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# The Pain of Metamorphosis: The Necessity of Witnessing in The Love of the Nightingale

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Pain of Metamorphosis:

The Necessity of Witnessing in *The Love of the Nightingale*

by

Alyssa Dianne Bradac

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
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DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE PAIN OF METAMORPHOSIS: THE NECESSITY OF WITNESSING IN THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE submitted by ALYSSA BRADAC in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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## Abstract

This Artist's Statement is an examination of the creative process that culminated in the staging of Timberlake Wertenbaker's play, *The Love of the Nightingale*, at the University of Calgary. The production ran from October 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. The introduction focuses on the director's inspiration and observations which helped to chart the course for the project. Chapter two begins with a three-part textual analysis of *The Love of the Nightingale*, examining the play through the lenses of Timberlake Wertenbaker's alterations to Ovid's poem in *Metamorphoses*, the importance of hyper-theatricality within the play, and an analysis of the role of violence and importance of witnessing through the lens of trauma theory. The third chapter discusses creative and rehearsal processes which culminated in the production staging at the University of Calgary. The final chapter is a reflection of the project as a whole, specifically addressing feedback and outcome.

## Acknowledgements

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I must humbly thank my family, Thomas F. Bradac, Pamela F. Keiser, Anne Barolet, and Caitlin Bradac for their unconditional love and support, all the way from California; as well as my Calgarian family Sara Derrick, Tyler Jones, Fiona Foran, Lee Shedden, Sue Finnis, Paul and Martine Toman, Clint and Karen Roberge. ‘Thank you’ will never be enough, but I’ll never stop saying it.

Finally, for my love, Elizabeth Derrick – thank you for believing in me, even when I didn’t believe in myself.

## **Dedication**

For Tracy Marion Clifton...

My best friend, my family, my soul-mate.

You have been, and continue to be, the reason I keep fighting.

and

For Susan Coromel...

Whose guidance, support, and encouragement turned me

into a Theatre Major in the first place.

You saw me for who I was long before anyone else did (including myself).

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## Epigraph

Regrets collect like old friends  
Here to relive your darkest moments  
I can see no way, I can see no way  
And all of the ghouls come out to play

And every demon wants his pound of flesh  
But I like to keep some things to myself  
I like to keep my issues drawn  
It's always darkest before the dawn

And I've been a fool and I have been blind  
I can never leave the past behind  
I can see no way, I can see no way  
I'm always dragging that horse around

Our love is questioned, such a mournful sound  
Tonight I'm gonna bury that horse in the ground  
So I like to keep my issues drawn  
But it's always darkest before the dawn

And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back  
So shake him off

And I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't  
So here's to drinks in the dark at the end of my road  
And I'm ready to suffer and I'm ready to hope  
It's a shot in the dark aimed right at my throat  
'Cause looking for heaven, found the devil in me

And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back  
So shake him off

“Shake it Out”  
by Florence + The Machine

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

**“And it's hard to dance with a devil on your back, so shake him off...”**

One summer day in July of 2012, I was driving back to Calgary from a week-long vacation on Vancouver Island. I had been searching for something – a poem, a painting, a song – another piece of art that encapsulated the whole of this massive play I would start directing in less than two months. Up to this point, my creative inspiration had been empty – the only understanding I had of the play was academic, theoretical, and vague. This is normally not my process – I am a highly emotional creature and am able to have an almost sudden empathetic understanding of a text; an emotional map to guide me through based on impulse, inspiration, and instinct. *The Love of the Nightingale* felt big, in some ways, too big. I did not know where to start, what to focus on – I felt like a compass spinning hopelessly without magnetic North. Then, while driving through the Coquihalla, Florence + the Machine’s big hit of the year, “Shake it Out”, started playing on my car radio. I did not notice it at first, but as the song progressed, I heard the verse that would change my process and my outlook of the play: “And it’s hard to dance/ With a devil on your back/ So shake him off.” I knew in an instant that the tides of my creative fortune were turning and that I had found my spark of inspiration. The world of the play opened up to me in ways I could not predict; I now saw characters struggling with their own “devils”, either fighting them or joining them. I saw hope and courage overcoming silencing and violence. I saw colour, images, and movement.

Allow me to offer another personal anecdote. I was raised by a single father during my early childhood, and I credit my amazing father for so much of who I am today – strong, confident and fortunate, in that my father never set limitations upon me or my potential – he

never said no to something I endeavored to try because I was a girl. Much of my childhood was spent blissfully unaware of my gender minority and, as a result, I was able to traverse both the girls' side of the playground as well as the boys', freely and with wild abandon. Better still, this was completely acceptable to my playmates. It was then quite a shock to me in junior high when someone told me that I could not play flag football because I was a girl. It simply failed my logic and world-view. I went ahead and played flag football all the same, much to the chagrin of the female physical education teacher. But it was that moment which changed my life forever – where I started to realize that there was a set of social rules that I was woefully unprepared for, and I have spent the majority of my adulthood to date fighting to regain the equality I so freely had as a child. The difference between my child self and my adult self, is that now I am no longer fighting for just myself – but all women – everywhere. I have been blessed in my life to know and love some truly amazing women. Women who have survived and overcome the kind of violence and assault that no one should ever have to experience in a life, let alone on multiple occasions. Even more frustrating to me is that there are countless women around the world whom I do not have the privilege to know personally, yet who experience violence and assault at such regular intervals it has become commonplace – normal, even.

I share this personal world-view because it is an incredibly important part of who I am as an artist. In recalling my work over the course of my studies at the University of Calgary, every scene I directed, every play I submitted to the graduate committee dealt directly with the journey of a woman: *The Children's Hour*, *Medea*, *The Serpent*, *The Waste Land*, *Eurydice* – all of them feminist examinations of what it is to be a woman under male scrutiny. *The Love of the Nightingale* is the paramount project of my two year journey; the apex of my artistic, aesthetic and political pursuits.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that *The Love of the Nightingale* felt too big and, in some ways, months after the production has finished, it still does. In no way am I under any pretense that my production was the be all and end all, the paragon of productions. Quite the contrary, I admit freely that my production is the result of my world-view as it is right now, with all its limitations and biases. In the space of a year, my world-view could be completely altered, and so too my reading of the script. But I would be remiss if I did not also admit that I gave this production my all – that I stretched myself to be bigger, to be what the play required of me, what my cast, crew and design team required of me. Perhaps the greatest lesson I have learned in my time at the University of Calgary is the complete weaving of a production, of threading ideas through until their absolute end rather than leaving a single stitch, which, while perhaps interesting, does not yield fruitful results. And if I succeeded in nothing else, I know I succeeded in this aspect – no stone was left unturned, nothing unconsidered in the design and implementation. In the process of trying to be big enough, I grew.

This document records these areas of personal and artistic growth, from my creative process to the finished production of *The Love of the Nightingale* at the University of Calgary in the autumn of 2012. While I strive to provide a clear picture of both process and research, I must acknowledge that it will not encompass the production and the process in their entirety – such a document would take much longer to write and would be more arduous in its reading. However, I hope to capture its essence and, in so doing, hope to paint my small village of collaborators in the accolades and recognition they so richly deserve. In the following pages, I have divided my process into three separate chapters in an attempt to better communicate a murkily subjective and intuitive view of the play. While the next two chapters, “Textual Analysis” and “Process”, are separate and individual of each other, the reality is that they worked in tandem and continually

influenced and changed the other simultaneously. The last chapter, “Reflections”, is a response to the finished production, based on my own observations as well as discussions with and the personal critiques of others.

## CHAPTER TWO: TEXT ANALYSIS and RESEARCH

### **‘It's always darkest before the dawn’: Textual Analysis of *The Love of the Nightingale***

Through the autumn of 2011, I spent a great deal of time reading through countless stacks and anthologies of plays to propose for my graduate thesis project. I did not arrive at the University of Calgary with a list of plays I knew I wanted to direct (even though several people had gifted this advice to me prior to my arrival). In fact, my experience was the exact opposite. I knew that, if anything, I wanted to keep myself open to all possibilities; from the unknown student body, to the potential for growth in my courses, to the productions from previous seasons within the department. I did not want to attach my passion to something that could potentially be turned down due to repetition or an ill-fit for the students, nor did I want to propose something to which I was already familiar. One of my primary reasons for my graduate school ambition was the pursuit of growth – as an artist, as an academic, as a human being – and as such, I wanted to tackle a play that was new to me, that spoke to me and that had something to say. Then I found *The Love of the Nightingale*.

I was already familiar with Timberlake Wertenbaker’s work – I had performed in a production of *Our Country’s Good* during my undergraduate career. I was drawn to the contrasting qualities of her writing, her singularly unique style of blending stylized poetry with direct, contemporary colloquial language. Her writing walks a fine, beautiful line between past and present, classical and modern, witty and tragic – all of which adds a distinct level of difficulty in execution. As I read more of her body of work, I was increasingly convinced that I had to direct one of her plays for my thesis production, especially because of the difficulty and the demand for detailed storytelling. The first time I read *Love of the Nightingale*, I was

speechless for a long while after I completed it. This was strange because my experience of reading a play has almost always been intuitive; I can see images, I can feel the natural spine and pinpoint the crucial moment of a play, I can hear potential sounds and music. After reading *Nightingale*, I had nothing – my reliable intuition was silent and still – and I was enthralled. The notion that I had no immediate answers or plans for attack was surprisingly refreshing, yet simultaneously terrifying. This, I knew, was the perfect vehicle for growth.

In this chapter, I will analyze and compare Timberlake Wertenbaker's play with that of Ovid's epic poem, *Tereus, Procne, and Philomele* (as translated by A.D. Melville) from his definitive body of work, *Metamorphoses*. I will specifically target the primary changes from Ovid's poem in Wertenbaker's text, and explore the feminist implications and reconstructions of these changes.

The best stories are universal. They are able to surpass culture, history, geography, and time, to show us who we are – not as individuals, but as a human species – a tutorial of our nature. My interest in Greek mythology (and theatre) is rooted in this idea of story as a human identifier. However, as a woman, I understand all too palpably that these universal stories and mythologies are told, predominantly, by men; ergo the subjects and heroes of these stories are men, with women considered as not much more than an afterthought, or an accessory for the male hero. My developing passion has become the feminist deconstructions of these male-centric myths through dramatic literature. Wertenbaker revises a myth that both removes and inhibits the female voice by violence and omission, and places those disenfranchised voices at the forefront of the play. By using Ovid's original poem, *Tereus, Procne, and Philomela*, as a foundational text, I will analyze *The Love of the Nightingale*, specifically addressing how

Timberlake Wertenbaker has reconstructed the feminist voices within the play, and also how she has reimagined the male “tragic hero.”

An aspect of feminist theory that I want to examine, particularly within Ovid’s poetry is the idea of the male gaze.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey 17)

While the “gaze” is usually discussed within the confines of film, it is useful to consider how the male characters within Ovid’s poetry see each of the female characters, and how that view is translated and changed within the play; to appreciate Wertenbaker’s dramatically feminist contributions, one must look to the original, masculinized source. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the male is clearly the focus of the *Tereus, Procne, and Philomela* poem, and as the title indicates – the male comes first.

In *Tereus, Procne, and Philomela*, Tereus is the tragic hero and Ovid’s principle subject, unable to withstand his lust. Ovid describes him:

Tereus of Thrace with his relieving force  
Had routed them and won a victor’s fame;  
And, seeing he was strong in wealth and men  
And, as it happened, traced his lineage

From Mars himself, Pandion gave his child,  
Procne, in marriage, thus to link their lines. (16-21)

Here we see Tereus described as a warrior – though not a mere warrior, a supreme warrior – a son of Mars. In gratitude for his warlike services, Pandion, King of Athens, gives Tereus his eldest daughter, Procne. This is the first time that Procne is mentioned; as a gift from a king to his champion, as a piece of property. There is no further description of Procne or her attributes. Philomela, on the other hand, is described in detail when Tereus first sees her:

...when suddenly,  
In entered Philomela, richly robed  
In gorgeous finery, and richer still  
Her beauty; such the beauty of the nymphs,  
Naiads and Dryads, as we used to hear,  
Walking the woodland ways, could one but give  
The nymphs such finery, such elegance.  
The sight of her set Tereus' heart ablaze  
As stubble leaps to flame when set on fire,  
Or fodder blazes, stored above the byre. (454-462)

Again, we understand the female only through the male gaze; upon seeing Philomele, Tereus' lust (his tragic downfall) is ignited, and will not be quenched until he can possess her. Ovid describes the rape as an animalistic mauling and refers to Tereus as a "grizzled wolf", while Philomele is "pale and trembling" and "a dove, with feathers dripping blood" (526-528). The language of predator/victim is rife within Ovid's text, and Philomele is given no recourse except to say "You brute! You cruel brute! / ...Unless my ruin's shared by all the world, / You'll pay

my score one day. I'll shed my shame / And shout what you have done. If I've the chance, / I'll walk among the crowds: or, if I'm held / Locked in the woods, my voice shall fill the woods" (533-549). In fact, words are all that Philomele is left with, the only weapon she can wield. It is then that Tereus cuts out her tongue, silencing her voice permanently, though not her will to communicate. For Timberlake Wertenbaker, being robbed of a voice can only lead to violence: "I did feel very strongly that if you can't speak, if you don't have the language, the only way you can express yourself is violently, and I think we have evidence of it all around ... And the sections of society now, the people who have no voice, are violent, inevitably" (Stephenson 143). Once her tongue is severed, Philomele is left with no means to speak, no way to communicate the truth. Her only option, therefore, is violence.

Though she is viciously dispossessed of her ability to speak verbally, Philomele, determined to have her story told, weaves words into a fabric, telling "the tale of wickedness", and gives it to "a woman", asking that she give it to the queen (Ovid 581-87). While we read of Philomele's attempt to tell her sister, Ovid depicts a private message specifically meant for the eyes of Procne, and Procne alone. However, in Wertenbaker's play, Philomele spends five years not weaving fabric but constructing three "huge" dolls (Wertenbaker 55). During the very public, very female-dominated festival of the Bacchae, Philomele is not concerned with the privacy of her story; she uses the dolls to physically re-enact her rape and mutilation by the king, without specifically knowing that Procne is watching (Wertenbaker 56). Wertenbaker takes Philomele's need to speak to an extreme; rape is not, nor should not be a private occurrence, or a private suffering. By enacting the rape in front of all the play's women (and the audience), the responsibility of witnessing becomes ours; once we are informed, the burden of action lies with us, the audience.

Timberlake Wertenbaker also changes Procne's reaction to Philomele's rape, as well as Philomele's reaction itself. Ovid writes that Philomele was "convinced that she had wronged [Procne], could not bear / to meet her eyes and, gazing on the ground, / She made her hands speak for her voice, to swear / By all the gods in heaven that her disgrace was forced on her" (140). Procne then immediately comes to Philomele's aid and speaks of dismembering Tereus in several different ways (Wertenbaker 56-57). There is no question about Tereus' guilt, and no implication that Philomele is anything but a victim. Yet Wertenbaker changes the subject of blame; it is not Philomele who is concerned with the shame of the violence committed against her, but Procne. After Philomele's public re-enactment, Procne says:

How can I know that was the truth? (*Pause.*) You were always wild. How do I know you didn't take him into your bed? You could have told him lies about me, cut out your own tongue in shame. How can I know? You won't nod, you won't shake your head. I have never seen him violent. He would not do this. He had to keep you back from his soldiers. Desire always burnt in you. Did you play with his sailors? Did you shame us all? Why should I believe you? (*she shakes PHILOMELE.*) Do something. Make me know you showed the truth. (*Pause.*) There's no shame in your eyes. Why should I believe you? And perhaps you're not Philomele. A resemblance. A mockery in this horrible drunken feast. How can I know? (*Silence.*) But if it is true. My sister. Open your mouth. (*PHILOMELE opens her mouth, slowly.*) To do this. He would do this. (*Pause.*) Is that what the world looks like? (*Pause.*) Justice. (Wertenbaker 58)

Here, we see Procne not as a classical stereotype of female virtue, but a very real, very fallible and very fearful human being. She questions Philomele's story and implicates her sister as the

perpetrator of her own rape, calling her “wild” and recalling Philomele’s joy, passion, and curiosity about sex from scene two (Wertenbaker 10-13), though here Procne uses that same joy and curiosity as a weapon for guilt: “Desire always burnt in you.” Procne implies that Philomele is essentially a sexually voracious wanton, and attempts to goad her into admitting that she slept with Tereus willingly, thereby wronging Procne not only as a woman, but as family; an exact reversal to what Ovid’s Procne/Philomele scene describes. Procne even goes so far to question Philomele’s identity, disbelieving that the person standing before her is, in fact, her sister. There are two key points that change Procne’s mind: the first being that she sees “no shame” in Philomele’s eyes – here Wertenbaker places shame not on the victim, but on the aggressor. Secondly, in seeing the proof of violence when Philomele opens her mouth and beholds her dismembered tongue, Procne immediately knows that Tereus is capable of such an act, and in that knowledge, stops questioning and doubting her sister and calls for “justice.”

However, by seeking “justice” (or in this case revenge), both Philomele and Procne are attempting to equalize Tereus’ violence, thereby equating themselves to Tereus and placing them directly within the cycle of revenge, rather than circumventing it. Again, Wertenbaker deviates from Ovid’s text; it is not Procne who murders her child, but Philomele. In Ovid’s poem, both Procne and Philomele murder Itys, and it is Procne who initiates the violence by “pouncing” on Itys and stabbing him below the ribs after exclaiming, “You’re like, so like your father!” (623-625). Although Ovid’s Itys is a paragon of innocence, Wertenbaker literally makes Itys comparable to his father; arrogant and overtly masculinized: “Give me my sword, slave, or I’ll kick you. Kill you all. Cut off your heads. Pick out your eyes. (*ITYS goes for PHILOMELE. PROCNE holds him. PHILOMELE still has the sword. PHILOMELE brings the sword down on his neck.*)” (Wertenbaker 63). Here, it is Philomele who strikes Itys first, completing the cycle of

revenge. Yet Procne's role in the violence does not escape Wertenbaker's attention, as she becomes a somewhat unintentional accessory: "I did nothing. As usual. Let the violence sweep around me" (Wertenbaker 64). While Procne does not harm her child, she does hold herself accountable; inaction for Wertenbaker is no different than committing the crime itself. This moment is paralleled, however, as Wertenbaker also asks the audience to examine their own inaction – inaction inherent in their very roles as witnesses.

Analysis of the play cannot accurately exist without addressing Ovid's intention of his collection of myths: their *metamorphoses*. The characters in Ovid's poem and Wertenbaker's play undergo dramatic transformations. Ovid describes how the gods end the cycle of revenge: "...As they flee, / You'd think they float on wings. Yes, sure enough, / They float on wings! One daughter seeks the woods, / One rises to the roof; ...and he, grief-spurred, swift-swooping for revenge, / Is changed into a bird that bears a crest, / With, for a sword, a long fantastic bill - / A hoopoe, every inch a fighter still" (668-77). Wertenbaker keeps this transition intact, she places the focus on Itys and Philomele, the two victims of bloodshed in the story. While Wertenbaker's play is laden with violence and sadness, there is also a great deal of hope, particularly since Wertenbaker forgoes the plot point of baking Itys into a pie and his father's unwitting cannibalism (Ovid 651-58). Itys' demeanor and character changes, after his death he speaks like the child he always should have been – a curious child – rather than as his father's overtly masculinized double, as when we see him threaten Philomele in the previous scene. The conversation between Itys and Philomele as the Nightingale is one of healing; there is hope for the future, hope that the cycle of violence and sexual assault can end with a conversation about right and wrong. "PHILOMELE: Do you know why it was wrong of Tereus to cut out my tongue? / ITYS: Because it hurt. / PHILOMELE: Yes, but why was it wrong? / ...ITYS: What

does wrong mean? / PHILOMELE: It is what isn't right. / ITYS: What is right? (*The NIGHTINGALE sings*) Didn't you want me to ask questions" (Wertenbaker 66). For Wertenbaker, these conversations are imperative if human behaviour is going to change.

While the reconstructions of the women are the focal point in Wertenbaker's play, perhaps the most crucial comparisons can be made with Wertenbaker's reimagining of the "hero". In no way does Wertenbaker glorify Tereus – he is not the noble "son of Mars" that Ovid imagines, but a plain, direct man confused when passion overwhelms his sense of black and white morality: "PHILOMELE: ...I want to feel everything there is to feel. Don't you? / TEREUS: No!" (Wertenbaker 21). Wertenbaker gave a lecture in February, 2001 at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, where she said, "Many of the Greek tragedies are tragedies of self-knowledge ... lack of self-knowledge is tragic, and brings on self-destruction. ... We could very simply say lack of self-knowledge brings about a fall" (Hall 362). Tereus does not understand the intensity of his feeling for Philomele – he lacks self-knowledge – and because he does not understand, he takes what is not his, as he would during war: "So, you are afraid. I know fear well. Fear is consent. You see the god and you accept" (Wertenbaker 44). For Tereus, love is the equivalent to control, to ownership, to power; Philomele's lack of consent means nothing to him, "I will love you and love myself for you. Philomele, I will have you" (Wertenbaker 43). His hero's tragedy is his emotional ignorance – whether it is his "love" for Philomele, or his sense of shame after the rape, he cannot navigate his own psyche – especially when faced with Philomele's proclamation of his guilt. He solves problems with violence, not because he is an animal, but because it is all he knows; rape, dismemberment, war, and revenge. "How could I know what love was? Who was there to tell me?" (Wertenbaker 64). Tereus is an anti-hero, a villain and a victim, simultaneously.

It is not simply enough to provide women with voices; they must use those voices to speak and to act. Timberlake Wertenbaker demonstrates the necessity for voice by utilizing a contrast of inaction and silence. Though Philomele's tongue is severed, she strives against a seemingly impossible obstacle to tell her story, in direct contrast with the blatant unwillingness of the male chorus as witnesses to interfere. Wertenbaker holds everyone accountable. Yet both Ovid's and Wertenbaker's versions, while markedly different, resonate with the same message: history must change. Whether it is through embracing the unknown in defiance of the patriarchy, or enacting our right to fight back against aggression and tyranny, women are more than footnotes and greater than stereotypes. It is only through the telling and retelling of our stories that we will achieve Hélène Cixous' vision: "It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language...It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than their silence" (876).

### **The Importance of Hyper-theatricality**

Perhaps the aspect of *The Love of the Nightingale* that fascinated me the most was the element of hyper-theatricality: the Hippolytus play in scene five, the utilization of both a male and female chorus and their subsequent involvement in the story's action, and most importantly, the Festival of the Bacchae in scene eighteen. I have a self-professed penchant toward hyper-theatricality – I believe in the power of theatre, in the fullness of its scale, in its capacity for infinite possibility, and the sheer size it can occupy. Theatre at its core is larger than life, and in

such scope, it provides us with the opportunity for a better understanding of nature – for embracing a more fundamental truth. *The Love of the Nightingale*'s demand for hyper-theatricality left me petrified and inspired.

The Hippolytus play, or the play-within-the-play in scene five, is the first instance we see of simultaneous choric observation during a focused moment of action (Dymkowski 129). This moment is significant, not only due to its early placement in the action of the play, but as it forces the audience to analyze its reaction to both the events and the observations. There is a distinct juxtaposition between the “tragedy” of the Hippolytus story and the reactions of both audiences watching; those who know and are familiar with Hippolytus’ demise at the hands of the vengeful Aphrodite and those who are watching for the first time. Within this frame, Wertebaker masterfully establishes the first instance of problematized watching – an audience watching a play audience watching a play-within-a-play.

It is within this problematized watching that the proper theatrical audience is given advice on not only how to view the Hippolytus play, but the play at large. King Pandion is using the play as a teaching tool, hoping it will instruct him in a decision on whether or not to send Philomele to Thrace, “I find plays help me think. You catch a phrase, recognize a character. Perhaps this play will help us come to a decision” (Wertebaker 18). He is actively seeking an answer to a problem and even finds it at the end: “That’s the phrase. Philomele, you must not leave your father’s lands. You’ll stay here” (Wertebaker 23). The Queen, Pandion’s nameless wife, offers advice for those who are ignorant of the Hippolytus’ play’s plot (and indeed, Wertebaker’s plot): “Listen to the chorus. The playwright always speaks through the chorus” (Wertebaker 21). This pithy, meta-theatrical comment of a character named only by social ranking, “The Queen”, is not seemingly in response to either the on-stage action, or its

characters, but is apparently for the benefit of the audience proper. Through the Athenian audience's reaction to the Hippolytus play, the conversation is fluid, the comments remarking on specific events or characters as they arise.

Tereus, however, is on the other side of the spectrum from the Athenians. He has no experience in watching plays or indulging in culture at all, as he explains to Pandion that in Thrace "we prefer sport" (Wertenbaker 18). The audience becomes immediately aware of the fundamental differences between Pandion and Tereus, Athens and Thrace, and perhaps, separates their sensibilities toward one side or the other based on their own, private experience. Tereus represents the uncultured and unfamiliar. He is outraged at the play and at Phaedra's illicit love for Hippolytus, declaring, "Why should we pity her? These plays condone vice" (Wertenbaker 20). In Tereus, we see a black and white morality, inflexible toward frailty and uninterested in empathy. It is while watching the play-within-the-play that we see art mirroring life, life affected by art, and the foreshadowing of what is to come.

By establishing the Hippolytus play as a mirror and a framing device, Wertenbaker is able to continue making connections between the Hippolytus story and her instructions of listening to the chorus. In scene eight, Wertenbaker takes a drastic departure from the story, a sort of time-out, and asks about the nature of myth, the origin and transformation from "public speech...counsel, command" to becoming a "remote tale" (Wertenbaker 31). Through the male chorus' direct discourse with the audience, Wertenbaker urges us to consider the play and its events differently than we did before the play started – not as an "unlikely story" or even "about men and women", but rather to be "beside" the myth, to "think of countries, silence" (Wertenbaker 31). Just as the Hippolytus play elicited drastically different responses from the

on-stage audience, so the chorus asks of the off-stage audience to consider the events just as profoundly.

This direct discourse by the male chorus in scene eight is mirrored later in the play by the female chorus during scene twenty. The female chorus directly addresses the silence mentioned by the male chorus that later comes to fruition with Philomele's dismembered tongue, "Without the words to demand...What else was there?" (Wertenbaker 62). The women go on to ask a barrage of ten very large, unanswerable questions – everything from mythic quandaries: "why does the Vulture eat Prometheus's liver? He brought men intelligence," to cultural, systemic truths: "Why are races exterminated?", to specifically contemporary and gruesome realities: "Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities?" (Wertenbaker 62). But just as the men urged us as an audience to consider the story not as myth, but as something more, something different, the female chorus addresses the all-important, thematic idea that it is not the answers to these questions that matter, but the necessity to ask them in the first place: "We can ask. Words will grope and probably not find. But if you silence the question. ...You will have this" (Wertenbaker 62). The "this" that Hero speaks of is the murder of Itys – representative of the death of the future, and the death of any possibility of change.

The Festival of the Bacchae in scene eighteen is yet another play-within-the-play, though this time with a very different audience, and a very different structure. By changing the implement of Philomele's victimization from a woven tapestry to three huge dolls, Wertenbaker is providing Philomele with a public space for re-enactment; a stage on which to voice Tereus' crimes and recruit an army of witnesses (Figure 9). As Christine Dymkowski observes in her article *'The Play's the Thing': The Metatheatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*,

By giving Philomele back her voice through the medium of theatre, Wertebaker also implies that theatre can give voice to others who are silenced, both on the personal and individual level, and on the wider political and international one. Indeed, by suggesting rather than stating her theme, she invites the audience to collaborate with the play not just in determining meaning but also in listening to the silent and in making present the absent, albeit only internally in each individual audience member (131).

Therefore, the puppet play-within-the-play is similar to its Hippolytus counterpart in terms of effect on the audience; in the latter, we are given characters with verbalized thoughts and varying experience levels to align with on an empathetic level, and in the former, we are able to individually experience completion of Philomele's ultimate quest: to make Tereus' private crime public. Wertebaker leaves us with a silently hyper-theatrical moment to ponder the past events of the play and wonder about the so-far unknown outcome. But as Dymkowski mentions, because the doll re-enactment is silent, depicting events to which we are already privy (unlike those of the on-stage audience members), we are solidified as complicit witnesses, bound to Philomele's experience in a way that the on-stage characters are not.

### **The Problem with Violence: The History and Incorporation of Trauma Theory**

One of the primary difficulties with Wertebaker's text is the ever-increasing layering of violence. In many classically theatrical texts, the violence is usually marked at the climax of the play: when Medea murders her children, when Oedipus blinds himself, when the Suppliant Women murder their betrothed husbands. However, Wertebaker's play posits a very real

dilemma, in that there is not simply one act of violence, but four. I spent quite a lot of time weighing this somewhat structural problem, and questioning feasible solutions in which to continue building tension through previous acts of violence, while also allowing myself to highlight the primary moment of Philomele's silencing. Thankfully for this task, I had the considered critical prowess of my Dramaturg, Kimberly Richards, to assist me with the treatment and handling of violence from both a dramatic and an academic perspective. I had the good fortune of meeting Kimberly through graduate course work during my first year. She had written several elegant papers on trauma theory which I had the experience of hearing aloud through class presentation. Once I learned that *The Love of the Nightingale* would be my creative project, I immediately asked Kim to assist me through dramaturgy and to help me understand the responsibilities and implications that violence in a play like this might have on an audience. I am beyond grateful that she agreed. In this next section, I want to address some important historical and essential elements of trauma theory, and how trauma theory relates to the text and structure of the play, particularly in relationship to the viewing and witnessing of an audience.

According to Dr. Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, there have been four major instances within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that trauma theory has risen to public consciousness. The first was Freud's "talking cure" with hysteria, which resulted in his hypothesis that "at the bottom of every case of hysteria, there are *one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience*, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psycho-analysis in spite of the intervening decades" (Herman 13-14). Herman goes on to note that Freud's paper on the subject is still competitive with contemporary findings and effects of childhood sexual abuse (Herman 13).

The second major event was the treatment of World War I soldiers who were re-experiencing and re-living the traumatic events of war or, colloquially, “shell-shock” (Herman 20). At the time of its inception, “shell shock” was seen as a plague affecting men with inferior courage and fortitude, and a British psychiatrist by the name of Lewis Yealland urged a traditionalist approach to treatment, which included shaming, threats, punishment, and electroshock therapy (Herman 21). On the more progressive side of treatment was W.H.R. Rivers, who urged and practiced psychoanalytic principles along the lines of Freud: the talking cure (Herman 21-22). The most important link between Freud’s female patients and River’s male soldiers, lies with an American psychologist, Abram Kardiner, who went on to create clinical outlines of the traumatic syndrome as it is still understood contemporarily (Herman 24). As Herman observes, “Kardiner recognized that war neuroses represented a form of hysteria, but he also realized that the term had once again become so pejorative that its very use discredited patients” (Herman 24). Kardiner’s work in this vein begins to balance the gender scales in the field of trauma, for it is no longer solely the fragile female who is prone to psychological terror, but the male warrior as well.

The Vietnam War was the third major awareness of trauma theory. While still working within the realm of soldierly combat, there is a major shift in the dispensing of psychological help – not in the form of the military establishment but from the private efforts of alienated veterans (Herman 26). Through the formation of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the veterans organized small “rap groups” where they could verbalize their stories and experiences among an empathetic audience (Herman 27). The VVAW invited psychiatrists to attend these rap sessions and offer professional assistance, something completely unprecedented in the history of either warfare or psychological medicine (Herman 26-27). It is through the VVAW

and their rap groups that the organization “commissioned comprehensive studies tracing the impact of wartime experiences on the lives of returning veterans. A five volume study on the legacies of Vietnam delineated the syndrome of post-traumatic stress disorder and demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt its direct relationship to combat exposure” (Herman 27).

The final instance of trauma and public consciousness happens around the same time as the Vietnam War and PTSD, with the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s and the illumination of terror and trauma within the domestic sphere (Herman 28). In fact, the movement’s very name spoke directly and deliberately to the problem of “consciousness-raising” (Herman 28). The processes of “consciousness-raising” began with several campaigns to increase public awareness, for example, the very first public rally on rape was organized and executed by the New York Radical Feminists in 1971, as well as several tribunals on crimes against women and rape reform legislation introduced by the National Organization of Women throughout the 1970s (Herman 29). The more public these campaigns and rallies became, the more women within the private, domestic sphere were encouraged to come forward with stories of sexual violence and physical/emotional abuse (Herman 29-30). The women’s movement of the 1970s assisted in illuminating a startling truth about post-traumatic stress disorder: the most common and frequent victims of PTSD were civilian women, not male soldiers (Herman 28). Women were silenced by shame and fear, which gave authorization for every form of sexual and domestic exploitation imaginable (Herman 28).

To understand the impact of PTSD, Ruth Leys states:

Post-traumatic stress disorder is fundamentally a disorder of memory. The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events,

the mind is split or dissociated; it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness, instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. (2)

Symptoms of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, and other re-experiences, as well as depression and guilt (Leys 2). Within the context of sexual violence, specific trauma includes a sense of terror that results from actual harm to the body and mind, which has lasting changes in memory and emotion; there is also an intense sense of disconnection, which calls into question basic human relationships, shatters the construction of the self, and results in a loss of trust in themselves, in other people, and in some cases in God or a higher being (Herman 51). As a result, “trauma forces the survivor to relive all her earlier struggles over autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (Herman 52).

A major part of recovery for trauma victims, according to Judith Herman, is that recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation (Herman 132). In her model, recovery occurs in three stages: the establishment of safety, reconstruction of the trauma story (remembrance and mourning), and a reconnection with ordinary life (Herman 133). In her renewed connections with other people, the survivor recreates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience; these faculties include the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, and identity (Herman 133). The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling; it is crucial that the survivor articulate a testimony (Herman 181).

Within the idea of the victim's truth-telling, the witness becomes a vital necessity: "The therapist plays the role of witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak of the unspeakable" (Herman 175). The creation of the narrative is an intense reliving experience, thus it must be experienced within the context of a safe relationship (Herman 183). The survivor needs help from others to mourn her losses, and as Robert Lifton observes, "unresolved or incomplete mourning results in stasis and entrapment in the traumatic process" (69). However, it is not simply individual witnesses that can help a survivor's recovery process, but the wider, extended community as well:

...The response of a community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and community depends, first, upon public acknowledgement of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses—recognition and restitution—are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice. (Lifton 70)

Witnessing entails an even greater ethical response in the reader, listener, or audience member than just empathy (this is the burden of witnessing). Witnessing provoked by a work of art produces a deliberate ethical consciousness (Taylor 122). Witnessing also leads to a broader sense of understanding what has been done to victims, and a greater sense of responsibility: "[w]itnessing involves wanting to change the kind of world where injustice, of whatever kind, is common . . . . Witnessing implies a larger ethical framework that has to do with the public recognition of atrocities" (Taylor 122). When a playwright creates this role for the audience, he

or she directs attention not merely to individual suffering, but to much larger social and political issues. It was certainly my aim to highlight this issue as a director, and, I believe, was also Timberlake Wertenbaker's as the playwright.

Witnessing in the theatre depends upon a different scenic experience than is typical; that is, a form of viewing that does not imply "peeping or watching or voyeurism (Taylor 182)." The audience should not view the play from a safe, authoritarian vantage point, but rather the audience should be incorporated within the play itself – as much a character as any written role. For the witness there always exists a temptation to side with the perpetrator, as the perpetrator offers a more comfortable and less demanding experience; all the perpetrator asks is that the witnesses do nothing (Herman 8). The survivor, on the other hand, asks the audience to share the burden (and ethical responsibility) of pain; the survivor demands action, engagement and remembering (Herman 8).

*The Love of the Nightingale* opens with the conclusion of a war between Athens and an unknown enemy. In scene two, we see two sisters, Procne and Philomele, discussing freely the joys of sexuality and marriage while referencing soldiers visible from their room:

PHILOMELE: ...When I'm old enough, I won't stop doing it, whatever it is. Life must be so beautiful when you're older. It's beautiful now. Sometimes I'm so happy.

PROCNE: Quiet, Philomele! Never say you're happy. It wakes up the gods and then they look at you, and that is never a good thing. Take it back, now.

PHILOMELE: Life is sweet, my sister, and I love everything in it. The feelings. Athens. You. And that brave young warrior fighting to protect us. Oh!

PROCNE: Philomele? Ah. He's dead.

PHILOMELE: Crumpled. Procne, Was it my fault? Should I have held my tongue?

PROCNE: Athens is at war, men must die.  
(Wertenbaker 12)

Here, we have a stark juxtaposition between two worlds – the warring masculine and the domestic feminine. Wertebaker is already establishing witnessing within the play – as Philomele and Procne witness the death of the Athenian soldier, we observe two different reactions; the removed and neutral response of Procne who accepts war and its’ casualties as a logical event, and Philomele’s strong emotional response – she instantly thinks that she had responsibility in the soldier’s death. With these two varied reactions, Wertebaker is establishing implication of not only the victim engaged with violence, but the witnesses to the combat as well. This brief and fleeting scene offers a microcosmic metaphor for the journey of the play; that while the military war might be ending, the war on sexual violence is only just beginning, and that violence, trauma and terror are not exclusively regulated to the world of combat – we are, all of us, implicated and affected.

The male chorus is introduced to the audience as the primary witnesses of the play’s story, as well as the audience’s guide through their collective participation within the story itself. Wertebaker establishes this concept through use of direct address: “It didn’t happen that quickly. There was months and months of indirect discourse, but that is the gist of it. The end was known from the beginning” (Wertebaker 14). In essence, the male chorus is re-telling the story, re-enacting the events of the story for an audience; this speaks to Wertebaker’s duality between the contemporary and the historical. While there is a meta-theatrical element of this play’s re-enactment on a nightly basis, there is also the idea that this story is as old as time, and has been retold in many other places. Within the landscape of violence the male chorus question themselves about their own story: “But that we already knew. Could we have done something? And now?” (Wertebaker 25). We are not only given proof of the male chorus’ uncertainty of their actions (or inaction) within the play, but a strong sense of self-implication and perhaps even

guilt; there is an insinuation that if they *could* have done something, the outcome would be different.

This idea is mirrored in scene twelve when Tereus murders the Captain: “MALE CHORUS: (*carrying the body off*) We saw nothing” (Wertenbaker 41). Here, we have a complete rejection of witnessing; they discuss the elements of foreshadowing in the two scenes preceding, they know violence is approaching – and when it finally occurs, they “see nothing.” Wertenbaker uses the male chorus as a foil for the theatre’s audience – there’s almost a challenge in that moment as they carry the Captain’s dead body off-stage; while the male chorus denies culpability of witnessing and subsequent action, there is an inquiring of the audience’s witnessing of events. As the male chorus shows us the unfolding actions of the play, what will we do, as a body of witnesses to this story? How might we perform differently?

Once the Captain is killed the male chorus fades into the background, and the story is told by women. This is a significant shift; the murder of the captain is based, however falsely, within a form of military protocol. Tereus accuses the Captain of being a “traitor”, and for attempted rape – an action unfit for a soldier: “A young girl, defenseless. I’ll cut off your genitals. Go to the underworld with your shame around your neck” (Wertenbaker 40-41). Because the world of the male chorus is based on war and the military, the Captain’s death is perhaps the unfortunate consequence of insubordination and therefore (in some manner) understandable, if not regrettable. However, the violent events to come have nothing to do with structured combat or military protocol. The war then moves to the private domestic sphere; to the violence against women.

Where the male audience represents an inactive, rejecting witness, Niobe represents a different kind of viewer; a proponent of silence because she, too, is a victim of sexual violence. As Tereus is raping Philomele, Niobe says: “So it’s happened. I’ve seen it coming for weeks. I could have warned her but what’s the point?” (Wertenbaker 44). Throughout the entirety of her monologue Niobe continues to repeat the phrase, “I know” (Wertenbaker 45). She shares with us during an act of terror for Philomele that we can hear off-stage, how the same act of terror happened to Niobe. This moment is arguably the most powerful in the play, simply due to the heart-breaking testimony we are receiving while, in jarring contrast, we are hearing sexual violence and trauma in action. And yet, Niobe does not advocate for change, nor does she encourage Philomele to speak out against her perpetrator (Figure 8). As she washes Philomele after the rape, she encourages Philomele to continue her victimization in the hope of survival: “In the meantime, get him to provide for you. They don’t like us so much afterwards, you know. Now he might still feel something. We must eat. Smile. Beg” (Wertenbaker 48). This is, perhaps, a callous, unfeeling statement for an audience to hear, especially in the direct aftermath of rape. Philomele expresses her outrage, and exclaims that Niobe is worse than her rapist, to which Niobe matter-of-factly says: “Don’t be so high and mighty, Philomele. You’re nothing, now. Another victim. Grovel. Like the rest of us” (Wertenbaker 48). Considering that Niobe’s primary concern is with survival, her motivation is not meant unfeelingly, but rather is Niobe’s effort in helping Philomele to move on in the same way she (and millions of other women throughout history) did. Yet, for Wertenbaker, it is not the rape that is the most egregious act of violence, but the silencing of Philomele. In Niobe’s support for silence-as-survival, she cannot be of any solace or help to Philomele and soon, like the male chorus, fades into the background. But for the women in the audience, Niobe’s reaction is one that has been told and re-told

throughout history, as made clear in Judith Herman's observation that women are and have been the largest victimized demographic of post-traumatic stress: shame and fear dictate silence, and so the cycle of violence is allowed to continue.

As I mentioned earlier, the most egregious form of violence in the play is the severing of Philomele's tongue. Timberlake Wertenbaker writes in the introduction of *Plays One* that she witnessed the systematic silencing of the Basque people in her youth, as well as the violent retaliation that followed, and came to the conclusion that the silencing of a people can only ever lead to violence (*Plays One* xiii). This is reflected in Philomele's dedication to the telling of Tereus' crimes. Before Tereus cuts out her tongue, Philomele tries to understand why Tereus raped her. As Herman talks about in *Trauma and Recovery*, Philomele questions herself and her actions: "I was the cause, wasn't I? Was I? ... Something in my walk? If I had sung a different song? My hair up, my hair down? It was the beach. I ought not to have been there. I ought not to have been anywhere. I ought not to have been ...at all... then there would be no cause. Is that it? Answer" (Wertenbaker 49). Just as in scene two when she wonders if her words had cause in the death of the Athenian soldier, she is attempting to blame herself in order to reach an answer as to why violence was enacted. Yet it is not her investigation as to the reasons Tereus raped her that sparks his rage. Significantly, it is when she, the victim, addresses the audience directly: "Men and women of Thrace, come and listen to the truth about this man" (Wertenbaker 51). This is the first and only time in the play that Philomele speaks directly to us, and in this moment we are no longer secondary witnesses listening to such primary witnesses as Niobe and the male chorus, but we become the recipients of Philomele's testimony; we are now fully implicated in the events of the play, and now carry the burden of witnessing. We are now responsible to act. This becomes even more important when we witness the severing of Philomele's tongue; we, as a

witnessing body, have more investment in Philomele's journey, particularly when we see her attempt to defy her imposed silence with the doll re-enactment in scene eighteen. Philomele refuses to remain victimized in her silence and strives to the last degree to tell her story, defying all the limitations and intimidations Tereus endeavours to enforce upon her.

Once Philomele performs the re-enactment of her violence, the audience is given a new witness through which to view the story in the form of the female chorus. Throughout the beginning of the play, we see the female chorus repeatedly struggling to connect with Procne:

IRIS: We speak the same language, Procne.

PROCNE: The words are the same, but point to different things. We aspire to clarity and sound, you like the silences in between.

HERO: We offered to initiate you.

PROCNE: Barbarian practices. I am an Athenian: I know the truth is found by logic and happiness lies in the truth.

HERO: Truth is full of darkness.

(Wertenbaker 16)

We immediately see differences between what it is to be Athenian and what it is to be a woman in Thrace. Yet, beyond simple differences like "clarity" versus "silence", there is a fundamental knowledge of something unknown, something we are not yet privy to in Procne's claim of truth as happiness, against Hero's claim that "truth is full of darkness." This void of understanding between the two parties lessens as Procne's worry and fear over Tereus' journey increases, and Procne pleads to Iris to explain Tereus' absence: "Iris, please pity. One yes, one no. Small words and yet can turn the whole world inside out" (Wertenbaker 46). Procne is literally begging Iris to tell her if Tereus is dead, yet, how could Iris know any more than Procne? Especially since Iris has been in Thrace with Procne for the entirety of the journey. Throughout the female chorus' interaction with Procne, more and more clues arise that the female chorus has a sense that something wrong is happening with Tereus in his pursuit of fetching Philomele – in short, the

female chorus has a keen sense of intuition which Procne clearly lacks, and attempt to voice their fear through images and metaphors, yet cannot directly say what will happen:

IRIS: Procne, listen to me.

PROCNE: What now?

HERO: The sky was so dark this morning.

PROCNE: It'll rain. It always rains.

...

HERO: Your sister is on the sea.

PROCNE: She's been on the sea for a month. Have you just found this out?

HELEN: But the sea, the sea...

(Wertebaker 33)

The intuition of the female chorus is finally and empathetically understood by Procne, both when she witnesses Philomele's re-enactment with the dolls in scene eighteen and also when she witnesses Philomele's murder of Itys. Procne understands Philomele's story immediately: "How can I know that was the truth?... But if it is true. My sister. Open your mouth" (Wertebaker 57-58). Wertebaker uses Procne to communicate the consequences of an inactive witness. She rails at Tereus: "I did nothing. As usual. Let the violence sweep around me" (Wertebaker 64). Although Procne does not act in reaction to the violence, she does however declare Tereus' guilt publicly, and does not allow him to shirk responsibility: "No. You, Tereus. You bloodied the future. For all of us. We don't want it" (Wertebaker 64).

At the end of the play, it is important to note that the group most able to affect change is the female chorus. While possibly the group with lowest status in the world of the play, the group whose voice is silenced continuously, they are the body who takes the audience through the metamorphosis (Wertebaker 65). It is imperative to note that while the play begins in the world of male-dominated war, and is at first propelled by soldiers, the power for change lives in the domestic sphere of women – the group most impacted and victimized by the trauma of violence.

## CHAPTER THREE: PROCESS

### **‘And all of the ghouls come out to play’... getting started**

As I mentioned in previous chapters, my initial response to Wertenbaker’s text left me at a loss for a first impression. Usually upon a first read, I have a strong sense of images, or music, or something tangible to relate and orient myself to the world of the play – a proverbial “in”. During my Graduate Committee interview in the winter semester of 2012, when asked about my ideas for a potential production of *Nightingale*, I told the committee that I had no definitive ideas, that the play felt massive, and I had no clear idea about how to approach it; but that I knew I *wanted* to, and that it would be the most challenging production I had attempted to date. What I could not voice at that point in the process was the immense importance of producing the play – that while it is based in a mythic, distant past, its relevance is more contemporary and timely than ever before in our human history. I also did not fully understand the deep-seated fire I had for the play at the time of my interview; I knew it was there and could sense its demanding vibrancy, but could not explain why. I could not know that my passion for the play and personal connection to the text would not be fully realized until the addition of an audience.

Truth be told, it took a few more readings of the play for me to realize that my approach to this singularly enormous text needed to develop piecemeal, rather than as a whole, complete picture. I began to flag individual lines and words of text, looking for repetition, for imagery, for various little footholds in which to grapple and progress. The following chapter will be a concentrated examination of my directorial process, from my initial discussions with my design team to rehearsal practices, structure, and incorporation of research, as well as the vital consideration of the audience and their integration to the process as witnesses.

## **Images, the internet, and ways to communicate**

Once the 2012 winter semester ended, I left Calgary to go work on a show in Los Angeles, with an accompanying production at the Prague Fringe Festival. I had also been hired to direct the University of Calgary's production of SEXXXY in August so, needless to say, it was an incredibly busy summer. I had started the research for *Nightingale* during the previous semester, with the textual analysis of Ovid's poem and Wertenbaker's alterations, but because of the time constraints of my summer, I was hyper-sensitive to beginning conversations with my design team as soon as I could. I needed to be able to effectively communicate my vision, my interpretation of the play while avoiding settling on premature or flimsy ideas. Moreover, I needed to accomplish this from an international distance.

A classmate had suggested the bulletin board website, [pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com), the previous term, and I can honestly say I have never used a better, more comprehensive online tool. Essentially, [pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com) is an online bulletin board which is easily accessed and shared by the use of a hotlink. One can "pin" images, videos, websites – virtually any online content. I had an initial meeting with April Viczko (scenic, costume, lighting designer) before I left for Los Angeles. Our meeting was extremely preliminary, essentially covering our very first impressions and thoughts about the play. We continued our conversations over video conferencing, and once I began collecting images, I sent April the link to my [pinterest](http://pinterest.com) board, and our conversations proved all the more fruitful and rich. In turn, based on our conversations, April would send me images and preliminary design sketches; so while the distance was an obstacle to a typical design/planning phase of a production, it was by no means a hindrance.

## **Creating the World of the *Nightingale*: Scenic Design**

Once I returned to Calgary in late June, I began meeting with designers regularly. By this point, I had read the play through several times, and had formulated some very strong impressions of the play. Because of the episodic nature of the text, I did not want a literal design based in either a firm sense of time period or specified place. In no way did I want to imply a distance between our contemporary community at the University of Calgary and the mythic, classical text of Ovid's poem; I did not want to allow the audience an opportunity to excuse the events of the play as barbaric acts that happened in some distant, far-off past. Yet, neither are violence, enforced silence, and sexual assault strictly recent occurrences. I wanted to capture and evoke both past and present simultaneously, to reinforce the timelessness of the story, while emphasizing the horrifying fact that our society, our world, our species perpetrates these acts of violence (and much worse) – and at a much more rapid and appalling pace.

April's initial idea for a scenic image came in the form of a seesaw. What if, she asked me, we had a rocking platform? My response was one of shock and awe. I had never considered a rocking platform, let alone seen one on stage before and, while intrigued, had no idea how such a structure would work. My initial concern was that if the platform rocked, we would be defining the space as a ship, thereby imposing an unwanted literalness that would work against the rest of the play. I voiced my concerns to April who agreed, and suggested we let the idea go to see if any others emerged. But no others did emerge, and as we continued our conversations, we discussed the possibility of being able to set the platform in different raked configurations, essentially turning a fixed object into a highly transmutable visual entity. This new development was incredibly exciting and equally frightening. The dimensions of the platform were massive – sixteen by sixteen feet and three feet high. To commit to such a large, bold choice was

intimidating, but I knew that if we could find a way to rake the platform effectively, and create it to be a weight-bearing structure, the risk would result in a powerful visual element that could tie the action together.

While the rocking platform would fill the ground space and create a landscape; a large consideration for the scenic design was the physical space of the University Theatre. The University Theatre is a beautiful space, one highly conducive to epic, large-scale theatre. Yet there are many challenges to working on such a stage, including sightline issues and a great deal of vertical height to contend with. We knew the platform itself would not be enough to transform the space to the multiple locations needed in the play, seven separate visual spaces which I have labeled the following: Athens, Procne/Female Chorus space, the Ship, the Cabin, Thrace, the Festival of the Bacchae, and the After-life. April had an ingenious thought to solve this problem, resulting in the addition of light gray hanging silk which would attach to runners on a track system. This solution not only provided an intriguing and beautiful picture (filling up the vertical space of the theatre), but also had the added bonus of an additional lighting surface, as well as a scenic element which the actors could manipulate and work with in the transitions between locations. We talked about different possibilities for configuration; should there be silks that break the stage space and hang in the audience, drawing the audience into the world of the play as witnesses even more? Should the silks onstage be on one running track, or two? As most issues of this nature are inevitably determined, our decisions were based more on budgeting considerations than artistic preference. A second track would need to be purchased and added to the theatre, as well as the purchasing of the silk material. April and I decided that the second track was more important to our visual interpretation of the space than hanging silks beyond the boundary of the stage, and would provide more options for configuration. I was also concerned

that the placement of two silks, which would be permanently fixed to the lighting plot on the outside of the theatre's lighting frame, would cause sightline issues, as well as serve a blocking impediment once we added actors to the stage. The final decision resulted in five, eighteen foot tall silks, two of which were hung on the front track, with three on the rear track.

Visually, I was very pleased with the decisions we were making as a creative team. We were developing very bold and daring ideas to best serve my interpretation of the text; an abstracted, timeless space which was inherently transformational in design and operation. I felt excited at the infinite potential and possibilities this design would yield in staging, as well as the strong visual impact it would illicit. Yet I was anxious, too. The implications of these scenic elements: the visual transformations, the textual transitions, and the basic practical handling of the silks and the platform were now solely reliant on me as a director. April arranged for the scenic model to live in the rehearsal hall, an exceedingly generous and helpful tool which I had at my disposal whenever I needed to try out ideas of pictures through staging. It was also useful as a guideline and reminder to the cast as to the actual space they would be working on and manipulating throughout the performances. I spent a huge amount of my free time looking at the model, playing with the model, and planning configurations for both the platform and the silks. While we did not have any of these elements at our disposal in rehearsal, I wanted to make sure both the male and female choruses had a mindfulness of enacting these transitions as we progressed through the process. In my conversations with April regarding the scenic elements, we talked a lot about the isolation of Procne and female chorus within the intervallic nature of the script, and how the male and female choruses never interacted, nor were ever in the same scene until the end of scene fourteen (Wertebaker 47). We made a natural correlation between the world of the men on stage as mostly on and around the platform, whereas the placement of

the women seemed to pull more toward the downstage diagonal on stage right (Figure 1). My solution for the transitions of the scenic elements directly related to this isolation – the female chorus would be the only characters responsible for moving the silks, and the male chorus would be the only characters responsible for altering and manipulating the platform. Scenically I was able to visually delineate and reinforce the isolation of the choruses, and utilize both bodies as the propellants and facilitators of the story.

All of these considerations meant that I needed to design and arrange the various configurations for each location: Athens, Procne/Female Chorus space, the Ship, the Cabin, Thrace, the Festival of the Bacchae, and the After-life. The platform was more limiting in terms of visual differences; it could only rake stage right, stage left, or lie flat. We worked on developing each location with a prescribed setting of the platform, and found that the links of necessary action in a scene and location changes came quite easily, but that the platform was not relegated to the same moments of transformation as the silks. While the silks absolutely determined location, the positioning of the platform was mostly determined by the necessary action of the scene; for example, the obvious action of the boat rocking in scene six (Wertenbaker 24). Because the platform was so large, it visually represented a second stage when level and flat, and I wanted the scenes of hyper-theatricality to be performed, as it were, on that representative stage: The Hippolytus Play, The Festival of the Bacchae, and the crucial violent act of Philomele's severed tongue (Wertenbaker 18, 56, 51). The other platform configurations were dictated by the emotional state of the male chorus, when their world was off-kilter and out of balance: waiting on the desolate beach, and acts of war (Wertenbaker 34, 9). The silks were moved much more often, again, reliant solely on location. Determining and

creating the various configurations for the silks was a much more arduous task – this was an instance where I spent a lot of time with the set model, playing with different visuals.

### **Athens vs. Thrace: A tale of two cities**

April and I had many discussions about the differences between Athens and Thrace as locations, as signifiers of culture, as attitudes regarding art and expectations of human interaction. In scene three, Tereus asks, as a reward for his war-like services, to bring “some of your country to mine, its manners, its ease, its civilized discourse” (Wertenbaker 13). These are qualities which, by inference, must not already exist in Thrace. When King Pandion suggests to Tereus that he take some tutors, Tereus replies with “I have always believed that culture was kept by the women” (Wertenbaker 14). So not only is Thrace a country lacking in manners and civilization, it is one also lacking in culture. This initial scene, paired with Tereus’ reaction to the Hippolytus play and Tereus’ admission of having no theatre in Thrace, was the basis for our conversation and decisions regarding all elements of design. It was important to us both to establish the inherent differences between Athens and Thrace, to the extent that these differences create major tensions within the text and within the journey of characters. How then could we effectively tell the story of these tensions through design?

I return now to the design and layout of the silk banners. The consideration for pictorial locations needed to start with the differences between Thrace and Athens. Athens came to me quite easily as a symmetrical configuration of “columns”. The silk material was wonderfully light and would move and flutter with the suggestion of momentum when an actor would walk past, or brush it with their costume. The fabric had a distinct softness to it, and seemed to have

an inherent feminine character as a scenic element. Within the text, Athens seemed like a much more feminine place, and the five silk banners certainly provided that characteristic visually, whereas Thrace, I decided, was the exact opposite. The problem with Thrace, however, was that there were several distinct locations within Thrace – Procne’s space, the cabin where Tereus leaves Niobe and Philomele, as well as the shared family space in scene seventeen (Wertenbaker 52). With the exception of scene seventeen, the spaces are female dominated spaces, which was a vital realization as I was trying to formulate ideas and an important aspect to remember whenever the female space was breeched by men, which only happens once in the entirety of the play (Figure 6). Both Procne’s space and the cabin mirrored each other, with two silks overlapping each other both stage right and stage left. For scene seventeen, I pulled each of the silk banners out of sight; that was Tereus’ space – a space, I felt, which was void of any female influence or movement. I was able to utilize the silks to form the figure of a sail on the ship, which also bled into the following scenes on the beach and the derailment of the journey. I had posed an idea to April concerning leaving the female chorus onstage during scenes ten and eleven, creating a diptych of sorts between the female chorus’ incessant waiting of Tereus’ return to Procne, and the confusion and fear that waiting elicits from the male chorus (Figure 5). The silks were split across the stage to reflect these simultaneous moments of inaction.

The remaining two locations of the Bacchae Festival and the after-life needed to be starkly different than either Athens’ symmetry or Thrace’s fractures. I was searching for an image for the Bacchae festival, and in my active imagination, I had always seen the Bacchae festival happening out of doors, in a forest. I notice a tendency in my process to deny and reject the first thing that comes to me in an attempt to dig deeper and find a better solution. Yet I also acknowledge the value of the first thought, and could not erase the idea of a forest from my

mind. I moved the silks into the centre, in close proximity, creating a clump of “trees”. This configuration also served the literal onstage metamorphosis into birds. The after-life became a version of Athens which, though asymmetrical, still evoked columns and the Athenian values from scene three (Figure 10).

### **Creating the World of the *Nightingale*: Costume Design**

April and I spoke more about costumes than any other single aspect of design. How could we best capture in costume design the timelessness, the abstraction of a world we were able to so quickly capture in scene design? I conducted a lot of online visual research of past productions of the play – a regular practice of mine as a director. As I look at past productions, I attempt to get a feel for how other directors have envisioned the play – not to replicate previous design, but to avoid it altogether. I believe strongly in clear and mindful reasoning when producing a work of theatre; why this production? Why now? What is it that I want to say? This has been a very useful thought process for directing Shakespeare, the most widely produced playwright in the United States. As an artist, I cannot in good conscience ask an audience to spend more money on a production of *Hamlet*, unless I have something fresh and (hopefully) new to say about it, or at the very least, am attempting to reflect something happening in our world apropos to the thematic elements of the play. While Timberlake Wertenbaker is not as present in the theatrical North American zeitgeist as Shakespeare, she is part of the collegiate theatre repertoire. Much of what I saw in my research of past productions spoke to me of literalness, of Roman war re-enactments, of a stereotypically “classical” and “historic” aesthetic – the exact opposite of my sense of the world and the play. Again, I did not want to allow the

audience the opportunity to consider the play at a distance, as merely a piece of ugly history. And yet, the play for me is very much about our history as well as our present, and potentially even our future.

I talked with April about this in great length during our conferences. We both had a sense that the male chorus was a very contemporary unit, dressed in contemporary or even semi-futuristic forms of battle gear. I did not want to link their costumes to a specific war, again, potentially rooting them in a literal form of historic reality. I did, however, want them to be imposing, dangerous, with the potential for violence, even though they are not the direct perpetrators of violence in the play. A factor that we considered deeply in this regard was the physical shape of the men in our department, many of them of average height, and all of them lanky. How could we make them look bigger, scarier, and more imposing? April went to a military surplus store and found non-descript black pants and jackets, which served as the basis for the design of the male chorus, Itys, the Captain, and Tereus. A strong part of our design aesthetic again lay with the tensions and differences of Thrace and Athens. Thrace, we declared, was a war state; as Tereus replies in scene five after King Pandion asks if they have theatre in Thrace, “we prefer sport” (Wertenbaker 18). As the only male representative of Athens, we had to visually differentiate King Pandion; where Tereus and his men were dressed in all black and of obvious military confinements, King Pandion would be in colourful, loosely fitted robes. To accentuate the differences further, April introduced the idea of having the male chorus cutting their hair to the same militaristic cut; a solution that I loved, not only visually, but as a bonding tool for the chorus, which I was able to introduce as a production reality to the actors during auditions. As good fortune would play out, the actor that I cast as King Pandion had a head of

long hair (which remained uncut), and the distinctions between Athens and Thrace became even more specific and contrasted.

The women, however, were nowhere near as seamless in their design development. My very first impulse in regard to concept for the female chorus was that each member of the female chorus was a prisoner of war from Tereus' various military campaigns around the world. Much of this impulse was in response to the indirect premonition the chorus members attempt to communicate to Procne throughout the text. How is it that they know something bad is going to happen? Why does Echo keep repeating "Tereus" (Wertebaker 17)? How does Iris know that Tereus isn't dead (Wertebaker 46)? There was a different dimension to the female chorus than any other characters in the play; where the male chorus rejected witnessing Tereus' strange behaviour, his violation of Philomele, and the subsequent mutilation, the female chorus accepts the responsibility of Procne's loneliness, of sensing her growing uneasiness of Tereus' absence, and their involvement in helping Procne conceal Itys' body in scene twenty (Wertebaker 63). After a design meeting in July, April had introduced the idea that the five women in the female chorus were female leaders from different cultures at the height of their power, for example a Cleopatra-esque character from ancient Egypt, an Elizabeth I character from the English Renaissance, etc. I loved the idea of different cultures, but the evocation of time bothered me, particularly because most of the figures we thought of were from the Western European/North American historical spectrum. Not only did I feel a responsibility to make the world of the play current and contemporary, but I did not want it to become a strictly Caucasian story, or in any way imply that such violence and personal invasion only happens to white women. Again, I saw this play from a global perspective, and wanted to reflect that within the design of the play – most prominently through the female chorus.

Once I was able to clarify this point for myself while thinking about the female chorus design, I was able to effectively communicate my desire for a cultural emphasis through design, rather than a strictly historic design. What if we had one woman from every major continent? This conversation developed from an e-mail I sent to April at 1:00 a.m. in July, after looking over some sketches she had sent home with me. Serendipitously, she was also awake and we had a very exciting, fruitful, and concern-ridden exchange. The source of the concern: how do we culturally represent a cross-section of women from across the world, without falsely and ignorantly appropriating (and possibly commenting on) cultures which are not our own? This was a major issue for me, as it was for April. I spoke with my peers, with friends in other academic fields, with artists whose work I greatly respect, all with the same question: how do I create representation without appropriation? From these conversations, I was able to clarify another important point that I had considered earlier, in a different context: if the women are prisoners of war – spoils and prizes for men, essentially – then there is a very obvious opportunity towards over-sexualized and hyper-fetishized “costumes” imposed by the male conqueror. April had already considered having whatever transformational Bacchae garment we decided on underneath their character costumes, but with the added layer of an imposed fetish, this took on a whole new life. April thought about taking these fetishized cultural costumes and building them all out of a similar sheer, light fabric – an idea that, again, removed any literal suggestion of culture (and appropriation), but instead emphasized hyper-sexuality. The Bacchae costume then, instead of being hidden, could be seen through the sheer material. We agreed on a bright red, tight fitting material, suggesting lingerie or some sort of highly feminized and erotic undergarment (Figure 7). In addition, April had a stroke of genius – we should put the female chorus in obviously unnatural wigs, erasing any sort of natural beauty. I loved this idea, and the

more I thought about it, the more I saw the potential for a major visual shift within the female chorus. We learn from Procne that the Bacchae festival is a mostly (if not entirely) female event, “And tomorrow is the feast of Bacchus. I will go out this time. I will go out with the women of this country. You see how I become Thracian” (Wertebaker 54). The very next time we see the female chorus, scene twenty, they take over the telling of the story and mirror the male chorus in scene eight. Both of these scenes are direct and abrupt departures from the story of the play; the men question and challenge the audience about the evolving meanings and etymologies of “myth”, while the women question the audience about violence and warn of the dangers of “silence” (Wertebaker 31, 62). It is here that the women transition from being the objects of male sexual desire and uncommunicative companions to Procne, to becoming the major force of change in the text, the catalyst for metamorphosis (Wertebaker 65). I wanted to emphasize the change visually within the female chorus. I discussed the idea of stripping the female chorus of the overly feminine and fetishized costumes, wigs, and make-up, and having them arrive in scene twenty as natural as we could possibly have them. While we did not have the budget to create individual costumes for this purpose just for this scene, we decided to leave the women in the fitted red lycra costumes of the Bacchae, while showing them in their natural hair, unadorned, sans make-up.

I speak here of the female chorus’ transformation, but what of the male chorus? Once the female chorus takes responsibility for the story, the male chorus seemingly disappears. April and I made a very bold choice in adding the male chorus to the throng and chaos of the Bacchae Festival. Textually, the Bacchae Festival is the climax of the play, where Philomele successfully relays her story to a willing witness (Procne). It seemed to me that where the female chorus is able to shed their hyper-fetishized costumes and wigs, the male chorus might also experience a

change of their own superimposed gendered stereotype. I made a very specific decision to forgo the text's explanation of the Bacchae Festival as a female event, and allow it to be an all-inclusive event with the men who were willing to free themselves from Tereus' grasp; men who were willing to place humanity above masculinity. I wanted to include within the production a male population that was uninterested in maintaining Tereus' militarized hyper-masculinity and, in so doing, reminding the audience that gender binaries are not only predictable, but dangerous. This idea was immediately reinforced during the following scene, where the first and second soldier, still invested in their roles within Tereus' order, once again reject the witnessing of an inhumane act (Wertenbaker 61). So April designed Bacchae costumes for the male chorus members, and I added them into the celebration.

### **Creating the World of the *Nightingale*: Sound Design and Projections**

Sound can do so much to support and emphasize important moments in a production. As a director I am preternaturally drawn to sound, and while the first steps of my research are mostly visual, music and sound are always close behind. My process for sound design on *Nightingale*, however, was somewhat atypical – I did not hear music. I heard sounds: gunfire, rain, birds – environmental sounds, ambient nature sounds. I spoke with my sound designer, Michael Wanless, about my ideas, and he agreed. This was not going to be a musical show.

One of the many aspects that worried me about the story, both in Ovid's poem and Wertenbaker's play, was the use of a nightingale as the central symbol, metaphor, and image. Yet, besides the obvious metamorphosis, there is no mention of birds at all throughout Wertenbaker's script, nothing to link the transformation to the rest of the story. As a director,

this proved to be a troublesome problem. On my first meeting with Michael, I expressed my concern, and asked him to read through the text and probe it for any possibilities, any opportunities in which we could bring birds to the forefront of the production, rather than allowing the metamorphosis to be a surprise (and potentially startling) *deus ex machina*. I also asked Michael to think of sound at the top of the show, something for the male chorus to enter on that would help establish the world of the play, both from the masculine perspective and the feminine perspective. The result of this meeting was a cornucopia of sound ideas, all related to emphasizing the text through foreshadowing, advancement of time, and environmental mood. Michael found several areas to incorporate birds, largely during prime moments for Procne, Philomele, and Tereus; for example, the transition into scene two, where Philomele and Procne are talking about men and sex and Procne's future marriage, Michael created the soundscape of two birds cheerfully twittering, mirroring the joy, excitement, and love that Procne and Philomele share together at the top of that scene – a particularly important scene since the audience does not see the two sisters together again until the end of the *Bacchae*, after rape, mutilation, and marital rejection (Wertenbaker 10, 57). We then threaded this theme of emotional synthesis throughout the entirety of the play, finding moments of emphasis – when Procne says “This silence . . . this silence”, a lonely swallow transitioned into the next scene (Wertenbaker 17), when the play transitioned onto the ship, and Tereus' lust for Philomele grows, a singular hoopoe would cry at moments of foreshadowing: “Nor did we see, still sleeping” (Wertenbaker 38). Right before Philomele's tongue is severed, a screeching nightingale came in under Philomele's lines, rising in tempo and pitch, and then was suddenly cut short (Wertenbaker 51). There are several more instances of this variety of aural emphasis

and duplicity, including Philomele's song after Itys asks, "What is right? Didn't you want me to ask questions?" (Wertenbaker 66).

From the creaking wood of a boat and the cry of seagulls at sea during scene seven, to the quiet rain of Thrace, sound provided a more definitive sculpture of environment than any other element of design. Sound also became imperative in filling large gaps left by text. In scene ten, while the male chorus waits on the desolate beach, they repeat the words "days" and "wait" repetitively, counting the theatrical progress of time in weeks and months, when in reality the scene is only three pages long (Wertenbaker 34). Michael emphasized these intervals of time with a wooden clanging sound, symbolizing the arduous progress of time, or what we lovingly referred to as "drops of time". There were also several instances of using the birds sounds as transformative elements, much like the metamorphosis itself; at the top of the show, Michael and I hashed out the idea that as the audience entered the theatre, sounds of rain, thunder and birds would be heard. This environmental background then morphed into an increase of birds, which then became gunfire and sounds of war which in turn propel the male chorus into marching. Something similar happened at the beginning of the Bacchae scene, where the two joyful birds in scene two now foreshadowed Procne and Philomele's reunion at the end of the scene, which then transformed into the drums at the Bacchae festival. This sound cue, at this juncture in the script, was a metaphorical representation of the violent events which would cause the need for metamorphosis itself (Wertenbaker 55).

Another vital tool my design team and I utilized to tie birds into the script was video projections. This had been a thought of April's since the beginning of our conversations. I had never used projections in a production before, and was very excited by the possibility of visual avian representation as well as auditory. Toward the beginning of October, April had me look at

a few video clips of various birds – singular birds, swarming birds, which would have the ability to be played at different speeds and contrasts. While it was another way to weave birds into the body of the production, the projections served to foreshadow and highlight important moments: Tereus' covetousness for Philomele, Philomele's accusations and demands for answers of Tereus in scene fifteen.

### **The Rehearsal Process: One Chunk at a Time**

Because I had spent the summer endlessly reviewing articles and scholarly works, looking at and talking about design ideas, and rereading the play more times than I care to remember, I had an overwhelming amount of knowledge swirling around my brain that, as of September 15<sup>th</sup>, now had to be shared with a cast and rehearsal crew of twenty-one people. Where should I start? How do I get them all on the same page? The overwhelming feeling I felt about the play, about the design, about the entire production would raise its ugly head more times than once. Yet, my fears and anxieties were continually calmed by the idea that anything can be conquered, if only a chunk at a time. I confess this for the purpose of full disclosure about my process and how my process unfolded – literally, one chunk at a time.

My first rehearsal took place on Friday, September 15<sup>th</sup>, only two days after the cast list was posted. This rehearsal was not a typical first rehearsal; my designers did not attend, there was no show and tell of concepts or direction. This rehearsal was for me, a chance to speak frankly and openly with my cast, to establish the tone of our rehearsals, and the amount of work I would require of them in a fairly short amount of time. My attack was two-pronged: I needed to scare them and to prepare them. I needed to paint a very vivid picture of our limitations, of my

limitations – there was no earthly way I could do this play by myself, I told them; I am only one tiny human with one tiny brain. But together, with a company of thirty actors, designers, coaches, we could move mountains. For my pre-thesis production the previous spring, I had had nearly six full weeks of rehearsal for a play half the size, with two-thirds less of a cast. The burden of time weighed heavily on me at this point – I felt it too acutely not to share it honestly. I told my cast that we had thirty days, as of our first meeting, in which to shape *Nightingale* into a piece of theatre. This was the “scare them” prong of my message. The preparation came in the form of conversation. I passed out scripts, I delineated the lines of the male chorus, and we read through the entire play. Next, I passed around Ovid’s poem, which we all took turns reading. Once we finished the poem, I asked them to identify what was different between the play and the poem, and asked them to be specific with what Wertenbaker changed, and with those changes, how the story evolved from one form to the other. We had a two hour conversation which ranged from literary criticism to gender binaries and expectations they experienced in their own lives on a daily basis. It was one of the most exciting, inspiring, and productive first rehearsals I have ever had, and laid the groundwork for the rest of our time working on the play. Because of this first rehearsal, the actors were enabled as co-collaborators who continued to work independently outside of rehearsals, were able to ask important questions, and mine the text for more than just cursory answers.

### **Utilizing the Dramaturg**

The work I had started doing with the actors in terms of considering a larger context for the play was supported by the work of my dramaturg, Kimberly Richards. I asked Kim to do a presentation on our second rehearsal about trauma theory, with special emphasis on how the

characters of the play might experience trauma. She also introduced the importance of witnessing to the cast, an important point that I was able to reiterate and refer back to as our rehearsals progressed. However, Kim's most important role was as a facilitator. Every Sunday rehearsal, Kim would come in at 10:00 a.m., and lead the cast in a writing exercise. Kim and I would have a discussion about the nature and inspiration of these writing prompts each week, based on the progress we made the week before. There were guidelines to these writing exercises which Kim introduced, and we, as a creative group, would always observe: all writing was treated as fiction unless the writer requests that it be treated as autobiography, at all times writers were free to refrain from reading their work aloud, and absolutely no criticism, suggestion, or question was ever directed toward a writer in response to their work. With these guidelines, our group was able to maintain control over their writing and their experience. Our aim in these exercises was to give the cast an opportunity to work through a different creative expression, as well as to supply them with a private, emotional outlet while working on a play which handles some incredibly violent and disturbing subject matter. Starting these exercises at the beginning of our longest rehearsal day also set a precedent for engaging, thoughtful, and probing dialogue throughout our process.

### **Forming a Unified Body: The shaping of the male and female choruses**

The most important storytelling elements of the production, both in terms of concept and design, are the male and female choruses. Within the body of the text, the choruses are never together; they operate as separate entities, shaping the story in different ways. As such, I dedicated a significant amount of rehearsal time toward each chorus, but with very different

goals and focuses for each. Much of the delineation I noticed between the two choruses had to do with either the presence or absence of names – the female chorus had names, and therefore identities, where the male chorus is left nameless. I was instantly struck by the militaristic nature of being a nameless number in the male chorus, of the group’s welfare being more important than the individual. This was also reflected in the military hierarchy established in the play – Tereus as reigning war lord, followed by the Captain, followed by the First and Second soldier. For the male chorus, I wanted to exploit this established hierarchy as much as I could within the physical movement and carriage of the male chorus. On our very first independent rehearsal with the male chorus, I had the men play a game of follow the leader. The rules were simple: the leader had to keep the company safe, they couldn’t destroy anything, and they had to stay in the rehearsal room. In turn, the company had to do whatever the leader asked of them. I also structured the exercise so that each male chorus member took a turn being the leader; we started with the actor playing the Captain, and continued on through the company. While most of the exercise consisted of the men commanding each other to run up and down stairs, do an odd number of push-ups, and other various and sundry physical exercises, this rehearsal proved to be a remarkable bonding tool, and immediately established relationships without having to force identity or character in a superficial or meaningless way. This exercise also established an immediate respect for the actor playing the Captain, and created a meaningful hierarchy within the male chorus, while also creating the basis of movement for the beginning of the show (Figure 4).

The female chorus, on the other hand, was altogether an entirely different matter. Because Wertenbaker specified them with names, there was an inherent assumption of character and individuality, which is entirely supported within the text. It was very easy for the women to

access this individuality, to the point where their “characters” were developed very early in the process. However, I wanted the female chorus to search for a deeper, more specific sense of character – this desire was in direct response to my design concept. I spoke with the female chorus in great detail about the idea that each of their characters had come to Thrace as Tereus’ spoils of war; that they were not native to Thrace. I asked them to write the backstory of their character, describing the circumstances of how they came into Tereus’ power, where they had come from, who they left behind, and how long they had been in Thrace – but they were under strict orders not to share this information with anyone in the cast, until I deemed it appropriate.

As the rehearsal process continued, it became clear to me that both choruses, while working exceedingly hard, were all too aware of my “concept” on an intellectual level, but not on a visceral level. In conversations with my classmate Melissa Thomas the previous year, while she was directing her final project *Trojan Women*, she had voiced concern with how “polite” all of the men in her chorus were – how they were loath to be the “bad guy”. I saw a very similar occurrence within my own group of men, and wondered how I could create an experience for them that would both make the circumstances of my concept more visceral, and also to make an unavoidable truth of war real and immediate. I realized that the only way to achieve these goals was to take the power of choice away from the male chorus; I also realized that this needed to incorporate the female chorus and their imagined backstories, and would also potentially serve their experience as well as the male chorus, especially in regard to loss of agency. I needed to create an exercise that would encompass both choruses, their relationship with the cause and effect of war, and a loss of agency for both parties. This was no light task.

After a lengthy conversation with Melissa, the exercise we created worked as follows: I sent the male chorus to a separate room with the actor who played the Captain. I had asked the

actor who played Tereus to write out instructions to the Captain, containing a list of the male chorus members in a ranking order of his choosing, though without explanation. He gave me the list, which I then gave in turn to the Captain, whose only direction in this exercise was to execute Tereus' orders – whether he agreed with Tereus' ranking orders or not; outside of the commands, the men were told nothing. In the adjoining room, I spoke with the women in great detail about what was about to happen – in no way did I want them to feel manipulated or out of control in an unsafe way. I explained that we were going to blind-fold them, which served two purposes: firstly, it would enforce their loss of agency, and secondly, it would prevent any knowledge of the ranking order that the men were commanded to take. Once blind-folded, I explained, they would be led by one of the male chorus members to separate sections of the room where they would take off their blind-folds, place them on their male partner, and then they would tell their imaginary backstory to the blind-folded male companion. I also explained that they could choose how much or how little of the story they could tell, effectively regaining agency while the male partner was experiencing loss of agency. I also requested that the female chorus, while regaling their stories, use the pronouns “I” in regard to their person, and “you” in regard to the male counterpart, making it clear to the male chorus member that he had direct involvement in this woman's history. The culmination of the exercise within the chorus members' responses was more powerful and helpful than I could have hoped for. Because the male chorus had no opportunity to choose their actions as their character, they were instantly implicated in Tereus' wars, decisions, and conquests – within the exercise, there was no option to choose nobility or politeness or any sort of civilized ideal. The women spoke of experiencing helplessness and fear with the use of the blind-folds, but more importantly, they spoke of the empathy they experienced and the power they felt in their ability to control their stories. Some women told

their male counterpart the entirety of their story, some women only told specific points in an effort to either shield the men from the extent of their imagined crimes, or to withhold information as a form of regaining status and control. Essentially, this exercise became a crucial practice in witnessing, sharing, and the impact of storytelling. It also connected the chorus members to their role in the world of the play, to each other, and to an empathetic understanding of the greater global context of war and its collateral damage in a much stronger, more organic way than intellectual discussion provided.

### **Finding the Light in the Dark: the need for comedy**

One of the elements that I love most about Wertebaker's adaptation is her expert weaving of comedy in the dark tapestry of violent subject matter. As part of my preliminary research over the summer, I read Erin Shields' Governor General Award Winning play, *If We Were Birds*, based upon the same poem from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as *Love of the Nightingale* (Shields i). Besides some obvious plot and character differences, Shield's play is rooted in a similar feminist deconstruction, and even, I would argue, surpasses Wertebaker in bringing trauma theory to the immediate forefront of her prose through the female chorus (Shields iii). However, I openly admit to greatly preferring Wertebaker's play to Shield's play for one simple reason: there is little to no sense of humour to be found in *If We Were Birds*. And while I obviously did not choose *Love of the Nightingale* for its hilarity, I recognize the need for an audience to laugh in the middle of tragedy, not only to experience the full gamut of human experience, but as an invitation for personal investment in the story itself.

Niobe provides a good deal of tension-easing comedy in scene seven on the boat, particularly as Philomele traverses the space of flirtatious sexual attraction with the Captain, and later mild fear with Tereus' unwanted attention (Wertenbaker 25). I wanted to highlight and add more opportunities for comedy, not only for Niobe, but the production in general. Something I realized quite early in the rehearsal process was how dour and dark the play can become as soon as Procne is in Thrace, desperately craving the company of her sister (Wertenbaker 15). If the play shifted almost immediately into sorrow and despair, the production would have nowhere to fall by the Captain's death in scene twelve, exponentially weakening the impact of violence and the horror of Tereus' acts (Wertenbaker 38).

The solution to this problem is the Hippolytus play in scene five (Wertenbaker 18). The meta-theatrical nature of the scene notwithstanding, I wanted the play-within-a-play to border on ridiculous and to appear over-the-top – in short, I wanted the audience to feel free to laugh without questioning whether or not laughing was acceptable. I utilized large gestures stemming from ancient traditions of theatre – the raising of arms any time the word “God” was said in the play, whether characters were “dead” or not, specific character gestures upon an entrance or exit, as well as a breaking of the play's presentation when Phaedra directly addressed Tereus, “I am mad!” (Wertenbaker 20). I also utilized sound cues to punctuate the comedy and help establish the meta-theatrical qualities of the play (Figure 2). Not only did the comedy of the Hippolytus play enable the audience a respite, but I wanted it to serve as a chilling reminder to the audience of Tereus' reasoning for raping Philomele during scene thirteen: “The power of the god is above the law. It began then, in the theatre, the chorus told me. I saw the god and I loved you” (Wertenbaker 43). The fact that Tereus uses his experience of the performance as his rationale for breaking the law of family and violating Philomele becomes even more potent and shocking

when the audience recalls the play itself as comical; therefore, Tereus' justification itself becomes horrifying and incomprehensible. There is no appropriate excuse for rape, and while Tereus confesses his "love" for Philomele, the audience is able to see, in sharp detail, what is about to happen without the ability to prevent it or comment on it. Yet, without the broad humour during scene five, a potential for legitimacy exists in Tereus' experience at the theatre, and by extension, his justification for "having" Philomele (Wertenbaker 43).

Also paramount in the comedic experience of the play is the conversation between the First and Second Soldiers in scene nineteen (Wertenbaker 58). The scene happens at a crucial point in the story, directly after Procne and Philomele make pleas to the "drunken god" for help, and right before we see Philomele murder Itys. Structurally, it lets the audience breathe and take a break from the onslaught of tragedy and conflict that has passed since the death of the Captain in scene twelve. The scene also allows the audience to see the soldiers in the direct action of the play, rather than as strictly commentators and storytellers. I spent a great deal of time working with the two actors playing the First and Second soldiers on making the scene light, playful, and fun, particularly at the beginning of the scene. Again, I wanted the Second Soldier's witnessing (or rejection of witnessing) of Itys' murder to be a surprise, perhaps even confusing at the end of the scene – but in order for such a set-up to work, the comedy had to be immediate, which was not happening in the early stages of rehearsal. During one rehearsal about three weeks into the process, I asked the actor playing the Second Soldier to tell the actor playing the First Soldier a dirty joke before they entered. I expected the scene to lighten instantly, which it did, but the soldiers entered laughing hysterically – everyone in the room was in hysterics by the time the soldiers started their text. It was a key moment in the development of the story, and established a generous permission of laughter for the audience.

Levity also became an invaluable tool for the final scene – a scene which plagued me for most of our rehearsal process. I did not spend a lot of time on scene twenty-one until the fourth week of rehearsal, not only because I wanted the option to allow its evolution through the formation of the rest of the play, but also because I could not quite make heads or tails of it. The first time I read the play, I interpreted Wertebaker’s final stage direction for Philomele, “*The NIGHTINGALE sings,*” as a sort of melancholy answer to Itys’ question because she does not have a concrete answer for him (Wertebaker 66). As our rehearsal process continued, I questioned my initial impulse repeatedly. Throughout the body of the play’s text, questions are established and reiterated as a necessity for defeating the cycle of violence; this is especially true when Tereus cuts out Philomele’s tongue – the ultimate act of tyranny and oppression. I was not entirely clear on how to communicate the importance of this during the final scene, until the actor playing Philomele voiced a vital observation when I asked the actors for their thoughts on the scene: she had the notion that the reason she sings to Itys instead of answering him with words was because she was, in fact, rewarding him – something established in Itys’ desire to hear Philomele sing at the beginning of the scene (Wertebaker 65). I knew that this revelation was the key I had been looking for, and in turn developed the idea that Philomele and Itys emerge from the metamorphosis playing a game. This was the hope for change and for the future that needed to exist at the end of such a dark, tragic, and all-too-common story. To end the play on a note of existential frustration and melancholy seemed to me to serve no purpose – without hope, without the potential for societal change there is no good reason to produce this play.

## **It Takes a Village: the contribution of coaches**

With the constraints of time set upon the rehearsal process, and with the acknowledgment that I am only one human being with a limited skill set, coaches were imperative within the rehearsal process. Coaches also helped to establish a collaborative tone within the rehearsal hall itself; because I did not see my role as a dictator, but as a facilitator, any and all ideas were welcome, shared, and tossed freely within our rehearsals. Actors would come to me with ideas for warm-ups, or character relationships, or visual ideas – all of which verified that we were considering all possible ideas as a company, creating an atmosphere of ownership, responsibility, and investment. This collegiality would prove to be crucial when the show opened, and I was no longer at the helm; the cast and crew committed to a level of ownership each night that is unparalleled in my career thus far.

I knew that I would need assistance with elements within the text, such as fight choreography and mask work. My former officemate Lindsey Zess-Funk spent a great deal of her graduate research on mask work – and because April and I were making such bold choices with the meta-theatrical elements of the text, the idea of enacting the Hippolytus play in mask seemed an almost natural choice. I asked Lindsey to teach a mask workshop to the actors in the Hippolytus play and the bird masks at the end of the show. Lindsey's workshop proved to be a vital process in assisting the hyper-theatricality of the Hippolytus play; in particular in helping the actors capture the style of the mask and delineating the stark differences between acting with and without the mask – a truly important distinction. Laryssa Yanchuk had been the fight director on several University of Calgary productions and came highly recommended. We had our first meeting in July; because of the intense nature of the violence within the play, I wanted to ensure that our fight director would be sensitive to both the needs of the text as well as the

actors. The meeting proved to be incredibly positive, and I felt confident in moving ahead with Laryssa as fight director. My instincts proved true, and I was very happy with the fights she created to help tell the story of violence, as well as her rapport with the students – we were all being taken care of.

I also knew that I wanted to implement movement within the bodies of both the male and female choruses. As an actor, I have taken enough movement to be able to move myself, but as a director, my experience with creating stylized movement is minimal. I had an idea of rigorous, militarized movement at the very beginning of the show for the male chorus, but had no concrete ideas for female chorus. Melissa Thomas spent four rehearsals working with the choruses. After I expressed my idea about the male chorus, she had a divine stroke of creativity in regard to the female chorus: if the men are trapped and confined by war, what if the women are trapped by societal ideals of beauty? She used the images of ancient Greek statues of the feminine form as the basis of movement in the female chorus and their journey toward relinquishing those ideals of the patriarchy, which directly mirrored my impulse for their overtly-sexualized and fetishized costumes, wigs and make-up (Figure 3). Melissa's instincts and impulses helped us create a movement vocabulary as a company, which we were able to refer back to and alter as we progressed through rehearsals and staging. I also asked Professor Val Campbell to teach a kind of team-building workshop, utilizing movement vocabulary to search for conflict and character non-verbally within scenes, as well as movement exercises incorporating male versus female binaries, as well as exploring the sense of other.

Lastly, because our production was to be staged in the University Theatre, I wanted to establish the importance of voice and clarity at the genesis of our rehearsal process. I asked my advisor, Professor Dawn McCaugherty to teach a vocal workshop, specifically for the purpose of

line-endings and vocal energy. I have found that most students, due to a very contemporary form of conversation, tend to diminish the ends of lines, making for muddy and unclear storytelling. Dawn taught a two hour workshop, providing the company with exercises and tools in which to combat lack of clarity. She also suggested, because of the sheer size of my cast, that we have a couple of vocal captains to help some of the younger and less experienced cast members maintain these new teachings. After our first vocal warm-up as a company, the appointed captains asked if it would be better to add two more captains, and divide the acting company into small groups of four or five. This was the nature of our work together; fabulous ideas shared with the group, followed by deep consideration of these ideas, leading to even better ideas. I also asked the guest vocal coach, Dawn Sadoway, to come in and assist with one-on-one coaching, which proved to be a crucial resource and time-saver. Because of these phenomenal women and their expert coaching, my project was in no way damaged by the tight time constraints, but instead triumphed in ways I could not have imagined.

### **The Final Piece: The audience, the witnesses**

As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, so much of my focus on this project had to do with the incorporation and inclusion of the audience as witnesses rather than casual observers. I cannot, then, correctly speak about the process of this project without discussing the audience. Regrettably, we did not have any previews as part of our performance run. In my previous experience, previews assist the company with adjusting to the audience as the last ingredient of creation, particularly in a production where direct address by actor to audience is a prominent feature of performance, as is the case with *Love of the Nightingale*. As such, opening night

proved to be a very large adjustment for the cast; suddenly there were hundreds of bodies where there had only been empty seats and a few members of design staff before. There was laughter in places the actors did not anticipate, not to mention the collective organic responses of live bodies, including crying and gasps of surprise, horror, or sadness. Our opening night proved to be the final dress rehearsal with the addition of our witnesses – who, till that point, had only been a theoretical idea and point of reference during rehearsals. Yet, this addition proved to be the most exciting, not only to me, but to the cast as well. The performances changed slightly and adjusted in new ways each night to accommodate for each new and different group of witnesses. Some nights, uncomfortable laughter was the norm, some nights it was tense silence, and some nights, it was a complete journey – raucous laughter which led to riveted speechlessness, which led to muffled sobs by the end. I attended all but two performances, which was, I admit, incredibly excessive and probably unnecessary; I cannot recall another production I have directed where the audience response was so unbelievably palpable. Our audiences really were witnesses. The responses after the show did not begin with an exclamation of judgement based on whether or not the show was “good” or “bad” – more interestingly, they almost always began with a personal statement of feeling – which I remain glowingly proud of several months later.

It was not until the addition of the audience that I fully understood what my intuition had been attempting to tell me since my first reading of the play – the experience of witnessing *Love of the Nightingale* sparked vital conversations. One actor told me that after her mother attended the play on opening night, she began talking about the events which led the family to flee a newly integrated South Africa in the early 1990s – a story that the actor had never heard before within her family history – and the violence and rape her mother had been faced with on a daily basis, all the while watching her two young daughters grow older, grow into potential targets.

Another actor told me that their mother was a victim of enforced female genital mutilation. Yet another actor's family member remarked that at ninety years old, she had never seen something so "true and moving" before. My own family member confessed two different occurrences of sexual assault inflicted on her in her youth, something which she had not verbalized to another family member previously. It was these confessions, revelations, and stories of personal history which led me to a fully developed understanding of my own powerful pull toward this play – the realization that art, for the sake of itself is not enough; that I, as a practitioner of theatre need to demand more from myself as a storyteller, from my collaborators, from my audiences. It was not until these conversations were happening in the lobby after the performance that I had an ultimate understanding of the importance of human recognition, empathy, and yearning for connection with one to the other. This is the power of *Love of the Nightingale*. This is the power of theatre.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTIONS

### **The Pain of Metamorphosis: Learning how to give birth in public...**

I mentioned at the end of the last chapter that our opening night was more like our last dress rehearsal with the addition of the audience. This is absolutely true, though my experience was much more heightened. It was one of giving birth in public. I spent the entire opening night weeping, without much of a solid reason as to why. I felt raw, exposed, and vulnerable in a way I had never experienced in such an overwhelming fashion. Suddenly, this very intense and personal process was now open for the world to see – to judge – and I was completely ill-equipped to handle the tsunami of emotions that followed. While I benefitted greatly from the personal anecdotes and stories that members of my cast and crew relayed from their friends and loved ones, I was also acutely aware of criticism – which, at this level of academia, is only natural, though nerve-racking all the same. The problem with being aware of this criticism was that no one was coming forward to me directly – I had to seek out responses on my own, a process which lends itself to an entirely different form of neuroses. The foundation of my reflections within this chapter is based both on my own observations as well as the responses I solicited from colleagues, professors, friends, and family members.

### **The “Problem” with Didacticism**

One word that continued to arise throughout my search for responses was “didactic”; that the play itself is inherently didactic. While often it was used in a positive connotation, it was also raised as a negative issue, as a hindrance to the telling of the story. During the United Way

benefit, which happened at our first Friday evening performance, there was a talk-back with several of the actors and myself after the show. It was a well-attended and lively event, quite contrary to my previous experience with talk-backs. One question early on came from a student who snidely asked what I did, as the director, to curb the didactic qualities of the text, either through design or interpretation. I was a bit taken back by the question – I had never considered didacticism in theatre to be a negative element, or something that needed to be curbed or reduced. In fact, theatre, at its very core is essentially didactic – the ancestors to human beings would re-enact the hunt for the woolly mammoth as a way to teach the younger generations what to expect, and what to be cautious of – this ensured species survival. I reiterated this to the young man, and added that within the text, Timberlake Wertenbaker does not answer any questions – she only asks them; every question in the script is a large systemic question about our society. Yet she does not ask these questions in order to manipulate or to lead or to preach, on the contrary, she asks openly and honestly because none of these questions have found an answer for thousands of years. I do not think the student was satisfied by my answer, but it was the truth from my perspective.

However, the shock of this question served as a springboard for my own line of analysis; had I missed something in the story? Were my instincts off? I thought back through my process, through my research, through my view of the play. I had told my cast before opening night that the shows where I always felt my best as an actor were the ones where I left everything on the stage, and gave the audience everything I could on that particular night – I held nothing back. When I think back to the process of the *Love of the Nightingale*, that is how I feel – as though I gave everything I could at this point in my life, at this time of my experience. I made large

choices and considered each choice both against my research and my view of the world as it is right now.

### **Figuring it Out Too Late, and What I Would Do Differently**

While I absolutely stand behind the process and my choices, I acknowledge, in hindsight, that there are elements that did not work as well as I had hoped, which is part of the risk of making bold choices in the first place. The consideration of these elements has been a huge part of my learning process and, while perhaps little failures in an otherwise successful production, the failures are the elements I have learned from the most.

Perhaps the biggest failure of the production was the design and use of the giant puppets during the Bacchae scene. This is no one's fault but my own; I did not discover what the action of the scene needed to be until the second week of performances. I was too focused on the puppets themselves, and worrying about the staging of the scene and Philomele's re-enactment of her rape and dismemberment. What I missed was the central action of Niobe attempting to stop Philomele's re-enactment, effectively trying to silence her one last time, though in an entirely new way. I think that to achieve this, the puppets needed to be figures that could be tossed and pulled and vigorously used in order to stage the struggle between Philomele and Niobe. Admittedly, I have never used puppets in a production before and was entirely naïve to the construction and practical application that would be required for their use. The construction of the puppets for the play were beautiful, but the mechanical design did not help achieve the physical action of the scene – they were not easy-on, easy-off implements, nor were they

strongly made to endure a struggle. If I were to start working on the play now, this is definitely the first thing I would alter.

I learned a wonderful lesson in following my instincts. During the rehearsal process, I had a moment of inspiration in moving the male chorus out into the audience during scene eight – the first break in the story of the play (Wertebaker 31). I also wanted to mirror the female chorus in their break from the play in scene twenty, bring the house lights to half power, and have the choruses in the aisles, speaking directly to the audience and asking them the fundamental questions of the play, removed from the world of the play. I felt this would justify the opening with the male chorus and their initial entrance through the aisles of the theatre.

When I brought this discovery to my designer, she warned that if we brought house lights up in the middle of the story (rather than at the traditional moment after curtain call), we risk losing the feel of the show, and the rejection of the rest of the play by the audience. This was something I had not considered, and it scared me. What April did offer was to place light on the four main sections of the audience, thereby illuminating them and implicating them, without breaking the established mood and ambience of theatrical lighting. I acquiesced to this compromise, but once I saw the effect in performance I knew it was not what I wanted. My impulse for a full break from the play in both scene eight and scene twenty was validated during a conversation with my father upon his first viewing of the production. He asked me about the content of those scenes, and what purpose they served in the body of the play. I told him about my idea of a visual break in the play to support the textual break in the story, and moving the choruses into the house. My father looked at me as though I was crazy, and I thought in that moment that I had made the right choice in altering my view. Instead he said, “Oh that would have been so much better!” While

this was one thread I did not weave thoroughly, the learning process reinforced that trusting my instincts is crucial in executing my vision.

Interestingly, the largest point of contention about the production seems to stem from the giant rocking platform. The opinions on this matter, however, are not ambiguous – they are either in fervent opposition to the platform or in staunch support of its design and use. For several individuals, the platform proved to be a giant obstacle and an awkward impediment that, as they observed, gave the actors more to work against than work with. For others, it was a beautifully inspired piece of design, aptly able to capture different images and serve as a transformational tool, orchestrating the story as it unfolded from a visual perspective. Yet, with these drastic responses in mind, I cannot in good conscience claim the platform as something I would change. It was a big and bold risk which we identified from the beginning of the process. Having never seen one on stage or ever worked with anything remotely similar, I wonder if those who are against the platform took more issue in my staging and operational use. If that is the case, I will stand by both my staging and my choice to take such a large design risk; we explored and experimented with new possibilities in both staging and execution, which is something I am considerably proud of. However I will concede, if given the opportunity, that I would like to see how a slightly smaller version of the platform would work – if it would be able to operate in the same way, if it would be able to rake a bit more steeply and drastically, while still being able to bear a sizeable amount of weight.

**“So here's to drinks in the dark at the end of my road...”**

There is no qualitative or quantifiable way to analyze everything I learned while working on this project, or to measure the enormous amounts of personal and artistic growth I experienced. This project was, in every way possible, a labour of love that grew from the very depths of who I am as a human being, and who I want to be as an artist. I have mentioned several times in the body of this document instances of feeling too small and fears of not being big enough to provide my village of a company with the tools and direction they would need to succeed and thrive. But I think the very act of creating this production proves the exact opposite; I was absolutely all that I needed to be. I was enough.

The sad realization that I arrive at in looking at this production in retrospect, is that I may never have the opportunity to direct a play of this scale and magnitude again; it is too large and too expensive for the majority of professional theatres to produce. Yet with this acknowledgement, I leave the University of Calgary knowing and absolutely believing that I will be able to direct *anything*, something I could not say with such certainty when I was accepted into this program. From the enormity of obstacles, to accentuating the hyper-theatrical, to detailed and thoughtful storytelling, I have gained more tools and understanding from this singular project than any other in my previous professional career. Perhaps most valuably, I take with me proof of the power of collaboration; of the recognition that alone I am limited and finite, but with a village, there is no such thing as impossible.

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**Fig. 1 The Set, showing the male space on the platform, and the female space, left.**  
Gavin Semple, 19 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 2 Utilizing large gestures in the Hippolytus Play.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 3 Ancient Greek statuesque poses of the female chorus.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 4 The physical hyper-masculinity of the male chorus.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 5** Example of diptych staging, simultaneous male and female spaces.  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 6** Tereus returns to Thrace, the men invade the female space.  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 7 The death of Itys, with examples of the hyper-sexuality of the Bacchae.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 8 Niobe and Philomele, survivor versus revolutionary.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct. 2012



**Fig. 9 The Bacchae with Puppets.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct 2012



**Fig. 10 The Metamorphosis with bird masks, recalling an idea of symmetry at the end.**  
Gavin Semple, 22 Oct 2012