the position of the state as the ultimate authority in a secular society, a feature highlighted later in the play when Medea goes inside the house with her son Tom, and Pam phones the police. The workman does challenge Medea about her intended actions when he delivers one of his very few lines: 'Don't.' (Bartlett, p. 68). This imperative sentence is powerful because of its brevity and ambiguity. The line could be read as 'do not pack and leave', as that is the conversation he previously overheard, but the significance of stage directions detailing that '*they stare at each other for a long time. Then* –' he delivers his line and that '*they look at each other*' (Bartlett, p. 68)

[55] Please refer to earlier discussion, p.128.

before Medea re-enters the house, gives the one word line an added significance. The subtext for anyone familiar with the mythic narrative is 'do not commit matricide'.

Adapting the ancient chorus to a modern world where the communal authority of the form is not supported by a social framework is challenging. It is significant that all four playwrights, including Carr who is most openly sceptical about the merits of a contemporary chorus, chose to include characters of a similar identity, however radically reconfigured, who fulfil the function of the ancient chorus in their modern versions of *Medea*. Carr and Bartlett's broadly realist reworkings both focus on the individual psychological journey of their protagonists, Hester and Medea, respectively. Their internal battles of conscience manifest in external clashes with individual antagonists or 'Threshold Guardians' who are part of the community.[56] Lochhead's *Medea* utilises a more conventional choral grouping, an ideologically unified chorus of women throughout the ages embodying authority. Their oneness serves as the much needed 'counterpoint' expounded by Hall.[57] However the chorus manifests in these contemporary adaptations, their existence is a sign that the chorus as a public moderator of personal accountability in our private lives is as vital to tragedy today as it ever was. Lochhead's skilled crafting of a more traditional chorus, along with Cusk's individuated interpretation, provides hope for playwrights adapting ancient Greek tragedy, demonstrating that not only can a contemporary chorus work, even for a western European audience hailing from a society where there's an 'absence of communality', but that a chorus more in keeping with the ancient tradition, could, with an appreciation of its context and form, be crafted and actually applied to a realist contemporary play.[58] Significantly, Lochhead and Cusk demonstrate that something which appears on the surface to conform to convention can actually be more 'radical' if situated and radapted within a contemporary framework.[59]

[56] Vogler, p. 57.
[57] Hall 2010, p. 43; also see earlier discussion, pp 129-30.
[58] Eastman, p. 372; Goldhill, pp. 54, 63.
[59] Oxford English Dictionary, *radical, adj. and n.* (2018) <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/view/Entry/157251?rskey=EaSoKK&result=1#eid> [accessed 30 December 2018] The OED defines radical as 'Characterized by independence of or departure from what is usual or traditional; progressive, unorthodox, or innovative in outlook, conception, design'.

Chapter 2. Mask

To conceal the face is to conceal the self.

- ChrisVervain and David Wiles[1]

This chapter offers a reading of Rachel Cusk's *Medea* (2015) and Simon Stephens' *Blindsided* (2014). It explores questions relating to the reconfiguration of the ancient Greek tragic mask, and asks what remains when a playwright removes the physical mask from contemporary reinterpretations of fifth-century BCE tragedy, specifically Euripides *Medea*.[2] It examines how mask and interpretations of masking – as a mode of concealment and revelation – inform enquiry into performance within character, namely the presentation of identity and selfhood. To interrogate selfhood, I use the psychological framework of self-concept to investigate how identity is formed: the individual self, what makes us different; the relational self, interpersonal relationships and attributes shared with close partners; and the collective self, how we situate ourselves in relation to social groups.[3] I reference the work of Erving Goffman, specifically his book *The Presentations of Self in Everyday Life*, which makes a theatrical connection with how we construct and perform our identity. The quotation cited at the head of this chapter from Chris Vervain and David Wiles forms a starting point for this overall enquiry into mask. However, in order to investigate this statement fully, I first explore the form and function of the ancient Greek tragic mask to help identify the less tangible manifestations, the non-physical masks, within these plays.

Although no physical masks have survived from this period, we know what they looked like and why they were used.[4] David Wiles has undertaken extensive research into *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy – From Ancient Festival to Modern Experimentation*.[5] His work covers the complex historical and cultural understanding and evolution of mask, exploring its physical and metaphorical representations. In his work with mask-maker and scholar Chris Vervain, they use the Greek Mask as point of departure for practical exploration of modern mask work. Vervain and Wiles maintain that the literary text should not be given theoretical primacy over mask in the evolution of Greek tragedy, as both

[1] Chris Vervain and David Wiles, 'The Masks of Greek Tragedy as Point of Departure for Modern Performance', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 17, iss. 3 (2001), 254-72 (p. 256). Hereafter referred to as Vervain and Wiles.
[2] When I use 'ancient mask', 'Greek mask' or 'tragic mask', it refers to masks worn in performances of Greek tragedy during the fifth century BCE.
[3] Lowell Gaertner and others, 'A Motivational Hierarchy Within: Primacy of the Individual Self, Relational Self, or Collective Self?', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 48 (2012), 997–1013 (p. 997). Hereafter referred to as Gaertner.
[4] Wiles 2011, p. 1.
[5] See Introduction, footnote 54.

mask and text symbiotically developed the form.[6] Nevertheless, in order to understand its reconfiguration in contemporary texts, we must first investigate its physical appearance and function. Scholars inform us that masks in ancient Greek tragedy were shaped like a helmet, covering all of the face and most of the head, leaving the area over the ears open, covered only by hair that was attached to the mask, presumably to allow the actors to hear clearly in order to react to what was being said and sung onstage.[7] The masks were thought to be lightweight and made from linen made stiff with plaster or animal glue.[8] From representations in ancient paintings, the hole for the mouth appeared small so that the actors' mouths were unseen, and the apertures for the eyes were pupil-sized, presumably allowing the performer enough vision to move safely and co-ordinate with the rest of the cast.[9] The masks in classical tragedy were made by a 'skeuopoios, a "maker of kit"'.[10] They were painted and, as dictated by tradition, beautiful, as opposed to the grotesque caricatures common to comedies of the era.[11] Their neutral expressionless image was thought to be influenced by classical sculpture and contemporary art of the period.[12] The ancient mask was a key tool in the development of character in classical theatre, being a central element in the transformation of epic and lyric poetry - delivered orally by the poet - into the written form of ancient tragedy, performed by actors and a chorus.[13] In this new theatrical creation, the masking of actors allowed the audience to have a new relationship with their mythic heroes, witnessing them engaged directly in the narrative action of the play.[14] Practically, masks enabled actors to play multiple roles within a tragedy, each mask representing a separate character, except for the chorus whose masks would be uniform.[15]

Wiles also helps us comprehend the relationship between masking and understandings of identity. He devotes a whole chapter to 'Mask and Self', detailing a cross-cultural historical semantic journey of mask and face in relation to self. He explains that the term 'prosōpon', in the time of Sophocles and Euripides meant 'face', and that it is 'derived from the preposition *pros* ("before") joined to *ōps*, a noun related to words for seeing and the eye. "Before the

[6] Vervain and Wiles, p. 256.
[7] Hall 2010, pp. 55-56.
[8] Wiles 2011, p. 15; Chris Vervain, 'Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek Tragedy', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 28, iss. 2 (2012), 163-181 (pp. 164-65). Hereafter referred to as Vervain 2012.
[9] Vervain and Wiles, p. 255; Vervain 2012, p. 164.
[10] Vervain and Wiles, p. 255.
[11] Hall 2010, pp. 51, 55.
[12] Chris Vervain, 'Performing Ancient Drama in Mask: the Case of Greek New Comedy', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 20, iss. 3 (2004), 245-264 (p. 248). Hereafter referred to as Vervain 2004; Vervain 2012 pp. 164-65; Hall 2010, p. 55; Wiles 2011, p 71.
[13] Green, pp. 16-17; Jennifer Wise, *Dionysus Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), pp. 61-62.
[14] Green, pp. 16-17; Wiles 2011, p. 237.
[15] Goldhill, p. 46.

gaze…" yet the gaze in question might equally belong to […] the seer […] or the seen.'[16] He points out that in classical times the meaning of *I am* would be interchangeable with *who I am seen to be*. His etymological examination reveals a clear connection between mask, face and eyes and a shift in interpretation of the mask representing an act of being, to one which suggests performance and or concealment of self. He credits French anthropologist Marcel Mauss with laying the foundation for modernist enquiry into notions of selfhood. Mauss, claims Wiles, charts a cultural evolutionary path of self, drawing theatrical connections with mask through the term 'personage', translated as '"role"' or '"character"'.[17] In a separate yet interconnected article, Wiles explains this in relation to the monotheistic nature of western religion, noting that those coming from a culture steeped in Christianity are often uncomfortable with the idea that personality has multiple aspects, instead preferring a singular interpretation. He argues that an all seeing all knowing God does not welcome disguises, noting that Western and Islamic cultures are unusual in their interpretation of the mask as means to conceal and not reveal or transform.[18]

The eyes are a recurring theme in Wiles' understanding and interpretation of the self and character in relation to the mask. He cites the importance Cicero places upon the eyes: 'for each action proceeds from the soul, and the face is an *imago* of the soul, the eyes its *indices*.'[19] He makes connections with Descartes' influence on the Enlightenment period, describing how his now discredited 1640s theory of the Cartesian gland – said to be found behind the eyes – had influence on the polar ideas of feeling and reason, and ultimately shaped thinking that emotions can be read through the face.[20] Given that we now live in an age which concerns itself with the self and psychology, Wiles' thinking helps explain the limited use for and of the mask in modern western theatre, with audiences preferring instead to clearly see the actor's eyes and face in order to read their interpretation and presentation of character.[21]

The tensions arising from the presentation of the female character is central to Rachel Cusk's contemporary reinterpretation of *Medea*, in which the near perfection and beauty of the ancient mask is tangible.[22] The desire to be beautiful is an assumed aspiration for all

[16] Wiles 2011, p. 1.
[17] Wiles 2011, pp. 261-62.
[18] David Wiles, 'The Use of Masks in Modern Performances of Greek Drama', in *Dionysus Since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, ed. by Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh and Amanda Wrigley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 245-63 (pp. 245-46). Hereafter referred to as Wiles *Dionysus*.
[19] Cicero quoted by Wiles, see Wiles 2011, p. 263.
[20] Wiles *Dionysus*, p. 246.
[21] Wiles 2011, pp. 261-66; Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Expressions* (Los Altos: Malor Books, 2003), pp. 3-5; Gaertner, p. 997.
[22] Hall 2010, p. 55.

women, a view held by both male and female characters in the play. The play reflects the pressures on and expectations of twenty-first century women.[23] In the opening scene Nurse – Medea's mother – is acutely aware of her daughter's behaviour and appearance, all freely judged by the outside world. She warns Medea that crying causes a woman to age, something clearly undesirable and advises: 'You ought to tidy yourself up, put some make-up on and pull yourself together for their sake (Cusk, pp. 7-9). Medea's mother is literally telling her to put on a mask and perform for the sake of her sons, advice echoed in another mother-daughter relationship, as the cleaner's mother admonishes her daughter, 'at least you can pretend!' (Cusk, p. 21). This intergenerational legacy is a prominent theme in both Cusk's and Stephen's retellings. Cusk draws out the pressures placed on young women by their parents to be beautiful and act in a desirable way. Just as Medea is shaped by her parents, Jason's new wife is shaped by her father Creon. When Creon visits Medea, he projects his expectations of women onto Medea. Creon judges the females in life by their beauty or lack of it. As with Nurse, there is a strong association in this scene between fading beauty and ageing. Creon refers to Medea's age negatively five times, not to mention his disparaging comments about her appearance, as he connects it to that of his ex-wife. He is presumably venting his anger and frustration at his own failed marriage and former wife through Medea: 'Divorce is very ageing […] Women tend to lose weight – they get all excited by that, but it's far too late. They're mistaking death for youth' (Cusk, p. 35). Focusing on Medea's face he comments about the lines around her mouth. In scrutinising Medea's face, Creon believes he gains insight into Medea's inner self: 'Have you seen your face? It's so… severe. Anger is so ugly in a woman' (Cusk, p. 37). The inference here is that it is acceptable for men to be angry, but not for women. Creon clearly judges women by their beauty and neutrality. He even goes so far as to suggest that Medea has a hysterectomy to neutralise her anger (Cusk, p. 38).
But Cusk's Medea will not be silenced by men or women, and she expresses the unspoken truth of being a woman wife and mother:

> A bad thing has happened to me.
> You're scared that if I name it, it might happen to you too.
> […] pain is reality; it can't be denied,
> unless you deform yourself hiding it.
>
> (Cusk, pp. 18-19)

Although it is debatable whether the women who function as a chorus of mothers at the school gate can hear her speech, Medea's disdain for them is clearly felt by the way they

[23] Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women* (London: Vintage Press, 1991), pp. 9-11.

ostracise her from their coterie. Not only does Cusk's Medea voice the reality and pain of her experience, she embodies it, as commented by Woman 5: 'she's gone very Belsen' (Cusk, p. 16). Again, the link between emotion and appearance is clear. Creon and the chorus note the physical change in Medea, but blame her for this manifestation of perceived ugliness. It is ironic therefore that chorus Woman 4 is obsessed with dieting in Scene 3 (Cusk, pp. 10-11, p. 13). She also expresses vulnerability in Scene 13 when she is sensitive to the fact that Woman 3's husband is in Paris admiring the looks of other women (Cusk, pp. 73-74, 78-79). Medea too is threatened by the beauty of others, in particular Jason's new wife. In the messenger speech, which recounts Medea's scripted reprisal on the recently married couple, the new wife's beauty is repeatedly mentioned. In the ultimate revenge narrative imagined by Medea, her retribution is exacted by ruining the looks of Jason's wife, not by killing her:

> a stranger threw acid in her face.
> Her skin was burned entirely away:
> That witless villain, beauty, died that day.
>
> (Cusk, p. 95)

The death of beauty is a recurring motif in Cusk's *Medea*, and is closely linked to the symbolic representation of ruined perfection. Towards the end of the play Medea talks about a snow globe she was given by her father:

> I couldn't tolerate its sealed perfection.
> It hurt me to love it, when I was outside of it.
> I wanted to get inside.
> So I smashed the glass barrier.
>
> (Cusk, pp. 87-88)

This is clearly a metaphor for other broken things in Medea's life: her marriage, her children, herself. Given this, it is appropriate that the final act of the play ends with a symbolic image of breaking something beautiful – two silver framed photos of the boys (Cusk, p. 96). This accidental destruction is not caused by Medea but by the Cleaner, another woman who voices unpalatable truths. She is engaged in a domestic chore and distracted by voicing plans to leave the place and live her own life: '*mopping around the couple and the desk* […] *she* […] *knocks it by mistake. The two photographs fall to the floor and smash*' (Cusk, p. 99). The breaking of the perfect beautiful family is symbolised in this final image.

Masking as a mode of concealment for the inner self and perceived truths features prominently in Cusk's adaptation. It is foregrounded in Medea's post-split relationship with Jason through their interactions. Medea believes that Jason's now exposed deceit and infidelity effectually means that their relationship, their 'whole past […] has become a lie'

(Cusk, p. 25). She claims not to know him anymore. The fact that their interactions, in the main, do not take place face to face, most happen over the phone, is perhaps significant in terms of their separation and adds to their unwillingness and inability to read each other's faces and understand each other's emotional state and inner selves (Cusk, pp. 23, 40, 43, 96). There are two scenes (11 and 16) when they are in the same location, a dislocated space, described as both as 'barren' and 'boulder landscape' (Cusk, pp. 59, 85). These settings metaphorically represent their isolation while work and domestic life continue. In Scene 11 Medea works at her computer and is interrupted by Jason (Cusk, pp. 60-63). Stage directions state that she does not look at him for a large section of the scene, '*still typing, not looking up*' (Cusk, p. 60), as they discuss the children, building to an argument about their own inadequacies. It is only when their differing views towards honesty and truth arise that she looks up:

> MEDEA I wanted honesty.
>
> JASON Your honesty made me a fucking exile.
>
> MEDEA Our life was –
>
> JASON Our life was –
>
> MEDEA about truth.
>
> JASON an ordeal.
>
> *Medea stops typing and looks at him.*
>
> (Cusk, pp. 62-63)

Now that Medea is looking at him they start to hear what each other is saying. Their exchange becomes more of a conversation and further uncomfortable truths are revealed: Jason's ambivalent feelings towards having children, something he claims most men feel but don't voice (Cusk, pp. 70-71). When Jason starts to remove his mask – the acceptable face of fatherhood – his inner self is rejected by Medea and the argument escalates until eventually 'they stare at each other' (Cusk, p. 71). Cusk's stage directions, when read against the residual influence of Cartesian theory and that of Cicero, suggesting the eyes reflect the soul, makes this a significant moment, as Medea and Jason are staring at each other's face, both of their masks starting to slip and reveal inner selves. In the end, they choose to walk away in separate directions (Cusk, p. 72).

The theme of masking her inner self extends to masking of truth and is evident in all Medea's relationships, in the scenes with Cleaner, Nurse, Tutor, Aegeus, Creon, her sons and

particularly those with Jason. The cleaner seems to sum up the accepted face of women in society, again quoting her own mother 'if you ain't a good liar, you got no business being a woman!' (Cusk, p. 22). Given this comment, it seems fitting that Cusk's Medea is writer, a profession in which people are often paid to invent lies, adding to the complexity of both play and protagonist, as Medea prides herself in telling the truth. She even voices what Creon hints at in his description of writers, when she says, 'You mean a liar' (Cusk, p. 35). Creon later acknowledges her reputation for '"telling it like it is"' (Cusk, p. 39), though he evidently disparages this quality, claiming instead to prefer manipulation through imagination. It seems appropriate that his future son in law, Jason, is an actor by trade, someone who wears disguises for a living. According to Medea, Jason's acting skills also extend to the real world, as she claims that he played the upset father in the divorce hearing, arousing sympathy from the judge, even though he was the one making the children homeless (Cusk, p. 53). When dealing the children, Medea tries to be truthful with them when they discuss moving house:

> B1 But I don't want to live in a smaller house. Why can't Dad come Back and live here?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> MEDEA Because of me. Dad doesn't want to live with me any more.
>
> (Cusk, p. 32)

This exchange does contain a level of concealment, the pause indicating her uncertainty about how to respond to the children. Cusk suggests that Medea decides to fudge the issue, sacrificing herself for the children's sake rather than apportioning blame to Jason. In a subsequent scene, Medea does lie to the children about the row she has just had with their father on the phone, saying that she was speaking to a friend (Cusk, p. 49). However, Medea's stark honesty is evidenced in Scene 19, when she tells her son, Boy 2, that she is going away and not coming back (Cusk, p. 90). This news is prefigured by long pause that indicates an acknowledgement of the level of difficulty and importance of what she is about to tell him. Ultimately, Cusk indicates that in a world where women are expected to protect children from the harsh realities of life, Medea chooses to tell the truth (Cusk, p. 18).

Cusk's Medea is troubled by the mask others wish her to adopt, that of selfless, caring wife and mother. Erving Goffman's analogy of theatrical performance as a way to interpret social interactions can help to further explain her situation. Goffman argues that a projected character is not wholly shaped by the individual performer but influenced by the context of their performance, as he outlines in the following quotation:

> In our society the character one performs and one's self are somewhat equated […] self-as-character is usually seen as […] the psychobiology of personality […] I suggest that this view is […] a bad analysis of the presentation […] self itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his [or her] action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses.[24]

Goffman places an emphasis on the role onlookers and, indeed, society, plays in the performance and interpretation of character. In Cusk's *Medea* Jason has played his role in creating the situation they are now in. Medea rejects Jason and society's expectations by withdrawing from her sons' lives and has therefore afforded her individual inner self primacy in the tripartite relationship of identity, described by Gaertner.[25] But, when Jason telephones from the hospital with the news that their sons have killed the dog and overdosed on painkillers, we witness Medea yet again struggling with a forced mask, in part shaped by Jason and societal expectations. With the creeping realisation that her children might be dead, Medea becomes silent. This prompts a series of questions from Jason which remain unanswered:

> Do you even care if they're alive?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Do you?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Do you? Jesus, do you? Don't you want to know?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Don't you?
>
> *Pause*
>
> Don't you fucking want to know?

(Cusk, p. 98)

Given that Medea has vocalised her thoughts and feelings to Jason throughout the play, her silence with him is significant. It could be that she is in shock at the news, but the repetition of Jason's questions and her silence suggest that she is expressionless and emotionless.

[24] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 244. Hereafter referred to as Goffman.
[25] Gaertner, p. 997-98.

Medea's inner self is not expressed through words but in her unreadable face, perhaps a nod to the neutral expressionless tragic mask from two and half thousand years ago.[26] Cusk reinterprets Euripides' ultimate taboo of a mother killing her children to suit the twenty-first century middle-class setting where a mother's ambivalence towards her children is, it seems, a greater transgression to a contemporary audience than matricide.[27]

Simon Stephen's *Blindsided* is set in Stockport and the Isle of Man. The play comprises two acts or '*parts*' (Stephens, p. 2) which are set nearly twenty years apart. In her introduction to the play Jacqueline Bolton makes the link with Euripides' *Medea* as a political tragedy and the political context of *Blindsided*.[28] Both parts take place during the period leading up to two significant British elections that saw newly elected Prime Ministers and political parties: Part One in May 1979 – Margaret Thatcher for the Conservative Party; and Part Two, May 1997 – Tony Blair for New Labour. By using doubled casting of actors for related characters (a mother and a father play their own children as adults), Stephens sets up his play adeptly to explore ideas of legacy and fate through an intergenerational prism that focuses not just on individuals but on wider society.

As in Cusk's *Medea*, the face and particularly the eyes form a central motif in *Blindsided*, as a means to explore the inner self of individuals in relation to others. In twenty-first century Western drama where the actor's face is, in the main, unmasked and 'modern psychological expectations' weigh heavy on playwright and actor, it is understandable that Cusk and Stephens focus on the eyes and face to explore character.[29] Cathy reveals her attraction to and fascination with John through scrutiny of his appearance, being very attentive to the detail of John's physicality generally, admiring his 'lovely cock' and his 'incredible skin' (Stephens, p. 11), but she repeatedly comments about and studies his face and head.

She examines his face.

CATHY I like your left ear.

JOHN What?

CATHY Is that a bit random?

Your right one's okay. Your left one's flipping brilliant.

[26] References to the neutrality of the ancient mask can be found in Vervain 2012, pp. 164-65; Wiles 2011, p. 67.
[27] Cusk *Telegraph* (paras. 10-11 of 14).
[28] Jacqueline Bolton, 'Introduction', in Stephens, *Blindsided* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), paras. 8-9 of 10. Hereafter referred to as Bolton.
[29] Goldhill, p. 81; John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 130-32.

She smiles.

(Stephens, p. 11)

When John first meets Susan he remarks that Cathy and Susan both have 'startling eyes' (Stephens, p. 17).[30] He then goes on to compliment Susan's hair, quickly realising that he has overstepped the mark. Stephens leaves room for a variety of interpretations here. These compliments could be attributed to John's nervousness at the situation, or they could be read as an attempt to manipulate Susan into liking him. John's observation also reminds the audience of an intergenerational physical connection between mother and daughter, highlighting the legacy that one generation passes on to another, a major theme of the play and an echo of the preoccupation of fifth-century tragedians with fate and family.[31] Siobhan also uses compliments about physical features when she draws attention to baby Ruthy's pretty, little eyes. The stage direction following this remark indicates '*some time*' (Stephens, p. 23), suggesting that Siobhan is genuinely drawn to the baby's eyes. She then goes on to ask Cathy when she had her hair cut. Putting Siobhan on the spot, Cathy asks her if she likes it. Siobhan tries to divert the question with 'It looks very different' (Stephens, p. 23), but Cathy asks the question again, forcing Siobhan to answer. She does so with a compliment: 'I love it. It shows your eyes up' (Stephens, p. 23). Shortly after, Siobhan remarks on the attractiveness of John's face, an honest comment that Cathy finds inappropriate (Stephens, p. 24). When Cathy recognises that the attraction is reciprocated, the evidence, she claims is in John's eyes:

CATHY Why are you looking at her like that?

JOHN Like what?

CATHY Don't say like what it just makes it worse.

JOHN I honestly don't know what you're going on about.

CATHY I don't blame him Shiv you're beautiful. He's eating you up with his eyes.

(Stephens, p. 26)

[30] John reiterates the similarity of their eyes, see Stephens, p. 22.

[31] Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 138-39; Hall 2010, pp. 3-4; M. K. Martinovich, 'The Mythical and the Macabre: The Study of Greeks and Ghosts in the Shaping of the American Premier of *By the Bog of Cats*…', in *The Theatre of Marina Carr "Before Rules Was Made"*, ed. by Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003), pp. 114-127 (p. 115). Hereafter referred to as Martinovich.

Cathy's interpretation of John's attraction to Siobhan expressed through his eyes seems verified when he visits Siobhan's flat in Scene 6 and, it is suggested, has sex with her – a fact he later confirms (Stephens, pp. 39, 75).

Goffman's analysis of social interactions from the perspective of theatrical performance can assist with the reading of character and notions of masking in *Blindsided.* Goffman believes that when 'an individual plays a part he [or she] implicitly requests his [or her] observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them.'[32] Stephens uses the unsettling technique of John appearing to say exactly what he is thinking, rather than what it is socially acceptable to impart. John's directness makes the other characters re-evaluate whether he is telling the truth, for example in this extract when he talks about burglary:

> CATHY […] Were you really scouting our house to try to break into it?
>
> JOHN Yes. I was. I'm sorry.
>
> CATHY Have you ever really broken into somebody's house?
>
> JOHN Yes.
>
> CATHY Have you?
>
> JOHN Yes.
>
> CATHY I think you're completely lying.
>
> (Stephens, p. 9)

When John is introduced to Cathy's friends Isaac and Siobhan his lack of social filter reveals information that contradicts Cathy's version of events. John tells Isaac that he's only known Cathy three days, so is surprised at her overfamiliarity and that she considers him a boyfriend. He then goes on to goad Isaac by informing him that they had a 'bit of a fuck' (Stephens, p. 16) in his bed. Stephens increases the tension when John threatens Isaac with violence because he intends to call the police. It is not just the content of John's words that is shocking, but the casual way in which they are delivered (Stephens, p. 16). With Cathy, however, her persona expresses a certain naivety and vulnerability. For instance, when she admits to lying about doing 'A' levels (Stephens, p. 6) she has just exaggerated the number of subjects she is doing. Cathy appears to mimic what she perceives to be John's deceitful and deviant behaviour; she wants to seem edgier than she actually is. The fact that she is sucking her thumb during this conversation, something John points out and that she denies, could be read as deliberate contrariness or a simple lack of awareness of her own childlike actions, an

[32] Goffman, p. 28.

'expression […] given off' as Goffman would categorise this involuntary non-verbal communication.[33] Cathy's mother, Susan, is obviously unimpressed when she first meets her daughter's new boyfriend, John, despite his compliments, and she clearly conveys her thoughts to Cathy. Goffman would classify Susan's words as 'expressions given', as they leave no room for ambiguity:[34]

> SUSAN He's really odd. He's really unpleasant. I don't like him one bit.
>
> CATHY Don't say that.
>
> SUSAN You could do a lot better.
>
> (Stephens, p. 20)

As truthfulness goes, this is nothing in comparison to the unspeakable truth that Cathy tells Susan later in the play. After swearing Susan to secrecy, Cathy reveals what she has done to her daughter:

> CATHY I killed her.
>
> I killed Ruthy.
>
> I smothered her with a pillow when she was asleep. Is that awful?
>
> (Stephens, p. 80)

This truth is so abhorrent that that Stephens shows Susan doubt what Cathy is saying for quite some time, not wanting to accept her words and what they reveal about her daughter's personality, her inner self (Stephens, pp. 80-81). Cathy's behaviour in this scene is reminiscent of the casual way in which John threatens violence, but significantly it also chimes with the emotionless reaction of Cusk's Medea to the news that her children have been rushed to hospital. This neutrality is perhaps an influence of the ancient Greek mask.

The ancient tragic mask as a physical object that enabled actors to play multiple characters is removed in *Blindsided*, yet Stephens deliberately specifies in the text doubled-up casting for the characters of John and Harry Connolly (father and son) and Susan and the Cathy Heyer (mother and daughter) in Part Two of the play. The metatheatrical effect of parents playing their grown up children is profound in terms of this story, which explores a shocking act of violence and its consequences, as well as the refusal to be bound by repeated patterns suggest that renewal and hope is possible. This double casting device also has a deep

[33] Goffman, p. 16.
[34] Goffman, p. 16.

resonance with themes common in Greek tragedy – fate, legacy, intergenerational destruction of families.[35] In part two, the older Cathy echoes these themes when telling Harry 'I think the reason you don't go to sixth form is because of your dad. You think he's graced you with the legacy of not being good enough. It's not true. You are' (Stephens, p. 101). Cathy does not openly acknowledge the damaging role she has played in shaping Harry's destiny, but chooses to focus on the future and emphasise the positive: his could be a brighter future. The possibility of personal and social change is a dominant theme in *Blindsided*, effected by the double casting device. The scenes between the Older Cathy and Harry echo those between younger Cathy and Harry's father, John, in Part One. It is reminder that the new, post-prison, Cathy is still the same woman who, as a teenager, fell in love with John Connolly and murdered her own child. By not having an actor's face physically transfigured by a mask, the focus becomes on the transfigurement of character, a recognition that 'change and renewal' is possible in both individual and collective identity.[36] In her introduction to the play, Bolton highlights the metatheatrical effect that witnessing the actor 'uncoupled' from character has on gaining a greater understanding of the play as a whole, suggesting that it reflects Stephens' interest in the fluidity of identity within individuals and society across different generations: 'what it meant to be seventeen or thirty-seven in 1979 was very different prospect from being seventeen or thirty-seven in 1997 and now, in 2014, it is different again.'[37] The possibility of personal and societal change is something that was limited in plays of ancient tragedy, perhaps best expressed by the physically unchanging features of the masks and the philosophical preoccupation of tragedians with the influence of the Gods and unerring fate.[38] However, for an audience today change and transformation may seem possible. This is evident in two similar scenes featuring the younger and older Cathy:

> CATHY […] Bite me.
>
> JOHN What?
>
> CATHY Bite my cheek.
>
> *He does. She puts him inside her. They fuck. She comes.*
>
> *She hits him repeatedly for making her come.*
>
> (Stephens, p. 11)

[35] See Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, trans. by Christopher Collard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[36] Bolton, para. 9 of 10.
[37] Bolton, para. 10 of 10.
[38] Aeschylus, p. xxx.

Younger Cathy's request for John to bite her cheek is echoed in the final scene with Harry, but this time the reference exhibits a change in character for Cathy and the difference between Harry and John, his father:

> CATHY […] I'm sorry.
>
> Can I ask one thing?
>
> HARRY What?
>
> CATHY Can you touch my face?
>
> HARRY No.
>
> *He looks away from her.*
>
> *A long time.*
>
> *He looks at her.*
>
> *He reaches over and very gently touches her face*.
>
> (Stephens, p. 103)

Cathy's request for Harry to touch her is a lot gentler than that of the more demanding teenager expressed in Scene 2. When speaking to Harry she asks his permission and does not tell him. Also, the act that she wants is now a touch rather than a bite, indicating a softer side to her now reformed character. Stephens leaves the audience with a last image of Cathy and Harry looking out over the horizon, a picture conveying hope. It suggests that they not only have a past that has shaped them, but also a future.

In summary, the varied manifestations and definitions of mask provide a means with which to interpret its absence, legacy and reconfiguration in contemporary adaptions of Greek tragedy. Historically, the evolution of the ancient mask in fifth-century Athens contributed to the development of a new theatrical form, one which allowed tragedians to explore storytelling in a new way by having actors centre stage playing characters actively engaged in their own narrative: actors assumed a mask to hide their own face and perform another character. Given a broader historical and cultural reading, the prosōpon - mask or face - becomes a means of reading a person's inner self. And, once we consider the contemporary preoccupation with self, it may seem no surprise that physical masks are absent from many modern reinterpretations of Greek tragedy; character is no longer determined by the wearing

of the mask but by its removal.[39] Seeing the actors' faces, therefore, adds another dimension to present day tragedy, allowing the playwright and audience to further explore and experience mythic characters and ancient tragic themes – fate, revenge, intergenerational destruction of families – with new resonance. In Cusk's *Medea* we find an articulate protagonist negotiating age-old sex-specific injustices with modern rhetoric and individual agency. The dual conflict within the interpretation of mask – a mode of concealment and revelation – seems to permeate Cusk's text and heroine. This twenty-first century Medea is conflicted: she both projects and rejects notions of motherhood, beauty and perfection shaped by society. It is only when she removes herself from the orbit of her domestic life and interpersonal relationships that she appears to realise her individual inner self. This is also true with Cathy in *Blindsided,* although her removal from her own world is effected by an extreme act of violence. In choosing to tell Cathy's story over nearly twenty years, Stephens not only allows us to consider his 'Medea's' individual self, her rehabilitation and renewal, but gives the audience an opportunity to reflect, as Williams suggests, on 'the mutability of the world' through tragic action.[40] This consideration is heightened because the playwright intentionally specifies doubled casting. By 'uncoupling' the actor from their roles, the device both distances and connects audience to and from character and era, forcing viewers to reconsider issues relating to repeated patterns of behaviour – are they decreed by fate or is a person or society able to change?[41] Ultimately, in adapting classical narrative and tradition, by removing the mask yet specifying multiple roles, Stephens revitalises ancient tragic themes for a twenty-first century audience. Whatever the playwrights' intention in adapting these ancient texts, it is clear that the legacy of ancient mask lives on in these non-masked reinterpretations of *Medea.* The physical mask may be removed, but its influence remains in the non-physical mask.

[39] Notable exceptions to this in in the UK include Peter Hall's productions of Greek tragedy, particularly Tony Harrison's translation of *Oresteia* for the National Theatre, which attempted to re-establish the traditions of ancient theatre with an all-male cast and ancient masks, see Vervain 2012, p. 163; APGRD, *Oresteia (1981-1982)* (2018) <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/productions/production/577> [accessed 23 January 2018]
[40] Williams, p. 114.
[41] Bolton highlights 'uncoupling' of actor and character, see Bolton, para. 10 of 10.

Chapter 3. Messenger Speech

On stage, you either act out what is happening or report what has happened
- Horace[1]

This chapter will explore how violence and death is represented in contemporary adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* by Mike Bartlett, Marina Carr, Rachel Cusk and Simon Stephens. Through the lens of the ancient messenger speech, I will analyse how playwrights chose to dramatize or report death for a twenty-first century audience. This analysis will draw upon the work of Fiona Macintosh's monograph *Dying Acts: Death in Ancient Greek and Modern Irish Tragic Drama* and on James Barrett's *Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy*, as well as the narratological theory of Irene J. F. De Jong in order to shape a critical response to these contemporary adaptations.[2]

Horace's statement at the head of this chapter goes some way to answer the question: how are violence and death represented on the stage in these plays? In ancient Greek tragedy violence and death were usually, though not exclusively, reported by a messenger in a speech - a highly prized form held in huge esteem by the Athenian audience who greatly valued the spoken word. Barrett, in his study *Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy*, attributes the success and longevity of messenger speech to its genesis in the revered Homeric epic, itself associated with the divine inspiration of the Muse.[3] The influence of epic poetry, he explains, affords the messenger speech great authority and privileged status within narrative tradition.[4] Barrett is particularly interested in narrative techniques used within the speech and what these reveal about the messenger in relation to their spoken words, as opposed to other dramatic characters within the play. Barrett believes that messengers have a 'tendency within [their] narrative toward[s] self-effacement, which appears as virtual disembodiment.'[5] This disembodiment proves valuable in effecting a detachment between the speaker and speech, placing focus on the words. Drawing upon metatheatrical theory Barrett

[1] For Horace quotation, see Rebecca Lämmle and Cédric Scheidegger Lämmle, 'Homer on Kithairon: Dramatic and Narrative Representation in The Bacchae', *The Classical Journal*, vol. 108, no. 2 (December 2012 – January 2013), 129-58 (p. 129).
[2] James Barrett, *Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (London: University of California Press, 2002), hereafter referred to as Barrett; Irene J.F. De Jong, *Narrative in Drama: The Art of the Euripidean Messenger-Speech* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), hereafter referred to as De Jong; for Macintosh, see footnote 37.
[3] Barrett, pp. xvi-xvii.
[4] Simon R. Perris defines the messenger speech more simply when he refers to it as '"report-narrative"[…] : a narrative of events in the past, providing new information about changed offstage affairs, delivered to onstage addressees by someone with a superior claim to genuine knowledge of this information'. Simon R. Perris, '"What maketh the messenger? Reportage in Greek tragedy"' *ASCS 32 Proceedings* (2011), p 2. <http://ascs.org.au/news/ascs32/Perris.pdf> [accessed 1 February 2018]
[5] Barrett, p. xvii.

investigates this idea of detachment within *Bacchae*. He responded to the view of Richard Buxton who argued that messengers were inside the drama, instead believing that *Bacchae* produces 'messengers substantially "outside" the drama – virtual "spectators-in-the-text" – and in so doing expands our notion of what is possible on the tragic stage'.[6] Considering ideas of spectatorship both inside and outside the drama is particularly relevant in the analysis of modern technology used to convey violence and death in these contemporary adaptations.

De Jong's forensic narratological examination of Euripidean messenger speeches covers three main areas: form, style and function.[7] She focuses on three specific subjects: messenger speech as first person narrative, how narrator is restricted by place, access and understanding; style of presentation, to what extent is narrative objective or subjective; and narrative in drama, telling versus showing. She states that the Euripidean messenger speech is a first-person narrative, in that messengers are characters who play a role in their own narrative, and are not omniscient.[8] They are eyewitness narrators to events and are never the protagonist.[9] According to narratology, De Jong notes that the knowledge of messengers can be restricted by place, access and understanding. De Jong uses the terms 'experiencing focalization' and 'narrating focalisation' to differentiate between narrator recounting events as they happened in the now (experiencing) and with the experience of hindsight (narrating).[10] With the messenger recounting events as he or she saw them without reference to 'ex eventu knowledge' it gives the audience a dual perspective, one in which they experience the same emotional journey as the messenger at the time they experienced the events.[11] This, she says, allows Euripides to explore the changeability of life and unforeseen reversals that it presents.[12] She cites the reportage of the wedding scene in *Medea* when the princess looks at herself in the mirror before the tragic event and sees her '"lifeless image"' to illustrate how Euripidean messengers make use of 'implicit anticipations […] gently preparing their audience for things to come.'[13] This hint at premonition, a moment of literal and metaphorical reflection, asks epistemic questions of characters within the narrative, in this case the princess, the messenger, and more broadly that of the audience, but it also raises broader

[6] Barrett, p. 103.
[7] Elizabeth M. Craik, 'Narrative in Drama: The Art of the Euripidean Messenger-Speech', *The Classical Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (1992), 431-32 (p.431).
[8] De Jong, p. 1.
[9] De Jong, p. 60.
[10] De Jong, p. 1.
[11] For quotation see De Jong, p. 38; Barrett states that there are only two examples of female messengers in extant tragedy 'Nurse in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and the servant in Euripides' *Alcestis*', see Barrett, p. xvii, footnote 2.
[12] De Jong, p. 38.
[13] De Jong, p. 61; In the Euripides' version translated by James Morwood, he uses the phrase 'lifeless picture of her body', Euripides, p. 31.

thematic questions about personal destiny and the agency of individuals in relation to violence and death.

It is often claimed that dramatized death rarely existed on the classical stage. Macintosh investigates the veracity of this and the reasons often given – staging practicalities, religious sensibilities, audience squeamishness – and finds them wanting because there are examples of staged deaths in *Alcestis* and *Hippolytus* and many 'gory spectacles' in ancient tragedy.[14] Significantly, she highlights that the point of death is rarely dramatized or even reported onstage. She attributes this scarcity to the fact that the ancient Athenians viewed death as a process not a finite moment, which therefore warranted little interest.[15] The exception to this is in particularly violent deaths, which often shine a light on the actions and morality of the perpetrator rather than the passing of the victim.[16] Macintosh develops the connection made by previous scholars that tragic characters are already dead before they die because of an awareness of their fate, so they are dually '"absent and present"', occupying a similar position to that of the deities in tragedy.[17] She explains that tragic dying characters are not just close to death but 'participat[e] in the process of dying […] "dying into death"'.[18] She notes that not only are they engaged in this process, but they often play a peripheral role in the drama thereby drawing attention to the wider community's involvement in the process of this death. She cites *Agamemnon* as a prime example of this, explaining that the eponymous character is ignorant of his own dying into death and therefore plays a relatively minor role in his own story, thereby highlighting the involvement of other characters, particularly Cassandra with her awareness of death as a seer. Macintosh illustrates the broader impact of the absence and presence within *Agamemnon* when she states:

> the play does not only show absence and presence in the world at one and the same time through the minor characters' severance from the process of living, it also shows this most powerfully in its creation of a lugubrious atmosphere suggestive of a borderland somewhere between the lands of the living and the dead.[19]

The idea of characters existing in a liminal space between life and death is particularly evident in the modern Irish tragedies that Macintosh studies. She draws parallels between tragic existences in *Agamemnon* and *Juno and the Paycock*, claiming their dying characters have 'a

[14] Macintosh, p. 128.
[15] Macintosh, p. 127.
[16] Macintosh, pp. 127, 135.
[17] Macintosh quotes Lucien Goldmann's study of Pascal and Racine, in which he notes that tragic characters are 'absent and present in the world at one and the same time, exactly as God is simultaneously absent and present to man'. See Macintosh, pp. 78-79.
[18] Macintosh, p. 79.
[19] Macintosh, p. 85.

supra-human status as spectres in the land of the living'.[20] This spectral motif and mournful hinterland is particularly evident in another Irish tragedy, Carr's *By the Bog of Cats…*, a play which both reports and dramatizes violence.

The decision to show or tell can be a concern for today's writers whose audience is generally more familiar with the visual medium of television and film rather than an oral storytelling or theatrical tradition.[21] Critic Aleks Sierz, when analysing staged violence in his study of drama in the 1990's *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, quotes writer Irvine Welsh, whose work spans films, plays and novels noted for their violent content. Welsh asserts the menace of violence is more powerful because of the power of suggestion:

> Most of the violence in this play [*You'll Have Had Your Hole*] doesn't really happen. It's psychological. The threat of violence is so much more powerful than actual violence.[22]

Surprisingly, given the content of violence in his work, Welsh acknowledges that writers can create greater tension within the audience using threatened violence rather than by simply showing it. Playwrights can choose whether to convey threats of violence through words, actions, or a combination of both. With portending violence the power intensifies as the audience member is a more active participant in the production, engaging in creative process imaginatively. The actual act of violence may never happen, onstage or off, but the power lies in its simultaneous absence and presence, existing in a theatrical space on the axis of where playwright, audience and production team meet.

Carr uses reported, dramatized and threatened violence in *By the Bog of Cats….* Dramatized violence is confined to the third and final act of the play and comprises Medea's destruction of Carthage's property, Medea's murder of her daughter and her own suicide. However, if analysing death as a process, it is ever present in this adaptation, represented not only in Carr's protagonist, Hester, but through peripheral characters such as the Ghost Fancier and Joseph Swane, who serve as constant reminders of Hester's proximity to death, her misdeeds and her ultimate fate. Unlike Euripides' protagonist, Carr's Medea does not orchestrate the deaths of her husband's new wife and father-in-law at the wedding. As such, there is no messenger or speech to report the deaths. However, there is a description of Hester's brutal violent act in her monologue at the beginning of Act 3, which tells of the destruction of Xavier's house and farm, a property that was once Hester's and is soon to

[20] Macintosh, p. 90.
[21] For research into the adolescent consumption of media violence, see Kirsh, pp. 68-90
[22] Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014), p. 207.

belong to Jason and his new wife, Caroline. The full horror of this scene is depicted verbally and visually in this extract:

> *Dusk. Hester, in her wedding dress, charred and muddied. Behind her, the house and sheds ablaze. Joseph Swane stands in the flames watching her.*
>
> HESTER Well, Carthage, ya think them were only idle threats I made? […]
> Them's your cattle howlin'. Ya smell that smell? That's your forty calves roastin'. I tied them all in and flung diesel on them. And the house, I burnt the bed and whole place went up in flames. I'd burn down the whole world if I'd enough diesel – Will somewan not come and save me from meself before I go and do worse.
>
> (Carr, p. 317)

This is a departure from De Jong's definition of a messenger speech, as Hester is the protagonist in her own narrative and not directly recounting the event to another character.[23] Instead, Hester is talking to herself whilst also addressing an absent character, Carthage, all the while being observed by Joseph, the dead brother she murdered, inhabiting a liminal space where he is both absent from the living and from the dead, lingering over the bog.[24] This opening is a synthesis of dramatized and reported violence, which represents ongoing past, present and future violence. Hester here is not just in close proximity to death, as Macintosh states tragic characters are. She is surrounded by it and aware of her own violent destiny.[25] This resonates with an astute observation made by playwright Frank McGuiness about Carr's characters. He states that they 'die from a fatal excess of self-knowledge. Their truth kills them. And they have always known it would'.[26] His comments also echo the messenger scene in Euripides' *Medea* where it is indicated that the princess sees and imagines her own fate.[27]

The dramatized threat of violence and death is depicted later in the same scene. Here the suicide of Hester can be read as part of a process. She is building herself up to the act:

> *Hester […] comes out with a knife.*
> *She tests it for sharpness, teases it across her throat, shivers.*
>
> [HESTER] Come on, ya done it aisy enough to another, now it's your own turn.

[23] De Jong, p. 60.
[24] Martinovich, pp. 114-15.
[25] Macintosh, p. 79.
[26] Frank McGuinness, 'Masks: An Introduction to *Portia Coughlan* from *The Dazzling Dark'*, in Leeney, *The Theatre of Marina Carr*, pp. 78-79 (p. 79). Hereafter referred to a McGuinness.
[27] Euripides, p. 31.

Bares her throat, ready to do it. Enter Josie running, stops, sees Hester with the knife poised.

JOSIE Mam – What's that ya've got there?

(Carr, p. 337)

In presenting the audience with a violent action that is thwarted by the entrance of a young child, Carr provides a layered perspective on the threat of the horror to come. Initially the audience may fear for Hester's life, but when the child enters they are given a duality of perspective: seeing the scene through Josie's innocent eyes and perhaps fearing for the child who could be at risk from her mother. If the audience sense impending violence, Carr meets their expectations, presenting them with a 'bloody and brutal' dramatic end to the scene, which commences with the murder dramatized in this extract:[28]

HESTER […] Close your eyes.

Josie closes her eyes.

Are they closed tight?

JOSIE Yeah.

Hester cuts Josie's throat in one savage movement.

(softly) Mam – Mam – *(And Josie dies in Hester's arms.)*

HESTER *(whispers)* It's because ya wanted to come, Josie.

Begins to wail, a terrible animal wail.

(Carr, p. 339)

It is significant that before the enacted murder can take place, Hester tells Josie to close her eyes. Following her mother's orders the victim does not witness her own death. With Josie's eyes shut the focus is switched to Hester. So although we see the moment of death, we are focused, as Macintosh suggests we should be, on the perpetrator not the victim.[29] This focus continues when victim and perpetrator become one in the dramatized suicide of Hester, whose

[28] Macintosh, p 127; Clare Wallace, 'Tragic Destiny and Abjection in Marina Carr's *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats…*', *Irish University Review*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2001), 431-49 (p. 436); For 'extreme violence exerted by women […] transformed into an affirmative act', see Eda Dedebas, 'Rewriting of Tragedy and Women's Agency in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*…, *Ariel*, and *Woman and Scarecrow*', *Women's Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2013), 248-70 (p. 263).

[29] Macintosh, p. 127.

death echoes Josie's. Hester asks the Ghost fancier – who can be read, among other things, as her subconscious – to take her away:[30]

> HESTER […] *(She walks towards the Ghost Fancier.)* Take me away, take me away from here.
>
> GHOST FANCIER Alright, my lovely.
>
> *They go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into Hester's heart. She falls to the ground. Exit Ghost Fancier with Knife.*
>
> HESTER (*whispers as she dies*) Mam – Mam –
>
> (Carr, pp. 340-41)

Hester's dying words are the same as Josie's. Dramatically, they situate the deaths within the wider context of her family history, suggesting a legacy of violence that has been handed down through the generations, a chain now broken with Josie and Hester's deaths. Although Hester's mother, Josie, is not the perpetrator of her daughter's death, Hester's last words shine a light on her absent mother whose behaviour has contributed to Hester and young Josie's violent end. This sad scene of family destruction set in the liminal space of the bog evokes Macintosh's observations about a borderland between life and death existing in tragedy, a home for people 'dying into death'.[31] If the ghost fancier is read as emanating from Hester's subconscious then she has some awareness of her own fate, if not of Josie's. However, Carr choses to place this mother's actions centre stage, shining a light on her participation in her own death and that of her daughter.

In his modern retelling of *Medea,* Mike Bartlett dramatizes and reports violence, using domestic appliances and technology as a motif. The presence of violence lingers throughout the play but is first spoken about directly by Medea in relation to her son, Tom, when she comments:

> It's
> that game, he sits in his bed and plays it all
> night, I don't know what it is I can only
> hear the noises, it's all guns and girls I
> think, shooting, violence, but that's what
> boys like isn't it?
>
> (Bartlett, p. 14)

[30] Martinovich, p. 123.
[31] Macintosh, p. 85.

Here virtual violence is depicted through reportage. Tom retreats from the real world to perpetrate violence in a safe space without any apparent consequences. Arguably, this type of sanitised violence can have deadly consequences, and the normalisation of violence in this domestic setting hints at the tragedy yet to come.[32] At the end of Act 1 is a non-verbal dramatic sequence of domestic abuse, which speaks volumes about Medea's mental health and the impact it is having on the relationship with her son, Tom, as represented here:

> *Medea is making dinner, badly. The radio on.*
>
> *Tom sits at the small table, waiting, watching […]*
>
> *Then she chops up carrots carelessly, and throws them into a pot of boiling water.*
>
> *Slowly smoke starts pouring out of her grill. Ignoring it, she takes peas out of the fridges, rips them open, peas go everywhere. She puts them in the boiling water.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *She takes the grill pan out. The fish fingers are charcoal, and smoking […]*
> *she puts two on Tom's plate*
> *and two on hers, then drops the grill on the floor.*
>
> *Goes back to the pan, takes it off the heat, brings it over to the table.*
>
> *Then puts her hand in the boiling water and pulls out carrots and peas and puts them on the plate. Her hand becomes raw with the heat.*
>
> *Tom just watches her.*
>
> (Bartlett, pp. 30-31)

Here dramatic action and elements of the messenger speech mingle. As already established, the messenger speech is a report of events, often violent, delivered to another character, but here we see another person bearing witness to enacted violence. The scene is perhaps more powerful because the observer is a child, the child of the character inflicting casual violence on herself. Tom's presence allows the audience to experience Medea's self-harm through the eyes of her child. The scene contains a visual illustration of Medea's breakdown, which also happens to chime with Barrett's comments about the messenger acting as a spectator in the text. Here the spectator is Tom, but Barrett's observation highlights ideas of spectatorship in the messenger scene and signals new ways of presenting spectatorship within tragedy.

[32] Kirsh, pp. 227-50.

As well as showing violence, Bartlett's Medea 'tell[s] the future' (Bartlett, p. 57). She predicts scenes of violence and murder when talking to Sarah who is drunk. Medea details the possible scenes at Jason's wedding:

> [Jason's] going to […]
> find his bride stuck like a pig in her
> dress going round and round, with the
> guests held at gunpoint forced to eat
> burgers made from her thighs.
>
> No – I'll make her have sex with her father
> while Jason watches […]
>
> I'll kill Tom and send him in pieces to
> the wedding. Individually wrapped.'
>
> (Bartlett, p. 57)

This detailed foretelling of the violence that awaits Jason, Kate, Carter and Tom is embellished, though it does contain enough of the truth to be read as prediction: Kate dies violently in her wedding dress, embraced by her father as Jason watches on, and Medea kills Tom after she chases him with a knife (Bartlett, pp. 76-77, 79, 81). At this stage in the play, if an audience member were not familiar with Euripides' interpretation of the myth, this could easily be read as a morbid fantasy designed to wind up her friends. Whichever way it is viewed one thing is very clear: the threat of violence runs through this version of *Medea*.

Pam's speech in Scene 3 is near to a conventional messenger speech. However, Bartlett adds technology – a mobile phone video – which allows a consideration of Barrett's 'spectator in the text' and modernises the narrative with chilling effect.[33] Unsurprisingly, perhaps, in this twenty-first century adaptation, a servant is replaced by Pam, a friend of Medea and Jason's, as the bearer of tragic news. As in Euripides, the messenger recounts the wedding day horrors to a rapt Medea. In the ancient text Medea receives the news along with the chorus. In Bartlett's Medea we've already established that Pam is among several characters who serve the same function as the ancient chorus.[34] Pam's speech is a first person focalised narrative. She is a character, a guest at the wedding, who observes events and is now recounting them chronologically as she witnessed them. Unlike Euripides, Bartlett does not explicitly prefigure Pam's account with the horrific end result. However, he does indicate that Medea is responsible for something terrible, as Pam enters 'fraught', questioning Medea about her involvement: 'It was you, wasn't it? You always said you could do things […] You

[33] Barrett 'borrows' the term 'spectator in the text' from Nick Browne. See Barrett, p. 102.
[34] See Chapter 1. Chorus, p. 131.

know what happened! What happened was exactly what you planned, the presents' (Bartlett, p. 75). Unlike Euripides' messenger who is certain of Medea's guilt, there is a touch of uncertainty in Pam's accusation of Medea, starting with a question and then the realisation that her worst fears were correct. Pam's reticence is perhaps a result of Medea's earlier outlandish claims that she is a witch; if Pam accepts that Medea is responsible she thereby concedes that Medea has supernatural powers (Bartlett, p. 28). In the initial exchange of dialogue before Pam launches into her monologue, and even when she commences her speech, Pam does not state that Carter and Kate are dead. This information is reserved for the final line in the monologue. It could be argued that the withholding of this information intensifies the element of surprise, delivering a focus on the 'what' and 'who' as well as the 'how', as outlined by De Jong.[35] However, Pam and Sarah, and also the audience, have already heard another of Medea's earlier predictions: 'They're going to die in some way horrible. Both of them. I can feel it' (Bartlett, p. 29). Whilst this foretelling of death refers to Jason and Kate and not Carter, the seed is planted that some awful fate has befallen Medea's ex-husband and his new wife. Despite Pam's knowledge of the violent event she narrates the story as she experienced it at the time, choosing to highlight the detail of the wedding, which with hindsight seems somewhat crass. However, structurally this makes for a stronger dramatic narrative, first building up the perfect wedding and then destroying it with horrific violence. This perhaps gives us an insight into Pam's lack of loyalty, or is a sign of fickleness, as she becomes caught up in the description of the wedding and beauty of the bride, which must be painful for Medea to hear:

> the dress fitted perfectly, tightly to her figure
> and she's got a good figure and I'll tell you
> when she was there at the top of the stairs
> in that moment every woman watching
> thought, 'I give up, I have never looked
> that beautiful, I will never look that
> beautiful,' […]
> we could see, I was close to her and
> we could see she was sweating, and itching.
>
> (Bartlett, p. 76)

Pam use of 'I' and 'we' has the effect of drawing the audience in, as if they too are guests at the wedding. This binary account of joy and violence ends with a description of the point of death delivered to Medea: 'they both stopped moving, not breathing any more, they were both dead' (Bartlett, p. 77). In building to and then describing this moment the audience are able to

[35] De Jong, p. 33.

focus on Medea, the perpetrator of this violent death, as she hears the results of her action, just as Macintosh claims should be the case. This scene further intensifies when Pam plays filmed footage of the wedding on her mobile phone:

> *We hear jazz music, a happy crowd. Then heavy breathing, panic, and then just screaming, coming out of the tiny speakers – Sarah watches.*
>
> […]
>
> *The video finishes.*
>
> [PAM] - you did something to that dress and the tiara and the police are going to get you and you'll be locked away for ever like you should be but I wanted to say that nothing that happened to you justifies that nothing.
>
> *She slaps Medea.*
>
> You're not mad are you?
>
> MEDEA No.
>
> PAM You're not ill, or deranged or depressed.
>
> MEDEA No.
>
> PAM
>
> MEDEA

(Bartlett, p. 78)

Pam is clearly searching for answers from the perpetrator to make sense of this event, though she seems to find none in Medea's monosyllabic replies, which leave Pam speechless if only for a moment. The messenger as witness and reporter of action works on many levels. Pam sees events at the wedding and reports verbally within a dramatic scene. She records video and shows footage to a character, Sarah, onstage. In doing so Pam makes Sarah a 'spectator in the text'. It is not specified in the text whether Medea sees the recording or not, but she certainly hears the horrific detail, as does the audience. They cannot see the events, their visual images are shaped by Pam's words and Sarah's reaction to what she sees on screen, and also Medea's response to what she hears (Bartlett, p. 77). This recording raises two more issues about spectatorship. Firstly, relating to Pam as voyeur: at what point does she stop filming? The text is not specific about the length of time, yet we gather from the stage directions that she continues filming during the screaming. Secondly, if Pam is filming whilst

this is going on, is she actually fully present at the wedding and observing what is happening, and does this affect her position as a credible narrator? This suggests that her character, like Medea, is both absent and present. Medea is present through her actions in that she has orchestrated the deaths, yet she is absent from the scene. However, Bartlett's use of video footage merges the absence and presence of Medea, Pam as messenger, and Sarah, making them all listeners and possibly 'spectators in the text'.[36] This is a multi-layered messenger speech for the twenty-first century.

Cusk's *Medea* also includes a messenger speech. It is an uninterrupted extended monologue that recounts the fate of Jason's new wife and father-in-law, but in a key reinterpretation the words are delivered by a God and comprise elements of a story penned by Medea, who in Cusk's version is a writer. The messenger speech is a four page monologue that warrants a scene of its own, the penultimate scene of the play. As a God, the messenger occupies a privileged position, omnipotent and omnipresent with no restriction of place, access or understanding.[37] Departing from De Jong's definition of a messenger speech, Cusk's messenger does not report her narrative to another character onstage but rather addresses the audience.[38] So whilst this isolated scene and figure adds to the idea of separation – Gods looking down on events and people – it also connects in a direct way with the audience, ultimately inviting them to make a judgement. The content and tone of the opening twelve lines is certainly one that invites judgement, though it is not impartial as it signals condemnation of Medea. The messenger's divine status is not revealed until much further into the monologue. Instead, the opening lines convey a separation and detachment from ordinary humans:

> One tries to keep a balanced view
> of humans and the things they do;
> But speaking for moi and moi alone
> This is too naughty to condone.
> What could be easier to condemn
> Than a mother abandoning her children?
> A mother's task is to protect:
> Unnatural should she defect.
>
> (Cusk, p. 92)

The choice of a deity as messenger chimes with Barrett's observation that the convention is closely related to epic poetry – delivered by the poet directly to an audience – and the

[36] See Barrett, p. 102.
[37] De Jong, p. 60.
[38] In the text the messenger is gender neutral, though in the casting of the first produced run at the Almeida the actor was female, and she also doubled as member of the chorus. See Cusk, p. 6.

influence of the muses, though departs from any notion of self-effacement and impartiality.[39] As identified above, the messenger soon takes ownership of the narrative (line three), is direct about being critical of Medea's behaviour (line four); then poses a loaded question about absent mothers (lines five and six); and attempts to influence the audience's view of Medea being an unnatural mother (lines seven and eight). Later the messenger acknowledges the difficulty of being impartial, as conveyed in this extract:

> I'm just an onlooker to this drama –
> Though that does involve a degree of trauma.
> One doesn't like to take sides
> But fact is, a divided house divides
> itself down to the last crumb.
> Partisanship is forced on one.
>
> (Cusk, p. 92)

The partisanship of those who know the divorced couple serves as comment upon the role of the messenger: is the messenger's account balanced and impartial, or is it subjective and therefore skewed to suit the interpretation and judgement of the messenger? This notion of partiality serves as comment about the words and slant of Cusk's messenger and the role of messenger more generally. Here, she simultaneously makes reference to the drama of Medea and Jason's relationship and of the messenger's relationship to the action recounted in the tragedy. Part of the messenger speech comprises details of a drama penned by Medea herself within the play. Medea is physically absent from the scene, but she has literally written her own and Jason's future. Unlike Euripides' version, where the narrator recounts events orchestrated by the protagonist – the murder of Creon and his daughter – in Cusk's *Medea* the ultimate destruction is not the annihilation of Jason's new wife and her father, but their social ruin. Jason's wife becomes fat and starts to gamble, and his father-in-law is so devastated at his trophy daughter's appearance that he loses his mind and as a result his business (Cusk, pp. 94-95). Jason loses his financial and social standing, and it is suggested, his happiness, all under the media spotlight. All of these events are effected by a narrative penned by Medea, who in Euripides' version was thought to have supernatural powers. This speech is delivered by a God, perhaps a nod to the position of Euripides' Medea. Scholars have suggested that Euripides' Medea shares common status with the Gods.[40] She is the only protagonist in extant tragedy who escapes justice and the wrath and retribution of the deities. [41] Indeed, in

[39] Barrett, p. xvii.
[40] Hall states: 'In extant Greek tragedy no other kin-killers reach the end of their plays unpunished. Euripides slightly ameliorates this scandal by suggesting that Medea, as granddaughter of the Sun, is not quite mortal and thus not entirely accountable to ordinary theological rules', Euripides, p xvi.
[41] Hall 2010, p. 242.

Euripides' version of the myth she escapes with the help of them; Medea exits with the bodies of her children on a chariot belonging to the Sun – whom she claims is her grandfather – to bury them at 'the precinct of Hera, goddess of the Acropolis.'[42] The possibility that Medea might be a deity may encourage audiences to reflect on the significance of the metatheatrical thread through this scene connecting divinity, life and art. It conjoins fate and story for a twenty-first century audience asking the question: can we humans write the narrative of our lives and change our future? The messenger, being a God, claims not:

> We are the writers of the human plot.
> Free to decide your own fates you are not.
> Imbalance offends our whole sense of art.
> The self-willed man denies his part.
>
> (Cusk, p. 93)

This opinion seems at odds with evidence in the speech about Medea's successful self-penned revenge narrative that changes the course of her life and wreaks havoc on Jason, his new wife and father-in-law, proving instead that Medea has agency within her own fate and has influence over the lives of Jason and the children. In this extract the messenger draws attention to Medea's superior knowledge of the world and ability to manipulate it:

> But the wife understood the rules of this game.
> Story and truth must be one and the same.
> Narration is governed by laws pure as maths –
> Art and life follow parallel paths.
>
> (Cusk, p. 94)

Cusk draws parallels with life and art creating a metatheatrical element to the messenger speech, made possible by the direct address of Messenger to audience.

In Simon Stephens' *Blindsided* the threat of violence plays a significant role in the play. When Isaac discovers John has broken into his home with Cathy, he tells them that he will call the police. This invokes a direct threat of violence from John:

> JOHN If you do I promise you I'll find you and I'll beat the living shit out of you.
>
> CATHY John.
>
> JOHN I have got one fuck of a temper on me haven't I Cathy?
>
> CATHY He really has.

[42] Euripides, p. 37.

JOHN So just calm down.

CATHY His dad was a farmer. He inherits it from him.

(Stephens, p. 16)

John's threat of violence serves to restrict Isaac's actions and it works. This success is partly down to Cathy's verification, which signals that John's warning is real. The suggestion of a violent legacy passed down through the generations in a family thematically chimes with ancient tragedy. Cathy too seems also to be influenced by John's tactical use of violent language when she discovers that he has slept with her best friend Siobhan, and confronts her:

CATHY It's funny. You think you know somebody and then you find out something and it makes you want to cut their cheeks off with their kitchen scissors or grind glass into their eyes or something like that. It makes you really want to hurt them. I won't. Don't worry.

(Stephens, p. 72)

Cathy goes on to warn Siobhan that she should 'watch her back' (Stephens, p. 72), leave the area, perhaps even go abroad because Cathy will always follow her. Instead of just inflicting injury on Siobhan when she can, Cathy threatens her with what might happen in the future at any moment, a far more worrying prospect. Later with John, she is more immediate with her retribution:

She hits him hard across his face. She gasps in excitement.

[JOHN] I swear to Christ Cathy Heyer if you lay one more finger on me ever again I will fucking brain you […]

CATHY It's nothing compared to what I'm going to do.

(Stephens, pp. 75-76)

Cathy's physical attack is rebuffed by a verbal threat, to which she in turn retaliates with a warning suggesting an escalation of violence. The power of her statement seems to lie in suggestion, leaving the worst to John and the audience's imagination.

The next scene shows Cathy with Baby Ruthy alone together. It has already been established that Cathy is angry and is capable of violence, thus suggesting that Ruthy, being in close proximity to her mother, might be in danger:

John's flat. Cathy and Ruthy. Ruthy is in her cot. She is silent. Cathy approaches her. She stops. Hears something. Looks up.

CATHY Water and shit and skin and bone. She's not real.

She's made out of rubber.

She holds up Ruthy's pillow. She smells it.

Look at you.

Imagine growing up as you?

(Stephens, p. 76)

The key moment of violence in *Blindsided* happens offstage, between the scene above (Scene 12) and Scene 13. The whole play pivots here. As written, the play does not dramatize the murder of a child. Instead it suggests that something bad is about to happen and later tells us about it. The fact that Cathy stops when she hears something implies that she is about to do something she does not want witnessed. Her dialogue dehumanises the child, a classic tactic of someone who wants to justify a violent action against another human being.[43] This juxtaposed with the act of smelling the child's pillow, reminiscent of the nurturing desire to smell a baby's head, and possibly suggesting an act of smothering, invites unease. The audience are viewing the unseen child through the eyes of Cathy, who in turn invites herself to imagine Ruthy's future. The scene ends with a question mark over baby Ruthy's life.

In Scene 13 Cathy reports her actions in a duologue to her disbelieving mother, Susan. The earthshattering content of the words is contrasted by Cathy's apparent calm delivery.

CATHY […] I left her in her cot at John's flat. I did it on purpose so that he'd have to find her. I smothered her. She was fast asleep. She didn't feel a thing.

What?

What's wrong?

(Stephens, p. 81)

The reportage of Ruthy's death is all the more horrific because it is situated in a domestic scene between mother and daughter. The audience have an idea that something bad may have happened to Ruthy, but when it is revealed they have the double horror of hearing the news and witnessing Susan's reaction to the murder of her grandchild at her own daughter's hands. Cathy's behaviour in the scene suggests a desire not to be present or noticed: 'I tried my hardest to be really quiet […] I honestly didn't mean to wake you' (Stephens, p. 77). When Susan starts to question Cathy about John, Cathy appears not to hear and seems to be in her own world, absent. This resonates with Macintosh's theory of tragic characters being both

[43] Robert Fine, 'Dehumanising the Dehumanisers: Reversal in Human Rights Discourse', *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2010), 179-90, p. 179.

absent and present in the same moment and of Barrett's notion of self-effacement with messengers when reporting their narratives. This unusual behaviour clearly unnerves Susan who asks her if she is alright (Stephens, p. 80). It is then that Cathy delivers her devastating news.

Just as the classical period produced great variety in its messenger speeches, these modern presentations of violence and death within *Medea* have been configured variously, with examples ranging from more traditional reportage to dramatization of murder and suicide.[44] The question that needs addressing is not whether to show or tell violence and death, but how is a narrative of violence and death best shaped, visually, verbally, or using a combination of both, for a modern audience, by drawing on ancient technique and convention. In Cusk's case, she combines the traditional conventions of messenger speech and use of deities to directly address the audience. She also includes a metatheatrical element to the messenger scene, in which she weaves the story penned by Medea into the drama to enhance the messenger's narration. But the most significant change Cusk makes with regard to violence in the play is to omit the Euripidean ending in which Medea kills her children offstage. Indeed, in Cusk's version, Medea is not a murderer but an absent mother who does not appear to care about the fate of her sons. Medea's impassive reaction, is, it can be argued, more shocking for a contemporary audience than when Carr's Medea slashes her own daughter's throat. Hester justifies this as an act of love and protection, as she will soon commit suicide herself. So although this physical act of violence is perhaps shocking to view for an audience – and this will largely depend on staging verisimilitude – it is conceivably less shocking for an audience than the sight of an absent mother not appearing to care for children. Bartlett uses modern technology and household appliances to explore the domestication of violence in *Medea*. Mobile phone video footage of the murders acts a modern messenger, not only to verify Pam's reportage but also to bring offstage death onstage with potentially chilling effect. The use of technology fits with Barrett's observations about self-effacement and impartiality of the messenger. Stephen's play seems to take this a step further when Cathy reports her act of matricide in an emotionless detached manner. Whatever the form that violence takes, the commonality in every representation is a carefully shaped response to violence and death, one that is inspired by ancient tradition, that can most importantly still challenge contemporary audiences.

[44] Goldhill, p. 100.

Chapter 4. Radapting Ancient Conventions in *My Boy*, *Electricity* and *Fed*

This chapter will explore how I treat the theatrical conventions of chorus, mask and messenger speech in my own plays. The three plays that form part of this submission each foreground a revised theatrical convention. *My Boy* focuses on chorus, *Electricity* on mask and *Fed* messenger speech. In this chapter, I use the analyses presented in the previous chapters to frame reflection on the process of radaptation in relation to the use of these conventions in my own plays.

From a critical and creative perspective, it has been useful to learn the significance of these conventions in the ancient world. This knowledge provides a greater appreciation of their reconfigured form on today's stage and had allowed me to radapt ancient texts with confidence. The key to understanding and reforming the chorus lies in the tension between the individual and the collective, its voice, action and identity. The moral authority of the chorus needs to be asserted whatever the size and identity of the chorus, though special consideration should be taken in selecting its identity, marginal or otherwise, which further shapes the dramatic tension between the two, whether it be a group comprising many or an individual character. On the ancient stage, the tragic mask was used to conceal the actor and present character. It functioned in creating a new form of theatre which allowed for visual representation within a story offering different perspectives. The neutrality of the mask gave fifth-century tragedians the opportunity to explore their characters' relationship to the tragic action through dialogue and speech, which was anything but neutral, within ancient texts. Therefore, whatever a playwright chooses to focus on in the adaptation process (character, action or speech), the palimpsest of mask, a means to conceal and/or reveal, can be detected in contemporary texts. The ancient messenger speech, like the chorus, exists in a far more tangible form in these contemporary adaptations. And the key consideration when writing the messenger speech is about the relationship between speaker and their words. Is your messenger objective or subjective in relation to what they are saying? Whether a contemporary playwright chooses to show or tell death and violence, they need to craft a shaped response, one which causes maximum dramatic tension for their audience. This thesis was written alongside my creative work, and as a result I experimented with radapting these conventions in my own plays. What follows in chapter 4 is a consideration of what ended up on the page in the light of these discoveries.

4.1 *My Boy* – Chorus

The idea to include a chorus in *My Boy* was sparked by Helen Eastman speaking at a University College London symposium where she argued that the chorus should be viewed as a theatrical opportunity and not as a problem.[1] As outlined in Chapter 1, the function of the chorus as a public moderator of personal accountability can be just as relevant for playwrights today as it was for tragedians working in the fifth century. Contemporary choral function can present in a variety of forms, from something nearing a traditional chorus comprising many group members, to individual characters. Like their ancient predecessors, they tend to exude moral authority and express views reflecting wider social norms, often challenging the protagonist. The idea of the chorus engendering tension between the collective and individual appealed to me and was one I wished to experiment with creatively through choral composition and identity.

As *My Boy* deals with individual and parental versus state and broader societal responsibility, I wanted a chorus who would embody the 'moral authority' of the ancient chorus, a chorus who by their very presence would ask serious questions of the audience about personal and public accountability. The chorus in *My Boy* is similar to its ancient counterpart in that it speaks with a unified voice, comments on the action and, occasionally, speaks in verse. This verse reflects the chorus's age and character. As a child's fate is at the heart of this reworking, it seemed fitting to have children in the chorus. Their identity was also inspired by Euripides' skilful inclusion of children in his plays to elicit an emotional response from the audience.[2] The text seeks to offer flexibility to a director about the scale of the grouping, specifying a 'chorus (Mother's children who are or have been in foster care; these siblings should number three or more and be different ages)' (*My Boy*, p. 3). By specifying a minimum number of three, a number noted for inspiring powerful visual imagery and language, the chorus are likely to be impactful.[3] The choral group in *My Boy* is mostly unheard and unseen by Mother and Woman until they join the chorus to recount what happened on the fateful day when Kyle met Jack. However, they do feel their presence from

[1] Helen Eastman, 'Greek Tragedy in Britain Today', *Staging Greek Tragedy Today: A Public Symposium* (London: University College London, 13th February 2015). This reference is taken from my contemporaneous symposium notes. Also see Eastman, p. 363.

[2] Hall interview Euripidean Tragedy.

[3] Playwrights such as Zinnie Harris and other creative writers support my contention here. Harris delivered a masterclass at the Traverse Theatre, 23 September 2017, exploring 'The Dramatic Triangle as a way of creating an internal dynamic for a play', Traverse, *Writing Masterclass with Zinnie Harris* (2017) < https://www.traverse.co.uk/news/writing-masterclass-with-zinnie-harris/> [accessed 5 December 2017] John Byrne, *Writing Handbooks: Writing Comedy* (London: A & C Black, 1999), pp. 57-59; David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 24. This idea is also supported by the studies of audiences in other settings, see Suzanne B. Shu & Kurt A. Carlson, 'When Three Charms but Four Alarms: Identifying the Optimal Number of Claims in Persuasion Settings', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 78, no. 1 (2014), 127-39 (p. 138).

time to time, and Mother hears snatches of what they say. This is a departure from the chorus in Euripides' *Medea* who converse with the protagonist and other characters onstage. The foster children in *My Boy* exist in a metaphysical space; they are a manifestation of society's uncared for children, here existing in a borderland, absent and present, straddling the world of the living and dead. In this extract they attempt to intervene in the action, to save their mother and secure the future of their sibling baby, yet because of the position they occupy, they have limited power to change events:

> MOTHER Kill me. Go on.
>
> CHORUS No!
>
> WOMAN You don't think I would?
>
> *The Chorus surrounds Woman and hug her so she can't move.*
>
> MOTHER Think of Jack. Think of your beautiful boy.
>
> *Woman thinks of Jack.*
>
> Dead.
>
> *Woman looks Mother straight in the eye; Woman drops the knife, frees herself from the Chorus and exits.*
>
> *Chorus sees Mother eyeing the knife. Concerned about what she might do, they bring baby to Mother singing him a lullaby – the same lullaby they sang to Mother earlier. Mother looks lovingly at them and the baby.*
>
> (*My Boy*, p. 30)

The ethereal children may also be interpreted as the women's subconscious, shadowy reminders of their own absent children who are ever present: Kyle is dead but he is driving Woman's grief and desire for revenge; these are Mother's own children who live in care, a fateful reminder of the future that awaits her new baby.

I had not considered the possibility of using a chorus before hearing Eastman speak so passionately about the benefits of this underused convention. At the time, I was struggling with a structural problem in the play; I needed Mother to give birth in what was then a 'real time' play that did not have an interval.[4] The theatrical style of the play had to be lifted out of its realistic setting, and the inclusion of the chorus proved a solution to this problem. By using a child's eye view of the birth as communal play it opened up new theatrical possibilities.

[4] Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 21.

The Mother exists in the 'real' world, and the children in a metaphysical theatrical hinterland, with the baby occupying a liminal space between the two, as illustrated in the following extract:

CHORUS Stop screaming, ma.

It's just like having a massive shit.

Like squeezing a giant football out your Mary.

Like shelling peas.

Pip, pop, don't stop.

You'll forget all this when the little angel's here.

Now push!

MOTHER Owwwwwwwwwwwwwww!

A baby (doll) is born.

CHORUS Pip, pip, pop
Easy as
one two three.
Pop it out
scoop it up
pass it on.
Going, going, gone.'

(*My Boy*, p. 21)

The chorus's communal childlike verse exhibits an awareness of how their mother's actions are, to them, perceived by wider society. It also shows a cognizance of their own place in the world and the fate that could await them.

In contrast with ancient tragedy, the choral lines in *My Boy* are spoken individually as well as in unison.[5] The Chorus of three 'inhabit the stage as if they are ghosts' (*My Boy*, p. 3). They deliver lines collectively and may also speak as individuals. Some lines lend themselves to the chorus speaking together as one, lines such as 'we didn't hear you' (*My Boy*, p. 5), which is a response to a claim made by Woman that she knocked before entering the house.

[5] Edith Hall and Simon Goldhill disagree about whether choral lines were spoken individually by the choruphaios. See Chapter 1, pp. 141-42, footnotes 21-23.

This doubt is further supported by their advice to Mother 'Don't believe her', a line which could be delivered collectively or by one of the group.

There is a major radaptation made to the chorus in the section of the play depicting the day Kyle killed Jack; Woman and Mother join the chorus. The layout of this scene, with some additional spacing between lines, indicates that chorus members may play different characters: news reader, police officer, witness, Kyle and Jack. The first part of the account suggests the voices of adults: 'A witness saw Jack on his bike […] Crossing the dual carriage way […] Definitely him […] He didn't look old enough to be out by himself ?' (*My Boy*, pp. 22-23). These express how members of the community viewed the day, the last one being a moral judgement. Part-way through this sequence 'Woman and Mother join the chorus to recount the event and play the parts of Jack and Kyle' (*My Boy*, p, 23). This was not to avoid children playing these characters during a tense exchange, but to highlight the legacy that parents, and adults generally, leave for children. The role of chorus within this scene serves a similar narrative function to that of the ancient chorus in that it presents a detailed backstory simply. However, the dramatization is a significant departure from how the chorus operated in classical Athens. This dramatization exists on what could be described as a metatheatical level. The chorus members, which in this particular part of the play include Mother and Woman, are not only characters in their own right, but they are also 'playing' other characters, which creates a drama within a drama, in which the adult world merges with that of children:

> I know where there's a dead
> swan. Down in the woods. A fox has
> ripped its throat out. If you touch
> it…
>
> I'll have to ask mum.
>
> Scaredy cat. Mammy's boy.
>
> I'm going home.
>
> Go on then.
>
> Please may I have my bike back?
>
> *Chorus start circling 'Jack'.*
>
> Not until you touch the dead swan.
>
> I want to go home.

(*My Boy*, pp. 24-25)

This scene shows adults playing their own children. This not only draws attention to issues of intergenerational legacy, it also asks questions of the audience about parental and societal responsibility for children.

The choral identity of *My Boy*'s chorus, 'Mother's children who are or have been in foster care' (*My Boy*, p. 3), is that of young people often marginalised in our society because of their care experience. Their age range plays a crucial role in subtly asking difficult questions of the audience. If we assume, like Edith Hall, that the use of children has an emotional effect on the audience, then their presence will elicit sympathy. Their range of ages, made visibly apparent, can also encourage audiences to consider questions about age in relation to personal and societal responsibility, such as: at what point do parents, and other adults, stop being responsible for children? At what age do children become responsible for their actions? And at what point should individuals, the state and society, stop caring for children? In the final lines of *My Boy* the chorus directly ask the audience to intervene:

> *Mother picks up the knife and gets in bed with the baby.*
>
> CHORUS Someone…
> Anyone…
> Help!
> Help her.
> Stop her.
> Someone…
>
> *Mother kills the baby and the duvet turns red. The Chorus watch on, now impassive. They look to the audience.*
>
> Please!

(*My Boy*, p. 31)

In these final lines of the play the chorus do not intervene in the action, perhaps because of their marginal status, an indicator that they are powerless to act because they are children or because they are not physically there. Significantly, though, they ask the audience to 'help her' (*My Boy*, p. 31). The last thing the audience sees is the children looking at them directly, an unflinching end to this radaptation.

4.2 *Electricity* – Mask

Chapter 2 established that the prosōpon – mask or face – can be used as a mode of disguise or revelation, with the face and eyes used as a means of reading a person's inner self. For a playwright, the non-physical mask can be used to shape complex characters and investigate psychological depth through presentations of self within the drama.

Non-physical mask is central to the structure and narrative of *Electricity*. Masking as a mode of concealment and/or revelation defines character and narrative. The mythic narrative of Euripides' *Electra* inspired the backstory for *Electricity*: a woman (Esther/Clytemnestra) has killed her husband to avenge her daughter's death and driven her son (Mac/Orestes) away, leaving her other daughter (Kath/Electra) devastated by the loss. The backstory facilitates hidden elements within character, allowing for performances of previously buried selfhood. When under pressure, characters' masks slip and their less than perfect inner selves are revealed. Scene 8, in which Kath announces that she is leaving the farm with Mac, is a good example of this. In this scene, Esther initially presents herself as a mother who is happy for her child to fly the nest, and wishes Kath and Mac luck. This is a presentation that conflicts with Esther's previous behaviour, and appears to be fake when she uses different tactics to persuade her daughter to stay. When all else fails, Esther reminds Kath of her mental health issues, issues that she prefers to keep hidden:

> KATH We're going to be happy.
>
> ESTHER Until you start with your craziness.
>
> KATH I am not crazy.
>
> ESTHER Make sure you pack your tablets.
>
> (*Electricity*, p. 84)

At this stage in the play, audience members cannot be sure if Esther or Kath's interpretation of the situation is the one that should be believed, as the state of Kath's mental health and the extent of Kath's damaged character is not revealed until the final two scenes. The use of masking selves by characters hopefully keeps the audience guessing until the end of the play.

At times the audience seems to know more than the characters on stage. Mac presents himself as a newly arrived stranger in Scene 3, though the audience have witnessed him bedding down for the night in the farm byre in Scene 1. This sets up a dynamic where the audience know more than Kath and Esther. Mac concealing that he has slept in the barn from Esther may cause the audience to suspect his motives for being there, doubt what he says and even question who he claims to be – a suspicion I return to below. The concealment and revelation of information, and the audience's knowledge of this, is facilitated structurally by

only having scenes with two characters communicating at any one time. *Electricity* comprises a series of duologue and monologue scenes.[6] The three characters never interact together in any scene.[7] This creates a space for the audience to imagine events and relationships between scenes. Within the scenes, this structuring device allows the playwright to let characters mask or unmask their inner selves in front of the other characters without being judged by the absentee. It also allows them to conceal or reveal details about their lives.

The notion of the face and eyes revealing a person's inner self and feelings is at play in *Electricity.* At the end of the second scene Kath emerges from the explosion with a blackened face, a physical manifestation of her mental state which is suggestive of mask. Stage directions also indicate that Esther is masking her true feelings:

> *After a few moments a blackened Kath emerges, in pain, nursing a badly damaged wrist. Esther is hugely relieved she's alive but doesn't betray it.*
>
> ESTHER You could have answered.
>
> (*Electricity*, p. 44)

This scene foreshadows the penultimate scene when the lights come up on Kath's face, splattered with blood, which reading the subtext of the dialogue between Mac and Kath we might assume belongs to Esther (*Electricity*, p. 89). The face is also used as a means to read or test sexual desire. In Scene 3, Esther touches Mac's face, a precursor to her apparent attempt to seduce him (*Electricity*, p. 50), which later reveals itself to be a test of whether Mac is a womaniser or not. This testing or searching for a character's inner self through eyes and face is a recurring motif. Kath interprets Mac's blushes to reveal his sexual desire for her (*Electricity*, p. 70). And in an earlier scene, hand to face contact leads to intimacy:

> *Kath launches herself at him putting her hand over his mouth. He tears her hand away; they are in an embrace.*
>
> MAC
> You are beautiful, do you know that?
>
> […]

[6] This device was inspired by the structure of Euripides' *Medea*, which was written to be performed by two actors rather than the usual three, see Euripides, p. xv.
[7] In Scene 5 of *Electricity*, three characters appear in one scene, but Mac hides out of sight when Esther enters and talks to Kath.

KATH Kiss me.

He's thinking about it when they hear Esther approach.

(*Electricity*, p. 59)

The intimate moment brought about by their close proximity is broken by Esther's imminent arrival. Later in the scene, after Kath has appeared to believe Esther's account that she has seen pictures of other women in Mac's caravan, Mac is horrified at what he claims are false allegations.

MAC She's lying.

Kath looks at him and says nothing.

MAC Please tell me you don't believe her?

KATH She's my mother.

MAC She's jealous.

KATH She's trying to protect me. She wants what's best for me.

[…]

MAC And I can't believe you're going to…

Kath starts to laugh.

KATH Your face!

MAC What?

KATH Wish I had a camera!

(*Electricity*, pp. 62-63)

This exchange in which Kath scrutinises Mac's face also reveals aspects of her own character. She is capable of deception, of holding his gaze and lying, albeit with a playful motive. This interaction shows that she is not as innocent and straight-forward as the self she presents. The face is also central to the moment when Mac thinks that Kath knows he is lying:

MAC […] why make me promise?

KATH To see if you're as good a liar as me.

MAC And what's the verdict?

Kath smiles.

KATH No.

MAC How can you tell?

KATH Your cheek twitches. My dad's used to do the same.

MAC I need to get out of these wet clothes.

(*Electricity*, p. 65)

It could be read that Mac's facial twitch unmasks his identity as Kath's brother Daniel. The fact that Mac immediately diverts the situation after Kath's comment seems to suggest that he's hiding something. However, earlier in the play when he is dealing with Esther and she says 'I know you', Mac actually '*holds her gaze*' (*Electricity*, p. 46), feeling the need to confront Esther's claim, which turns out to be a generic claim of knowing his sort, rather than him specifically. This could be interpreted that Mac is in fact Daniel and is masking his true identity, suggesting that he needs to be brazen with Esther to pass himself off as Daniel, though perhaps feels guiltier when it comes to lying to Kath. Mac's true identity is never directly revealed in the play, leaving his identity open to audience interpretation – is he is the person he pretends to be, or is he Daniel, Esther's son and Kath's brother? Ultimately this is for the audience to decide and will vary with the nuances of each production and performance.

4.3 *Fed* – Messenger speech

The idea of conflicting narratives and indeed the idea of radapting *Hippolytus* was inspired by Edith Hall during a conference at the Warburg Institute.[8] Hall stated that it was impossible to achieve a feminist version of the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus as a false accusation of rape is central to the narrative. This creative provocation was instrumental in the genesis of *Fed*, but more importantly her comments highlighting the elevation of stories in the press, which disproportionately covered false allegations of rape in comparison with figures evidencing rape victims not being believed or their cases not even reaching trial, helped to

[8] For Edith Hall's problem with the myth of Hippolytus, see Edith Hall, *Why I Hate the Myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus* (2015) <http://edithorial.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/why-i-hate-myth-of-phaedra-and.html> [accessed 27 January 2018] Hall's assertion that a feminist adaption of the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus is not possible was made during her presentation at *The Afterlife of Greek Tragedy* at the Warburg Institute on 5-6 March 2015, and is recorded in my contemporaneous conference notes.

shape the radapted narrative, that of juxtaposed conflicting narratives influenced by the messenger speech.

Chapter 3 establishes that Fiona Macintosh's analysis of death in ancient Greek and modern Irish tragic drama can provide a useful frame through which to view contemporary messenger speeches and scenes reporting or depicting violence. Macintosh champions the idea that the messenger speech was a highlight for an ancient audience who prized the craft of the spoken word. She sees death as a process, acknowledging the fact that the moment of death is rarely depicted or reported on the classical stage, though interprets this not as a loss or absence but an opportunity for expansion.[9] Playwright Alan Bennett acknowledges that absence plays a vital role in the art of monologue writing when he states: 'the monologue is all about what's not there. What [the characters] don't tell you.'[10] The idea of absence is one I wished to explore and expand upon through radapting messenger speech in *Fed*.

Fed uses juxtaposed monologues, some of which are intercut, as a structuring device. As with Greek tragedy and Bennett's monologues, what is not said and seen in *Fed* should be just as important as what is. The central event in the play, the rape of the maid, is not dramatized or directly reported. The only people to 'witness' the rape are the victim (Maid) and the perpetrator (Stepson). The audience is therefore presented with information from Stepmum's perspective about finding her maid:

> STEPMUM I push the door open… and… my… maid… my
> sixteen-year-old maid… she is bent over
> the bath… half-dressed… sobbing… she
> knows she shouldn't… well… she shouldn't
> be there. She says, 'sorry miss', she
> is… wiping tears from her eyes… trying
> to gather her underwear out of the bath.

(*Fed*, p. 112)

The detail of what happened to the maid before Stepmum finds her in the bathroom is never actually stated, and Stepmum says that the maid denies that anything happened. The audience members are therefore allowed to surmise for themselves what happened and why the maid is so upset. In this scene, Stepmum is actually telling other characters, women at a charity lunch, the story. Intercut with this monologue is Stepson's address to guests at a sportsmen's dinner.

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[9] Macintosh, pp. 129, 135.

[10] Samira Ahmed, *Alan Bennett: Why Spilling All is Not the Art of the Monologue* (2013) <http://www.samiraahmed.co.uk/alan-bennett-the-art-of-the-monologue/> [accessed 27 January 2018] (para. 4 of 16)

The juxtaposition of these two narratives suggests a connection between Stepmum's account and Stepson's attitude towards women. During this public engagement the Stepson is not afraid to refer to women in ways that could be perceived as disrespectful or misogynistic:

> STEPSON Feminists know what they want and they go for it […]
> They don't play silly chase me games. They're unashamed,
> very adventurous, and like my daddy always told me,
> if a girl's giving it away then why pay for it?
> That would just be rude, bad form, I'm a gent after all.
> (winks)

(*Fed*, p. 110)

This extract and other lines delivered by Stepson in this scene are intended to be open to audience interpretation, inviting a range of possible conclusions, such as: Stepson is not bothered that he will be perceived as misogynistic; he is unconcerned that people think he is misogynistic because he is confident that he will get away with it; that he has little understanding his words are inappropriate, and must therefore be judged as incompetent, being ignorant of the responsibilities of those working in or holding public office; or he is confident his audience will not take offence or judge him for his words, which are delivered with his unique style of humour.

The two working-class female characters, Maid (Effie) and New Maid (Martha) offer a key 'other' perspective on events, yet one central to the tragedy.[11] In Scene 3, sixteen-year-old Maid (Effie) is clearly influenced by Stepmum's 'rags to riches' liberal feminist narrative and is attracted to Stepson. This opens up potential for a nuanced debate around sexual consent, power and responsibility in working and familial relationships. All of which is relevant to, and inspired by, the current gender discourse shaped by #metoo.[12]

In Scene 9, the audience are presented with two versions of the same event from Stepmum and Stepson's differing perspectives. This serves to put the audience in a similar position to the jury at a rape trial. The alleged rape in *Fed* happens between Stepmum and Stepson and occurs offstage. Stepmum reports the rape to the police and this is presented as an intercut monologue with Stepson's police interview.

> STEPMUM I asked him what he doing in my bedroom. He just... smiled.

[11] Wallace, p. 152.
[12] Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockterman and Haley Sweetland Edwards, *The Silence Breakers: The Voices that Launched a Movement* (2017) <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/> [accessed 28 December 2018] (para. 7 of 70)

STEPSON Look, I'm a reasonable guy.

STEPMUM He pulled off the bedsheets.

STEPSON Tell me what the problem is and we can sort it.

STEPMUM I was naked.

(*Fed*, p. 117)

Once the magnitude of the accusation made against Stepson sinks in, he insists that the sex was consensual and that this is 'fake fucking rape' (*Fed*, p. 122). Both accounts cannot be right, so in the absence of witnessing the scene, the audience are left to decide who is telling the truth and who is lying. Stepmum's action to accuse Stepson of rape can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be read that Stepmum has been raped by Stepson, or that she is falsely accusing him of raping her because she is outraged that he has raped Maid and wishes to see justice done, as it is unlikely that domestic worker's testimony will be believed against that of a privileged man, or even if it is, it would be insufficient to achieve justice in a court of law. Conversely, it could be read that Stepmum is having an affair with Stepson and is jealous that Maid consensually slept with him, so sacks Maid and seeks revenge on Stepson falsely accusing him of rape. Within each of the above imagined interpretations, there is room for debate on the subject of gender and class in relation to sexual consent and rape. An individual's perspective on a violent event and how this is conveyed in the retelling is at the heart of the messenger speech. I have attempted to use elements of the messenger speech within *Fed* to address issues raised by Edith Hall about her aversion to the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus.

4.4 Radaptation conclusions

The word radical is defined in several different ways. The English Oxford Living Dictionary states two of the meanings as: '(especially of change or action) relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something; far-reaching or thorough' and 'characterized by departure from tradition; innovative or progressive'.[13] The online *Collins English Dictionary* includes the following definitions:

> of, relating to, or characteristic of the basic or inherent constitution of a person or thing; fundamental […] favouring or tending to produce extreme or fundamental changes in political, economic, or social conditions, institutions, habits of mind […] of, relating to, or arising from the root or the base of the stem of a plant […]

[13] English Oxford Living Dictionaries, *Radical* (2018) <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/radical> [accessed 2 February 2018]

or relating to the root of a word.[14]

I find the fact that the term 'radical' contains references to both change and roots particularly useful as I reflect on my status as a 'radaptor'. Being radical, in the case of my radaptations, has involved engagement with theatre history, both ancient and more recent. From a playwright's perspective, undertaking research into the context of development of ancient Greek theatre conventions has been invaluable. Understanding of the fifth century social and political frameworks in which chorus, mask and messenger speech were formed provides a deeper appreciation of why they were valued. It also shines a light on the world in which the tragedians operated, a society that prized the communal good over that of the individual and encouraged engaged citizenship, mostly for men and boys, through participation in civic events such a theatre. This knowledge – and reflection on the distinctions between then and now, especially regarding women and class – clarifies my approach to *My Boy*, *Electricity* and *Fed*. 'Radaptation' shares a similar methodology to Adrienne Rich's 're-vision'.[15] Both require critical engagement with the source text in order to make sense of the present-day world and our place in it. I, like Rich, consider re-seeing and re-naming as vital for creative subversion.

In each of my radaptations stage conventions are reconfigured in the light of historical engagement to progress a contemporary radical female-driven narrative. *My Boy* radically departs from the ancient tragic chorus: it has three members rather than twelve or fifteen; they are children; the chorus are joined by other actors to recount and act out a pivotal scene; they are not seen or heard by the other characters, except on one occasion; and they ask the audience to intervene in the action. In relation to other conventions and norms of Greek tragedy it is also radical: the play has a working-class protagonist and setting, and Mother kills the baby onstage. *Electricity* 'radapts' the convention of ancient mask by removing the physical mask, yet the idea of masking as concealment is evident through character and drives the narrative. Kath (Electra) and Mac (Orestes) have a romantic relationship. Although it is never stated, it could be read that Kath and Mac are brother and sister, therefore making this an incestuous relationship. Incest is a departure from Euripides' *Electra*, and also that of Sophocles, but a nod to Jung's 'Electra complex'.[16] Unlike Electra, Kath, it appears, kills her mother. She is a woman with agency and seems to act without the help of a man. *Fed* is

[14] Collins English Dictionary, *English: Radical* (2018) <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/radical> [accessed 2 February 2018]
[15] For earlier discussion of Rich, see Introduction, pp. 132-33.
[16] For Jung's 'Electra complex', see Mahrukh Khan and Kamal Haider, 'Girls' First Love; Their Fathers: Freudian Theory Electra Complex', *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities* vol. 2, no. 11 (2015), 1-4 (p. 1).

inspired by Hall's assertion that a feminist adaptation of the myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus is impossible because a false allegation of rape is central to the narrative. I radapted *Hippolytus* in response to Hall's reading of the myth and in light of points raised about disbelieved rape survivors' testimonies. The ancient messenger speech as a report of death and violence has also been considerably transformed in *Fed*. Stepmum and Stepson do not report to other characters onstage but directly to the audience. It is not what is said about the act of violence that drives the narrative, but what is omitted. *Fed*'s audience are presented with two perspectives on the same event, and therefore put in a similar position to a jury at a rape trial.

My critical engagement with more recent theatrical history has revealed a paradox in relation to how other playwrights' handle the conventions of chorus, mask and messenger speech in adaptations today. What may be a radical departure from ancient form can, when presented to a contemporary audience, be quite orthodox theatrically. Changing from a fifteen strong chorus to an individual character may seem like a significant re-formation of the convention, but there is nothing uncustomary in one person challenging another in a scene staged today. However, there may be something very radical in having an ancient chorus functioning in a contemporary realist play set, for instance, in a council estate. The very incongruity has the potential to be challenging for audiences. This paradox also applies to the removed physical mask and messenger speech as dramatized violence in the context of twenty-first century European theatre.

Conducting this research has been radical change for me. As a playwright, my interests and opportunities have been shaped by my working-class background. In secondary school, I was precluded from engaging with classical history and English literature, and discovered playwriting through an actor-centred devising and performance tradition, rather than a formal literary route. As a result, I am both fascinated and repelled by convention, a fact illustrated in my previous theatre and radio plays.[17] I enjoy rules and form, but need to experiment with them to fully explore content, to push audiences to rethink what they know about society and the human condition. 'Radaptation' is a term that celebrates a readiness to both embrace and depart from ancient theatrical convention and tragic source material. For me, radaptation is a process and product defined by my gender and social class. I hope the

[17] *Scarborough* is about a relationship between a teacher and pupil, which has two realistic acts with virtually the same dialogue. In the first act there is a male pupil and female teacher and in the second act the gender casting is reversed, see p. 129, footnote 21; *The Startling Truths of Old World Sparrows*, contains dramatized verbatim accounts of octogenarians voiced by children, see *The Startling Truths of Old World Sparrows* (Manchester: BBC Radio 3 *The Wire*, 2013).

creative work that forms part of this submission is a starting point for future conversations about radaptation, conversations that consider the cultural paradoxes of subverting ancient form and narrative.

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