

HOW CONTEMPORARY UK JEWISH THEATRE LOST ITS CARNIVAL AND HOW A
RETURN TO THE TRADITION OF THE PURIM-SHPIL COULD BRING IT BACK.

By

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Abstract

Petrified is a contemporary purim-shpil about a man turning into a Golem - a clay creature from Jewish folklore. It draws on traditions from the original form of Jewish theatre, sanctioned once a year at the Purim festival, as well as on the work of Leone de' Sommi (1525 – 1590), and his five act structure captured in the *Four Dialogues* of 1556.

The accompanying critical work will use Mikhail Bakhtin's examination of Françoise Rabelais's work to gain an understanding of the crucial role carnival played in the lives of the people, whilst making connections with the unique position Purim holds within Judaism. I will attempt to offer a definition of Jewish theatre, whilst exploring its tendency to veer towards a conservative realism that belies its origins; the UK perceptions of Judaism, its perceived association with Israel and the challenges in using the purim-shpil as a starting point to create a piece of contemporary theatre that can appeal to a secular audience. I will then document how I have attempted to address these issues through the development of *Petrified* and how it might be possible to create a richer and more varied theatrical culture within Judaism in the contemporary UK.

For Kelly, Reuben, Raphy and Latka.

Without their love and support this could never have happened.

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Everything being a constant carnival, there is no carnival left. – Victor Hugo

INTRODUCTION

‘Jewish theatre in the UK is experiencing an interim period of voice with Arnold Wesker feeling old fashioned and nostalgic and with a new generation trying to find their place’.¹ So said Rachel Mars when asked whether Jewish theatre in contemporary Britain is flourishing. Mars is a writer and performer and works closely with JW3, a Jewish organisation aiming to bring Jewish arts and culture to the community. This thesis will argue that one way for that new generation to find its place is to return to its origins in the festival of Purim, the Jewish version of carnival, and all its associated anarchy and chaos. It will analyse the current ‘interim period of voice’ and the conspicuous lack of carnival therein, before demonstrating how my play, *Petrified*, explicitly seeks to redress that lack by drawing on Judaism’s theatrical heritage and updating the purim-shpil for the contemporary stage.

Purim, the Festival of Lots, occurs on the fourteenth Adar, normally falling in March or April in the Gregorian calendar. On that day the Jewish community gathers to hear from the *Megillah* - the book of Esther - the final, and possibly most curious, book of the Jewish Bible. The *Megillah* tells the story of Esther, a young woman who used her position in the court of King Ahasuerus to foil a plot to murder the Jews of the land. In Chapter 1, I will explore the many peculiar aspects of these celebrations, focusing particularly on the purim-shpil.² Originally a parodic reading of the *Megillah*, the purim-shpil, as described by Joel Berkowitz, ‘helped to establish a largely seasonal or occasional performance tradition in Yiddish culture’.³ This tradition remained the chief form of Jewish performance up until the late eighteenth century

¹ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

² The word purim-shpil or purim spiel is taken from the Yiddish meaning Purim play. I will be using the phraseology as used by Dr. Eli Rozik for consistency.

³ Joel Berkowitz, ‘Writing the History of Yiddish Theatre’, in *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, ed. by Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), pp. 1 – 25 (p. 2).

development of the *Haskalah*⁴ when there finally emerged ‘a stable, professional Yiddish theatre’.⁵ Scholars such as Eli Rozik and Ahuva Belkin have written extensively on the relationship between Jewish theatre, the purim-shpil and carnival, but this thesis will reveal how that relationship is no longer at play in contemporary UK Jewish theatre.

In his introduction to *Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World*, Michael Holquist explains what carnival was and the vital place it occupied in society:

Carnival must not be confused with mere holiday or, least of all, with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic. The sanction for carnival derives ultimately not from a calendar prescribed by church or state, but from a force that pre-exists priests and kings and to whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival.⁶

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and literary theorist, explains how carnival celebrated a ‘temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order’.⁷ But more than that, it was the ‘true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal’.⁸ In Chapter 2, through exploring contemporary UK productions of Jewish theatre, I will demonstrate how there is little connection between these productions and the ‘indissoluble and essential relation to freedom’⁹ that once existed in the purim-shpil. In the UK today, one can find numerous productions influenced by other traditions and cultures, religious or otherwise. Ancient Greek theatre, commedia dell’ arte, morality plays, to name a few, so

⁴ The *Haskalah* was a movement that encouraged a more expansive outlook from European Jewry, leading them out of the shtetl and into the study of secular subjects and assimilation within the wider community. For more information read Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, (Liverpool: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014).

⁵ Berkowitz, p. 2.

⁶ Michael Holquist, ‘Prologue to Mikhail Bakhtin’, in *Rabelais and His World*, Translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. xviii.

⁷ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁸ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁹ Bakhtin, p. 89.

regularly impact adaptations of texts that resonate with twenty-first century audiences. However, when it comes to Judaism, which according to Michael Billington, has created such a 'vigorous theatrical culture',¹⁰ there has been a disappointing lack of contemporary adaptations thereof.

There are numerous reasons for this and Chapter 2 will first attempt to explore how exactly to define Jewish theatre. Through references to performances and interviews with practitioners working in theatre today, I will explore whether Jewish theatre is successful within the UK and what challenges it might be facing. Judi Herman, for example, journalist and contributor to *Jewish Renaissance* magazine, insists, there is often a desire among Jewish practitioners to 'not stay in the Ghetto'.¹¹ Whilst she is implying that these individuals don't wish to be defined by their past, John Nathan, theatre critic for *The Jewish Chronicle*, suggests that this is because 'defining yourself in that way in a country that is very good at defining the other and keeping the other at bay, reduces your scope as an artist'.¹² These viewpoints will be explored in more detail in order to determine why there is still very little sign of the carnivalesque within the vast majority of UK Jewish theatre compared to Jewish theatre produced in countries such as Israel, Canada and the United States.

There are significant challenges inherent in the process of looking to past forms to influence modern theatre, and Chapter 3, will examine some of these. It will focus on the portrayal of women in the purim-shpil and the way the festival has historically been used as a justification for and incitement towards violence. The final two chapters of the thesis, then, will illuminate how I sought to negotiate these issues and challenges when developing my own play, *Petrified*. I will chart my attempt to engage with components and conventions surrounding the purim-shpil, whilst seeking to make the play resonate with a contemporary, secular audience. Through looking to the past, I will attempt to develop a clearer understanding of the

¹⁰ Michael Billington, 'J is for Jewish Dramatists', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/feb/14/jewish-dramatists-modern-drama>> [accessed 06 April 2018].

¹¹ Judi Herman interview conducted on 08 July 2015.

¹² John Nathan interview conducted on 29 October 2015.

components and conventions surrounding the purim-shpil. Whilst an examination of the contemporary will explore the decisions taken by writers and directors when drawing on older theatrical forms in order to create effective works that can appeal to a wide audience.

In a society where Jewish practitioners are trying to find their place, both culturally and artistically, the answers lie in past traditions. Judaism has a rich theatrical heritage that has largely been untapped by contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK. It has forgotten its carnival routes and *Petrified* is an explicit attempt to bring it back.

Purim itself is a span of time in which rules are overturned and high is traded for low.
– Shari Troy.

1. PURIM, THE PURIM-SHPIL AND CARNIVAL

When asked to comment on the current state of Jewish theatre in the UK, numerous practitioners have suggested Jewish theatre is experiencing somewhat of a challenging time. Playwright, Julia Pascal, said it was ‘negligible’¹³ whilst Josephine Burton, director of DASH Arts, said it was ‘underwhelming’¹⁴ and Ellie Ruhan, Festival Director of Leeds based JFest International, claimed ‘there is not enough of it’.¹⁵ The reasons for this will be unpacked in Chapter 2, but this thesis will argue that one way for Rachel Mars’ ‘new generation [...] to find their place’,¹⁶ would be to look back to the origins of Jewish theatre, the purim-shpil, and to create an original work that draws upon its customs and traditions.

In this chapter, I will detail the unique position that the festival of Purim occupies within the Jewish religious calendar. It is the Jewish version of carnival and as such involves all the anarchy and chaos associated with those celebrations. I will explore what carnival is and its potential to influence Jewish theatre by referring to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* and through the exploration of writers, such as Eliezer Sigul, Shifra Epstein, Eli Rozik, Harold Fisch and Shari Troy. I will then examine how the Jewish festival of Purim eventually led to the beginnings of theatre in the form of the purim-shpil and how this differed from the path taken in the development of theatre from Christian ritual; significant, because this path, taken through parody and reactions to the often aggressive neighbouring communities, so

¹³ Julia Pascal interview conducted on 22 December 2015.

¹⁴ Josephine Burton interview conducted on 22 December 2015.

¹⁵ Ellie Ruhan interview conducted on 08 July 2015.

¹⁶ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

shaped the form the purim-shpil would take. I will investigate other influences on Jewish theatre such as *commedia dell'arte* and will conclude with a description of the vibrancy of Purim and discuss why it can be so valuable for contemporary Jewish theatre.

There is nothing like Purim in the whole of Judaism. It is a festival led not by the Rabbis and sages, but by students, the *Bahurim*; a festival that pokes fun at every form of establishment; that sees those in power ridiculed and those who are the lowest of the low, raised up to assume the role of kings. With Purim, the established rules and regulations of how the world works are in flux. It is a festival of inversion where cross dressing and excessive drinking of alcohol, normally prohibited, are not just a by-product of the celebrations, but are actively encouraged. Eliezer Segal, religious studies scholar, cites the Babylonian Talmud, the repository of the oral law within Judaism. It records the famous dictum of the noted sage Rava Megillah 7b: 'A man is obligated to get drunk on Purim to the point where he can no longer distinguish between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordecai"'.¹⁷ The festival commemorates the deliverance of the Persian Jews from the evil Haman. For most Jewish people, Purim is an excuse to dress up, have parties and annually sees scores of young, Jewish girls wearing their best party dresses to become Queen Esther. Yet the Purim story involves sexual politics and blood-soaked revenge on a vast scale. It is a story that created carnival festivities as a way to stand up to the marginalisation and fear experienced by the Jewish community on a daily basis 'by asserting the identity of an oppressed Jewish minority culture within a dominant Gentile culture.'¹⁸ It is a story that fully embraced the anarchy of carnival and it is through exploring this that the true benefit to contemporary Jewish theatre can be found and developed.

The story of Purim comes from the book of Esther, the twenty-fourth and last book of the *Tanach*, the Jewish Bible. It tells the story of King Ahasuerus, possibly Xerxes I of Persia (485 – 465 BCE). During a period of prolonged drinking, he orders his wife Vashti to dance and strip in public, but she refuses and is subsequently

¹⁷ Eliezer Segal, (n.d.) 'Purim, Parody and Pilpul' <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/Shokel/880219_Purim_Parody.html> [accessed 15 January 2013].

¹⁸ Ahuva Belkin, 'The Scarf and the Toothache', in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, ed. by Efrat Tseelon (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-113 (p.101).

dismissed. This highlights, what is referred to with some sarcasm as the 'benevolent hierarchy' of Judaism by Rabbi Judith Hauptman and will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.¹⁹ A beauty contest is organised to find a new wife and the king chooses Esther, a young girl who lives with her uncle Mordecai. She does not reveal that she is Jewish. Shortly afterwards, Mordecai foils a plot to kill the king and his deeds are noted. The king's Prime Minister, Haman, takes a disliking to Mordecai because the latter will not show him due reverence and decides to kill all the Jews in the Empire. Having got permission and funding from Ahasuerus he casts lots (in Hebrew, *purim*) to choose the date on which to do this. Suffering from insomnia, the king has his records read to him, discovers what Mordecai once did and asks Haman how best to honour him. Thinking that the king is referring to him, Haman suggests that he should be dressed in the king's robes and be paraded round for others to honour. Haman's horror at realising the king meant Mordecai is further compounded the next evening when at a feast, Esther confides in the king that Haman is planning to kill all the Jews, which includes her. Haman and his sons are hung instead, Mordecai appointed prime minister and all of the Jews' enemies, throughout the land are killed - a brutal end to a story that is celebrated across the age range in every Jewish community to this very day.

For Rabbinical Judaism the tale highlights the intercession of the divine at the crucial moment. God works behind the scenes to ensure his chosen people make the choices necessary to ensure their survival.²⁰ Rozik, on the other hand, looks at the story from a secular viewpoint and explains that the story of Purim is most likely to be 'a piece of romantic fiction'.²¹ He outlines several pieces of evidence for this argument, among them the structure of poetic justice within the story and the fact that Mordecai and Esther bear striking similarities to the Babylonian deities Marduk and Ishtar. He concludes that the story was probably adopted whilst the Jews were in exile in Persia and subsequently adapted to resonate with the Jewish populace.

¹⁹ Dan Rickman, 'Does Judaism discriminate against women?' in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/10/judaism-women-feminism-orthodox>> [accessed 18 December 2017].

²⁰ For further exploration of this, see Rabbi David Fohrman's series of videos, *Purim Memories* <<https://www.alephbeta.org/course/lecture/memories>> [accessed 21 May 2014].

²¹ Eli Rozik, *Jewish Drama & Theatre – From Rabbinical Intolerance to Secular Liberalism* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), p. 123.

Purim is a festival of contradictions and it is from these many contradictions that Jewish theatre was born and can yet again be explored in order to create a dynamic and exciting performance style for the contemporary age.

The *Megillah* found in the *Mishnah* – an edited record of the oral *Torah* codified around 200 CE by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi - documents the laws pertaining to the festival. Judaism is a religion based on laws. In fact, Jewish philosophy dictates that the doing of an action is often far more important than the belief in the action, ‘One might say that the “deed” is more important than the “creed”’.²² There are 613 *Mitzvot* – good deeds – by which a Jew must live and there is not a single occurrence in Jewish life that cannot be related to a law from the moment of waking through to sleep that night. Each festival has countless laws concerning the way it must be commemorated. But the laws of Purim are unusually brief, barely filling half a page on the website of *Ohr Somayach*, a Jewish outreach organisation based in Jerusalem. Look up any other festival and pages and pages of intricate laws are detailed. The organisation lists the laws of Purim as such, one must read the *Book of Esther* in public from an officially recognised scroll with the intent to share the story. The congregation aren’t allowed to talk ‘from the time of the blessings before the reading, until the end of the blessings after the reading’.²³ However, ‘It is customary to make noise when the name of Haman is mentioned’.²⁴ There are no rules governing the type of parchment used; smudged or torn letters do not disqualify it; certain rabbis allow you to skip the first chapter and the first four verses of the second, whilst others argue that you can start from the third chapter; both men and women can read from it and it can be read whilst standing or sitting. Harold Fisch, Israeli literary scholar, further adds, ‘Even if the reader dozes off in the middle, the reading is still valid’.²⁵ Purim is not regarded as a Sabbath unlike other Jewish

²² MJL, ‘Mitzvah: A Commandment’, in *Myjewishlearning.com* <<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/mitzvot-a-mitzvah-is-a-commandment>> [accessed 25 October 2017].

²³ ‘Laws of Purim’, in Ohr Somayach <https://ohr.edu/holidays/purim/laws_and_customs/1508> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²⁴ ‘Laws of Purim’, in Ohr Somayach <https://ohr.edu/holidays/purim/laws_and_customs/1508> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²⁵ Harold Fisch, ‘Purim and the Cultural Poetics of Judaism’, *Poetics Today*, 15.1 (1994), 55-74 (p.62).

holidays and 'people are allowed to work and women to busy themselves with household chores. It is permitted to light fire as well as to travel'.²⁶ As Fisch states when you study the rules connected with Purim: 'They display a curious feature, namely, a kind of calculated laxity, in striking contrast to the punctilious observance' of pretty much all of the rest of Judaism.²⁷

Purim is the only festival in the Jewish calendar that does not feature the presence of God or take place in Israel and from all this evidence, one might conclude that Purim is not a festival of particular significance or importance. However, Shifra Epstein, a contemporary scholar, states that this isn't the case. She observes how sixteenth century Kabbalists in Safed linked Purim with the most holy day in the Jewish calendar, *Yom Kippur*, expressing 'the belief that in the messianic days to come there would be no need to atone for one's sins on Kippurim, as it would become a day of enjoyment like Purim'.²⁸ So in Purim, we find very few rules that match with any other aspect of any other form of Jewish festival. It is clear that the 'disorder'²⁹ of Purim has originated somewhere else.

Epstein draws attention to the fact that running through the story of Purim is 'the theme *venahafokh hu* ("and it was reversed"), referring to the reversal of events when a plot against the Jews turned into a defeat for their enemy Haman'.³⁰ Shari Troy, in her study of a very specific custom exclusive to the Bobover Hasidim, develops this idea of the community being able to 'experience those feelings of freedom and cathartic release caused by temporarily letting go of their everyday rules and regulations [...]by engaging in activities which they perceive as those of the non-Jew'.³¹ Fisch offers a useful conclusion to these observations in stating that 'What we have in Purim, therefore, is a mini-Carnival or, more correctly, a symbolic

²⁶ Rozik, p.124.

²⁷ Fisch, p.55.

²⁸ Shifra Epstein, 'The "Drinking Banquet" (Trink-Siyde): A Hasidic Event for Purim', *Poetics Today*, 15. 1, (1994), pp. 133-152 (135).

²⁹ Shari Troy, 'The Live Frog as Prop in the Purim Play of the Bobover Hasidim', <http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=682> [accessed 10 January 2013]

³⁰ Epstein, p.135.

³¹ Shari Troy, 'The Live Frog as Prop in the Purim Play of the Bobover Hasidim', <http://www.jewish-theatre.com/visitor/article_display.aspx?articleID=682> [accessed 10 January 2013]

Carnival not an alien style adopted and naturalized, but an alien style symbolically recalled and rendered as part of a larger pattern'.³² These observations are crucial for the development of this thesis. For if carnival and Purim are so inextricably linked and Purim is the one area of Judaism allowing a form of theatre and Purim is still celebrated in every Jewish community, why is there seemingly so little carnival content in contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK? Might looking back to its theatrical origins, encapsulating the permissiveness and freedoms contained within, aid Jewish theatre in trying to find the 'place' that Mars and Burton have suggested it has lost? It is this that I wish to explore through the writing of my play, *Petrified*. However, before this can be done, it is first necessary to understand what carnival actually is and so I will examine what Bakhtin determines are the crucial elements of carnival and how they relate to Purim.

Carnival

For Bakhtin everything stems from the concept of laughter. It is the basis which gives 'form to carnival rituals',³³ and these rituals are 'completely deprived of the character of magic and prayer; they do not command nor do they ask for anything'.³⁴ Bakhtin takes all types of carnival festivities and discusses them as three distinct forms, ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions and various genres of billingsgate and it is useful to examine how Purim relates to all three.

Ritual Spectacle

Bakhtin notes that all forms of 'protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe',³⁵ and that they were distinct from more official ceremonies. What Bakhtin explains is that the time of carnival belongs to 'an entirely different sphere. [...] To the borderline between art and life'.³⁶ Carnival is a celebratory time that revels in food and disguise, in the use

³² Fisch, p. 69.

³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 7.

³⁴ Bakhtin, p 7.

³⁵ Bakhtin, p5.

³⁶ Bakhtin, p 7.

of obscene language and in the reversal of hierarchies. The Roman Saturnalia, the German *Fastnachtsspiele*, the Feast of the Fools, the Feast of the Ass and continuations of 'the fertility and renewal rites that agrarian societies performed at the beginning of the year',³⁷ all highlight how 'misrule was thus set within a strict context of rule'.³⁸ The religious authorities granted special dispensation to allow misrule to exist for a certain time before returning to normal, which then established the status quo for the rest of the year. Carnival embodies everything about the people, removed from their normal existence under authoritarian diktats and it is in this period of unique time that the parallels with Purim can clearly be found.

Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* is discussed by Kenneth Craig who, like Rozik, treats the story of Purim as a novel, whilst still making literary links with the characteristics of Bakhtin's carnival. Craig explores the 'many elements, even in a subdued form, of carnival life' that exist in the Purim story.³⁹ Numerous examples can be found from 'the clownish crownings and uncrownings, the lavish banquets, the contrast between official and non-official culture, the persistent fool, rogue, and simpleton, the theme of death and dying, and so forth'.⁴⁰ One can reference the numerous feasts and banquets held by King Ahasuerus and compare them with the eating exploits of Gargantua and Pantagruel in Rabelais's work as 'Feasting is part of every folk merriment. Not a single comic scene can do without it'.⁴¹ Bakhtin considered the market square to be of utmost importance, viewing it as being 'a world in itself, a world which was one; [...] the center [sic] of all that is unofficial'.⁴² Similarly the comparison can be found in the equivalent of the Purim story, 'Every

³⁷ Efrat Tseelon, 'Reflections on Mask and Carnival', In *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, ed. by Efrat Tseelon (Routledge: New York, 2001), pp. 18 – 38 (p. 27).

³⁸ Rozik, p.124.

³⁹ Kenneth Craig, *Reading Esther – A case for the Literary Carnavalesque* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995), p.37.

⁴⁰ Craig, p.37.

⁴¹ Bakhtin, p 279.

⁴² Bakhtin, pp 153 – 154.

day Mordecai would walk around in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared'.⁴³

Comic Verbal Compositions

For Bakhtin the comic literature of the Middle Ages, written either in Latin or in the vernacular, was 'more or less the expression of the popular carnival spirit'.⁴⁴ He details several texts as examples of this literature. *Cyprian's Supper* offers a 'peculiar festive and carnivalesque travesty of the entire scriptures'.⁴⁵ The *Grammatical Virgil Maro (Vergilius Maro Grammaticus)* is 'a semiparodical learned treatise on Latin grammar which is at the same time a parody of the scholarly wisdom and of the scientific methods of the early middle ages'.⁴⁶ Bakhtin lists many examples of such work all of which 'demanded from their authors a certain degree of learning',⁴⁷ and all of which 'brought the echoes of carnival laughter within the walls of monasteries, universities and schools'.⁴⁸

In Judaism, through the festival of Purim, the exact same thing was happening. Rozik records a long list of writers in twelfth-century Spain who were writing parodies of sacred texts for 'the more a text was known and the more it was sanctified, the better it suited parodic intent'.⁴⁹ He particularly singles out Menachem ben Aharon who wrote a parodic version of a prayer for the eve of Passover. During the fourteenth century two texts stand out, the works of Klonimus ben Klonimus and his *Masekhet Purim* (sometimes referred to as *Tractate Purim*) and the anonymous *Book of the Prophet Habakkuk*; the name being a distortion of the prophet Habakkuk, meaning wine. Examples of parodies continue into Italy and into the next century with Leone de' Sommi (1525 – 1590), a Jewish-Italian theatre practitioner

⁴³ Craig, p 70.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, p 13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, p14.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Rozik, p129.

who lived in Mantua during ‘a period of relative ease for the Jewish community’.⁵⁰ I shall explore his work in greater detail in Chapter 4, but it is worth noting scholar Richard S. Sarason’s observations. In his introduction to *A Comedy of Betrothal*, de’ Sommi’s one surviving play written as a ‘Purim entertainment’,⁵¹ Sarason notes the ‘parodies of Jewish learning and exegesis that [...] were part of the prescribed observance of the holiday’.⁵² He documents through an extensive list, examples in the play that not only parody sacred texts, but also refer back to the original parodic texts written previously:

The humorous name “Rabbi Balaam ben Bibi” (in the original Hebrew text; here rendered “Rabbi Balaam the son of Rabbi Shik-Kor [Drunkard]”) is found in *Tractate Purim* and refers both to the pagan soothsayer of Numbers 22ff. and to the act of drinking on Purim.⁵³

Just as with Bakhtin’s carnival, Purim similarly allowed the creation of texts that at any other point in the year would have been scandalous. They were permissible due to the Purim atmosphere and as Bakhtin observes, the spirit of carnival and its ‘temporary liberation is ever present’.⁵⁴

For Rozik, parody reflects more than any other genre within literature ‘the basic duality of the psychical mechanism of catharsis, in the sense of release of tension’;⁵⁵ a description that again finds parallels between Bakhtin’s concept of carnival and the festival of Purim. Sir James George Frazer, in his fascinating, though at times, contentious book, *The Golden Bough*, (1922) focuses on the inversion of society at these times, by explaining how ‘masters actually changed places with their slaves and waited on them at table; and not till the serf had done

⁵⁰ Rozik, p. 103.

⁵¹ Leone de’ Sommi, Ebreo, *A Comedy of Betrothal (Tsafoth B’dihutha D’Kiddushin)*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred S Golding (Ottawa: Carlton Renaissance plays in translation, 1988), p 61.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *A Comedy of Betrothal*, p 62.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin, p 10.

⁵⁵ Rozik, p129.

eating and drinking was the board cleared and dinner set for his master'.⁵⁶ Like Rozik, he observes that Haman represents:

The temporary king or mortal God who was put to death at the Sacaea; and his rival Mordecai represents the other temporary king who, on the death of his predecessor, was invested with his royal insignia, and exhibited to the people as the God come to life again.⁵⁷

These observations are fascinating in understanding where the tradition of the purim-rabbi may have come from.⁵⁸ The purim-rabbi is the embodiment of *venahafokh hu* that is so important to both Purim and carnival. Rozik observes that the purim-rabbi 'enjoys the typical license (and attached qualifications) allowed to the Fool' from the rituals involved in the purim-rabbi's election to the giving of the sermon.⁵⁹ Epstein observes many other borrowed customs:

The selection of the Purim Rabbi with that of the Italian carnival pope; animal and transvestite costumes with those of the Roman festivals of Calendes and Caliades; gambling and inversions of rank with Saturnalia; and burning Haman in effigy with Near Eastern and European folk magic.⁶⁰

Efrat Tseelon explains how during medieval carnival, the elevation of the grotesque – 'Those who don't belong' - to a position of power, replaces the rise of the slave.⁶¹

⁵⁶ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough, A Study in Magic and Religion* (Oxford: New York Press, 1922), p. 631.

⁵⁷ Frazer, p. 661.

⁵⁸ It is important to note, that whilst Frazer offers a lot to this study that there are worrying aspects in his writing. He suggests that in the Purim tradition of illustrating the defeat of Haman, that the Jews were actually carrying out human sacrifice well in to the modern era. It is a particularly uncomfortable comment due to the fact that it smacks of anti-Semitism and the blood libel - a centuries old lie that Jews murder Christians, particularly children, to use their blood in religious rituals. For some reason Frazer chooses to ignore the fact that the symbolic beating of Haman, in other words hanging Haman in effigy, is a far more likely and less anti-Semitic interpretation of an acknowledgement of what happened to the Mock King in ancient times.

⁵⁹ Rozik, p.157.

⁶⁰ Epstein, p. 133 – 134.

⁶¹ Tseelon, p.28.

It is clear to see how Rozik can conclude that there is much to find in the 'carnavalesque intent of Purim'.⁶²

Various Genres of Billingsgate

The third element of Bakhtin's carnival is the genres of speech found in the marketplace. He explains how when two friends converse, the form of their verbal intercourse also changes. It becomes more informal as 'abusive words are used affectionately, and mutual mockery is permitted'.⁶³ Carnival adopts this informal interaction, only this time that informality extends to those in ecclesiastical positions all the way up to God. Not that carnival was merely an excuse to be rude and break the rules. To dismiss the performances based on their focus of the body, sex and death would be belittling something that has far more depth. These were 'far removed from pornography'.⁶⁴ In fact they were symbols of life because they were based on 'the zone of the genital organs, the fertilizing and generating stratum. Therefore, in the images of urine and excrement is preserved the essential link with birth, fertility, renewal, welfare'.⁶⁵ The aim was indeed to insult and also to make people laugh, but those very acts had a higher purpose for 'how necessary to the pursuit of liberty is the courage to laugh'.⁶⁶

This can again be paralleled with the festival of Purim. Folklorist Jean R. Freedman talks about humour being 'a form of courage – a way of focusing the mind on action and not on fear'.⁶⁷ Purim is a holiday that 'actually requires one to be joyful'.⁶⁸ Very often that joy comes from the irreverent and the outrageous, what Bakhtin would call, billingsgate. Plays such as *Eyn sheyn purimshpil* – A Lovely Purim Play, 1697 – includes lines such as 'I stick my finger in my arse. Homen licks

⁶² Rozik, p.168.

⁶³ Bakhtin, p.16.

⁶⁴ Bakhtin, p 146.

⁶⁵ Bakhtin, p 148.

⁶⁶ Bakhtin, p. xxiii.

⁶⁷ Jean R. Freedman, 'The Masquerade of Ideas: The Purimshpil as Theatre of Conflict', in *Jewish Cultural Studies, Volume Three: Revisioning Ritual: Jewish Traditions in Transition*, ed. by Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011), pp. 94 – 132 (p. 125).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the dung'.⁶⁹ And the Akhashveyresh-shpil, 1708, 'Happy New Year, stinking eggs. May the King's balls grow and swell'.⁷⁰ The act of laughter, insult or mockery towards those seen to be untouchable, whether based on class, status or power is vital. It is an opportunity for those at the bottom of the rung to assert their power, albeit for a temporary and often authorised period of time. This is no better exemplified than with a memory from Solly Gaynor of a purim-shpil he saw in Dachau, in 1945. It was organised by a fellow prisoner known as 'Chaim the Rabbi':

Wearing a paper crown, clad in a blanket decorated with paper stars, he began his call for a purimshpil by shouting, 'Haman to the gallows! And when I say, "Haman to the gallows", we all know which Haman we're talking about!' Gaynor played Mordechai [sic] in the production, and recalls that 'we all ended up dancing in the snow'.⁷¹

Numerous scholars, such as Belkin, Rozik, Fisch and Troy, have made these connections and they are crucial in understanding Purim's relationship to carnival. The purim-shpil was effectively the birth of theatre within the Jewish tradition and this thesis will go onto show how this understanding can so influence Jewish theatre in the UK today. But first, I will explore how the purim-shpil developed within Judaism through the Purim celebrations.

The Development of Theatre

Rozik states that 'Jewish drama and theatre were created quite late in comparison to their history in other cultures'.⁷² The *Tanach* contains the occasional story of dressing up or performing, such as Rebecca disguising Jacob to help him deceive his father and obtain Esau's birthright, Genesis 27. 16 or Joab directing a woman to act as a mourner in order to lead King David to meet his rebellious son, Absalon, 2 Samuel 14. 2. There are also accounts of performance being used as an aspect of religious expression, such as Miriam leading the women in song and dance after

⁶⁹ Ahuva Belkin, 'The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil', in *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, ed. by Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), pp. 29 – 43 (p. 29).

⁷⁰ Belkin, *The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil*, p.30.

⁷¹ Freedman, p. 101.

⁷² Rozik. P1.

successfully fleeing from the Egyptians across the Red Sea, Exodus 15. 20. However, as Yoni Oppenheim, a theatre director and associate editor of *The Jewish Play Catalogue*, explains, ‘Judaism’s strict adherence to monotheism, modesty, and *mitzvot* – designed to connect people to their creator through action – stands in obvious contradiction,’ to many other cultures.⁷³ In Judaism, theatre wasn’t a celebration or a way of praising God. It was a representation of all that was wrong in the world around them.

For Judaism, the theatre came to represent ‘the oppressive Hellenistic and Roman cultures and regimes’.⁷⁴ The nations that dispersed the Jewish community, the Babylonians (586 BCE), the Romans (70 CE) and those that threatened assimilation such as the Greeks, all had forms of theatre. Therefore Judaism largely prohibited it. Several references have been taken to justify the reasons behind this prohibition, such as: ‘The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God (Deuteronomy 22, 5)’.⁷⁵ And in the Babylonian Talmud, *Avoda Zara* 18b, there is the prohibition for a Jew to be in the ‘seat [in the company] of the scornful [of fools]’.⁷⁶ Further to this, Rozik references Karl Young in stating that ‘the Synagogue service too does not feature any impersonation’.⁷⁷ However, for the Church it was different and it is useful to chart briefly, theatrical development within Christianity, in order to highlight just how different a path Judaism took.

Donald Clive Stuart records a passage from the *Concordia Regularis* drawn up by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, in the tenth century, marking the beginnings of the crossover between Church and Theatre:

⁷³ Yoni Oppenheim, ‘The Origins of Jewish Performance’, in *My Jewish Learning* <<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-origins-of-jewish-performance/>> [accessed 13th August 2015].

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Rozik, p.1.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Rozik, p.121.

While the third lesson is being chanted, let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention and sit there quietly with a palm in his hand. This brother is to play the part of the angel.⁷⁸

He discusses how ‘the serious plays of the Middle Ages developed by a steady process of adding scenes to such dramatized rituals’.⁷⁹ Therefore from readings about the birth and death of Christ, theatre slowly developed. The altar of the church became the first piece of scenery and over time it was used to represent other things ‘such as the Holy Sepulchre in the *Concordia Regularis* or the manger in *The Three Kings*’.⁸⁰ It is important to note that the primary aim of all of this theatre was didactic; to ‘fortify unlearned people in their faith’.⁸¹ It was concerned with ‘the struggle of Heaven against Hell for the erring soul of weak human beings baffled by the enigma of life’.⁸² Allardyce Nicoll charts a similar journey, from the liturgical dramas of the church through to the mammoth Christmas and Easter plays of the Middle ages which ‘essayed to present the whole of scriptural story from the Creation of the world and the Fall of the Angels down to the Harrowing of Hell and the coming of the Antichrist’.⁸³ The function of the purim-shpil, as will be explained, was very different.

Jewish theatre ultimately developed from parody and that was only possible due to the authorities giving ‘their blessing to a day of established misrule’.⁸⁴ Rozik writes in detail about the ‘umbilical relationship between the Askenazi purim-shpil and the Sephardic tradition of parody’.⁸⁵ I have already referenced writers such as

⁷⁸ Donald Clive Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art* (New York and London: D. Appleton, 1928), p.153.

⁷⁹ Stuart, p.155.

⁸⁰ Stuart, p.160.

⁸¹ Stuart, p.159.

⁸² Stuart, p.168.

⁸³ Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963), p. 177.

⁸⁴ Rozik, p. 127.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Menachem Ben Aaron and Klonimus ben Klonimus and these were just the tip of the iceberg in what were a plethora of parodies within Judaism

The Alhambra Decree (1492) expelled the Jews from Spain, and as they spread out throughout Europe, so too did their tradition of parody. The *Masekhet Purim* became more and more popular despite widespread criticism by the rabbinate and over time the connection between parody and Purim became ever closer. It soon became traditional to read a short parodic text on the eve of the festival. Yiddish became the language for these parodic works and they became firmly established components of the holiday. Over time, the purim-shpil emerged from these parodic texts. It was a different journey to Christian theatre and had a far closer connection to carnival and 'the jongleurs and fools'⁸⁶ providing after dinner entertainment that Nicoll documents. As it developed, it absorbed other forms of theatre that existed at the time, eventually becoming a form of theatrical performance in its own right. Judaism had a tendency to react to the customs of surrounding cultures and it would be useful to explore this further in order to gain a clearer picture about what the purim-shpil was.

Ever since the destruction of the second temple (70 CE), the Jewish people have been scattered across the world. The diaspora (from the Greek, meaning scattered) has defined and shaped Judaism just as much as any other factor. In some ways, Judaism is a religion and a culture that defines itself by the other, whether that be adopting culture or deliberately doing something to the contrary so as to differentiate themselves. A humanist study of the *Torah* laws would argue that a great deal of the rules and regulations were quantified by what surrounding communities were doing. In other words, we will do what we do precisely because the others do it like this. Laws of kashrut for example would fit into this category. Rabbi Aaron Goldstein explains:

But for all the health reasons lavished on these customs surrounding not eating pork and seafood, the real reason lies in the fact that these were foods

⁸⁶ Nicoll, p.158.

that other communities ate, so to maintain their distinct identity, Jews did not.⁸⁷

These laws were crucial, for as Belkin explains, they ‘not only regulated behaviour among Jews, but also signalled and guaranteed membership of the Jewish community and its exclusions’.⁸⁸ However, these attempts to differentiate and isolate were not fool proof. For as much as the rabbinate attempted to protect their people from the outside world, practices inevitably permeated their community and it was often more prudent to adopt an outside custom and re-create it in a Jewish image rather than ban it outright. Over centuries, Judaism adopted theatrical and carnival customs from the surrounding communities. Chief among these, was *commedia dell’arte* and in order to get a better sense of the *purim-shpil*, one should explore what it took from this Italian style of performance.

In *The History of Purim Plays*, Yiddish historian, Jacob Shatzky refers to the Purim play as being the Jewish *commedia dell’arte* and it isn’t hard to find evidence to support such a claim. Hebrew studies scholar and linguist, N.S. Doniach, references an illustrated *Megillah* in the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, which contains a vignette illustrating ‘a dance of masked figures reminiscent of the Italian actors of the *commedia dell’arte*. Some of the entertainers resemble the harlequin who carries a stringed instrument which is partly mandolin and partly viol’.⁸⁹ A similar image can be found in the Museum of Italian Jewish Art in the same city.⁹⁰

Shatzky writes how the ‘prototype of the Purim players is discernible in the *Badhan*, the Jewish wedding jester and his mono-dramatic performances’.⁹¹ It was a tradition at a Jewish wedding, and still is, to provide special entertainment for the bride and groom, which fulfills ‘the commandment to delight the bride and groom and

⁸⁷ Rabbi Aaron Goldstein interview conducted on 29th April 2018.

⁸⁸ Ahuva Belkin, ‘The Scarf and the Toothache’, p.103.

⁸⁹ N.S. Doniach, *Purim, or, The Feast of Esther: an historical study* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), p.132.

⁹⁰ ‘Italian Purim: the Megillah in Costume’, <<http://ijamuseum.org/event/italian-purim-the-megillah-on-costume/>> [accessed 14 April 2018].

⁹¹ Jacob Shatzky, ‘The History of Purim Plays’, in *The Purim Anthology*, ed. by Philip Goodman and Abraham Wolf Binder (Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 357 – 368 (p. 357).

dance with them on their wedding day'.⁹² These individuals were not just performers, but rather 'a repository of Jewish religious culture and oral tradition, invested with the role of transmitting songs and music, moral messages, and wise counsel along with the fundamentals of Judaism'.⁹³ Again, a useful similarity to *commedia dell'arte* can be found with experience and routines being passed through family dynasties, from father to son within a company, long before scripts were committed to paper. The first full purim-shpil script is generally accepted to be '*Ein Schon Neu Achaschweresch Spiel – A new Ahasuerus play*. It was first printed in 1708 at Frankfort-om-Main in Johann Jakob Schudt's – a Christian historian (1664 – 1722) - *Judische Merkwurdigkeiten*'.⁹⁴

The comparisons continue. Nicoll writing about the *lazzi* in *commedia dell'arte* wrote:

In the classical mime the *tricae*, or "tricks", of the actors had eked out the inherent dullness of many a plot, and these *tricae*, whether through a direct line of tradition or not we cannot tell, found their counterpart in the *lazzi* of the Italian comedians.⁹⁵

Shatzky observes something similar within the purim-shpil: 'The traditional Purim play was, as a rule, interspersed with comical interludes. The comic characters of the interludes were not connected structurally within the play'.⁹⁶ And Belkin continues, explaining how performers used: 'comic fragments, local allusions, jokes, liturgical parody, songs and a medley of gibberish, as well as sketches on local rabbis, doctors, and cantors'.⁹⁷ There were similarities of character as well. The fool was ever popular in the purim-shpil and 'Mordecai, the protagonist of justice and righteousness, became in some plays the fool Mondrish, or the "Smart Alek" who

⁹² J Baumgarten, 'Purim-Shpil', in *Yivo Encyclopaedia* <<http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Purim-shpil>> [accessed 18 January 2013].

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Doniach, p.160

⁹⁵ Nicoll, p. 219.

⁹⁶ Shatzky, p.363.

⁹⁷ Belkin, *The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil*, p.38.

dispelled the dramatic tension by his buffoonery.⁹⁸ A charlatan doctor became a hugely popular character, particularly in Poland and one only needs to look at Il Dottore, a gross caricature of learning and pomposity, to find obvious connections. And as well as the development of stock comic characters, so too developed stock-comic motifs such as the nakedness of Vashti and her tail, further explanation of which will be offered in Chapter 3.

In *commedia dell'arte*, Arlechino was constantly armed with his slapstick, ready to bring it crashing down at every opportunity to simulate violence. In the *purim-shpil*, the item of choice was the Grogger which was, as A. W. Binder explains:

A combination of two primitive instruments: the “bull-roarer” and the “scraper.” The bull-roarer consisted of a long stick at the top of which was attached a string and at the end of the string a thin board. When this was twirled, it made a weird noise. The faster it was twirled the higher the pitch of the noise.⁹⁹

There was also the scraper, consisting of ‘notched shell, bone or gourd which was scraped with a rigid object’.¹⁰⁰ This was put to powerful use whenever Haman’s name was mentioned and referenced a more primitive time when noise was used to scare away the evil spirits. However, one significant difference according to Doniach was that whereas ‘the *Commedia dell’Arte* was generally a true mirror of manners, The *Purimspiel* [sic] was to become more and more an acrid satire on communal life’.¹⁰¹

In this way the *purim-shpil* became more and more of a theatrical experience. As the Jews, spread throughout the world, absorbing culture, ritual and stories, Jewish theatre started to develop, but only on one day of the year. Their celebrations begin to ape neighbouring communities around them and although traditions may have developed in slightly differing ways, there is no avoiding the debt that Judaism owes to carnival and theatre, such as the *commedia dell’arte*. Now with an

⁹⁸ Shatzky, p.364.

⁹⁹ A.W. Binder, ‘Purim in Music’, in *The Purim Anthology* ed. by Philip Goodman and Abraham Wolf Binder (Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 209 – 222 (p. 211).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Doniach, p.159.

understanding of the development of the purim-shpil and its connections to carnival and other theatrical traditions established, I will attempt to create a picture of the energy created by the carnival day of Purim. This understanding will provide greater evidence of why so much can be taken from it to influence contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK.

The Purim-shpil

Doniach, writing in 1933, provides a compelling, albeit romantic, description of the purim-shpil. There is no suggestion of the tenuous position of Eastern European Jewry; no mention of the horrific pogroms that killed Eastern European Jewry in its thousands in Kiev, Kishinev, Odessa, to name but a fraction. Nevertheless, the passion of his description can reveal how important a time of the year this was and shed light on the energy and vibrancy of these traditions.

Early morning and once the *Megillah* has been read and breakfast consumed, the townsfolk rush into the town square. 'The Square is a hubbub. It is alive with men in every variety of fancy dress. The orchestra is assembled there too'.¹⁰² An eclectic mix of instruments warm up, from the dudelsack, a type of bagpipe, to cymbals and drums, whilst the men of the town give 'to his fellow's dress that final touch, that tasteful alteration, which will lend grace to his dress and humor [sic] to his masking'.¹⁰³ Then the parade begins, led by the *marshelik*, the jester, on his fiddle. It is a parade that includes all the key players from the Old Testament, Noah and his animals, Joshua and his warriors come to take down the walls of Jericho, Goliath with David running between his legs to strike him 'lustily behind'.¹⁰⁴ The parade winds through town, visiting every house, demanding gifts of wine and food. A list has already been drawn up of how much each house should donate and with each donation, the songs get dirtier and the atmosphere becomes more raucous. Finally, they arrive at the home of the wealthiest man in town, who has been playing host to all the key members of the community. It is here that the day's chief entertainment will begin; the purim-shpil. And it is this energy and passion; this sense of anarchy

¹⁰² Doniach, p.140.

¹⁰³ Doniach, p.141.

¹⁰⁴ Doniach, p.142.

and chaos; this freedom given license by the carnival atmosphere that can so positively help contemporary Jewish theatre find its 'place'.¹⁰⁵

There is no denying that 'Jewish theatre was born in the spirit of a holiday'.¹⁰⁶ When one considers the environments that the Jewish people have lived in for thousands of years it makes sense; always the stranger, the outsider; never to be fully trusted and so often the mistrust and scapegoating would lead to death and destruction. For the wandering Jew, Purim became synonymous with life, freedom and deliverance. Throughout Jewish history, special Purims have been appointed to commemorate moments of delivery. 'Festivals were inaugurated not only to commemorate a timely release from tyrannical rulers, but also to celebrate an escape from such impending disasters as plagues, earthquakes and conflagrations'.¹⁰⁷ To outline just a few:

The Padua Purim, for example, observed on 11 Sivan (June, July), celebrates Jews' deliverance from a major fire in Padua, Italy, in 1795...The Hitler Purim, observed in Casablanca, Morocco, on 2 Kislev (November, December), commemorates the city's escape from German domination during World War II.¹⁰⁸

This ability to laugh in the face of continual hardship; to have a form of expression that so encapsulates the freedom of carnival even when surrounded by aggressive and oppressive forces is yet another contradiction in a long line of contradictions. But those contradictions are so key to being Jewish. As Maria, the non-Jewish servant in Elie Wiesel's 1979 play, *The Trial of God*, observes: 'you Jews love to do things upside down. You laugh when you're crying; you cry when you're

¹⁰⁵ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Rozik, p.154.

¹⁰⁷ 'Special Purims', in *The Purim Anthology* ed. by Philip Goodman and Abraham Wolf Binder (Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 14 – 38 (p. 211).

¹⁰⁸ *Holidays, Festivals, and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, Fourth Edition, 2010* <<http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Special+Purims>> [accessed 18 December 2013] – other such Purims exist such as The Baghdad Purim, observed on 11 Av (August) which celebrates the conquest of Baghdad by the Arabs and the defeat of the Persians; the Snow Purim, observed on 24 Tevet (December, January) which celebrates the major snowstorm in Tunis that caused extensive damage and injury elsewhere but left the Jewish quarter of the city untouched.

laughing'.¹⁰⁹ It is 'the peculiar logic of (the "inside out") a *l'envers*, of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear'¹¹⁰ that Bakhtin explores in Rabelais's work. The stories of The Wise Men of Chelm do the exact same thing. These stories tell that when God created the world, he sent an angel out on the planet with a sack containing all the wise and stupid people. His aim, to scatter them so that no one place would have a surplus of either. But the angel flew too close to a mountain and ripped the sack, causing all the stupid people to fall into one place. And in that one place grew a town by the name of Chelm. These stories of Chelm glory in skewed logic as author and playwright, Isaac Bashevis Singer writes:

After many, many years the Chelmites became civilised. They learned to read and write, and such words as "problem" and "crisis" were created. The moment the word "crisis" appeared in the language, the people realised there was a crisis in Chelm.¹¹¹

In this particular collection of stories, Singer tells how the Chelmites decide to go to war with a neighbouring shtetl in order to detract from the fact they have no food. They are led by their wisest sage Gronam Ox and accompanied by his council of five sages, Dopey Lekisch, Zeinvel Ninny, Treitel Fool, Sender Donkey, Shmendrick Numskull and their secretary Schlemiel, for 'rulership and wisdom have always gone together'.¹¹² This particular collection - there are many both written and verbal - deserve a much greater analysis and could easily take their place alongside the subversive writings of Rabelais. However, what they show is another example of the almost gallows humour that is integral to Judaism. The book ends with the funny, yet thought provoking lines, 'The future is bright. The chances are good that someday the whole world will be one great Chelm'.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God*, (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1979), p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin, p 11.

¹¹¹ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Fools of Chelm and their History*, translated by the author and Elizabeth Shub (London: Abelard-Schuman Limited, 1973), p. 4.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Singer, p 73.

Judaism is a pragmatic religion and a culture that acknowledges its place in the world and how the world works and creates its laws accordingly. And with that pragmatism comes a humour that creates laughter, but also sustains and nurtures in the face of a far from funny world. It is absurdist. Martin Esslin, in his seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd*, references Freidrich Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* trying to ‘with dignity, confront a universe deprived of what was once its centre and its living purpose, a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless – absurd’.¹¹⁴ Judaism could say the same about its entire history; how do you maintain a religion and a belief in God in a world where even after Auschwitz, thousands of Jews returning to their villages were slaughtered by their neighbours who had moved into their homes? You either give up entirely or you laugh; for what is Mel Brooks’ interpretation of Hitler as a hippy, camp, clown in the *Producers*, but a form of victory and a way of championing the fact that he didn’t succeed and the Jews are still very much here?¹¹⁵

The purim-shpil captures this absurdist element so perfectly. Doniach, writes about a performance of a purim-shpil that sees all the male students in the village dressing as the Chief Rabbi and his advisors making very clear that ‘one of them is deaf, the second dumb and the third blind, any of which afflictions would disqualify an intending dayyan from holding office’.¹¹⁶ He is writing about a human being’s need to laugh in the face of adversity and to express themselves by ridiculing those in positions of power and authority. Antonin Artaud, in his 1938 book of essays, *The Theatre and its Double*, equally captured the importance of laughter, explaining why theatre is declining, because, ‘on the one hand it has lost any feeling for seriousness, and on the other for laughter. Because it has broken away from solemnity, from direct, harmful effectiveness – in a word from Danger’.¹¹⁷ Through bypassing the psychological or Apollonian elements of the human mind and by going

¹¹⁴ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Pelican Books, 1967), p. 399.

¹¹⁵ In Michael Y. Bennett’s *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd*, he actually argues that plays of the Theatre of the Absurd are not dark at all, but in fact are positive and life affirming.

¹¹⁶ Doniach, p.148.

¹¹⁷ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti (London: Alma Classics Ltd, 2013), p. 29.

straight to the metaphysical or Dionysian aspects, Artaud wanted to create a theatrical experience that supplanted all the false airs and graces that we assume in everyday life. He was 'impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall'.¹¹⁸ He wanted to rediscover 'the true sense of humour and laughter's physical, anarchic, dissolving power'.¹¹⁹ Artaud was seeing in laughter the same freedoms that Bakhtin saw in laughter as a means of freeing people 'from all religious and ecclesiastic dogmatism';¹²⁰ and that Freedman saw in humour as being a 'tool of disorder'.¹²¹

Conclusion

I am not suggesting Jewish theatre need incorporate Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. However, as an example of a quest to create a theatre that captures 'the profoundly anarchic spirit'¹²² of humanity, Artaud's writings can be useful in considering what Jewish theatre can learn from carnival. More and more companies today are looking at ways to push the boundaries of the theatrical experience - companies such as *Punchdrunk* and writer directors such as Oscar Blustin and Anna Soderblom with their *Hammer House of Horror Live* production are creating completely immersive productions; practitioners like Simon McBurney and Complicite continue to explore methodology in order to create 'the most imaginative theatre to be found anywhere'.¹²³ But this is what the Purim festival and the purimshpil are all about, the 'catharsis' referenced by Rozik brought about through the 'anarchy' of Artaud. To think that Jewish theatre owes its origins to something as freeing as Bakhtin's market place is exciting. To discover that fundamental to Jewish theatre, is 'the laughter of all the people [...] gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives',¹²⁴ is a truly inspiring

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Artaud, p.29.

¹²⁰ Bakhtin, p.7.

¹²¹ Freedman, p. 125.

¹²² Artaud, p.29.

¹²³ Complicite <<http://www.complicite.org/company.php>> [accessed 15 April 2018].

¹²⁴ Bakhtin, p. 11 – 12.

concept. It should be found in Jewish theatre today, yet, as will be explored and developed in Chapter 2, Jewish theatre in the UK seems to bear little if any connection to its origins. However, before this can be explored further, it is necessary to first properly define exactly what Jewish theatre in the contemporary UK actually is.

For me the defining feature of Jewish artistic expression is the understanding that comedy and tragedy aren't opposites but twins, two sides of a coin whose co-existence needs no explanation.– Amy Rosenthal.

2. JEWISH THEATRE IN THE UK

It is the argument of this thesis that contemporary UK Jewish theatre is trying to find its place and that inspiration can be found by looking back to its origins in the purimshpil, highlighted by the creation of an original play, *Petrified*. As outlined in the previous chapter, the 'irresistible'¹ carnival spirit once integral to the annual ritual Purim performance, can open up a gateway to 'perceive the world in its laughing aspect'.² This would capture 'the profoundly anarchic spirit'³ of these parodic performances and by doing so enable it to move away from its tendency towards domestic, realist, conservatism.

However, there are some vital questions that must be resolved, firstly what exactly is Jewish theatre and secondly what the condition of said theatre currently is in the UK in terms of its critical, financial and boundary pushing success. To determine the former, I will look at definitions as laid out by a number of scholars and will then explore whether these are corroborated in statements gathered through interviews with Jewish practitioners working in the UK today. As for the latter, I will look at some of the challenges facing the development of Jewish theatre and will then focus on specific performances as an indication of how it particularly tends to veer towards a conservatism which is at odds with the origins previously covered.

¹ Ben Taylor, *Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Library, 1995), p. 44.

² Taylor, p. 44.

³ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti (London: Alma Classics Ltd, 2013), p. 29.

A Definition for Jewish Theatre

Satisfactorily offering a definition of Jewish theatre is not straightforward. *The Drama Review* written in 1980 states the following:

For many people, Jewish theatre is synonymous with Yiddish theatre. For others, it signifies the contemporary Hebrew- language theatre of Israel. There are more extreme views, such as all theatre created by Jews is Jewish Theatre or only religious Judaic-influenced productions make up Jewish Theatre.⁴

However, this led to contact from ‘individuals, frequently angry ones’,⁵ who were far from happy at what *The Drama Review* had written. It is a topic that has the potential to anger by simply asking the question. Italian, Jewish playwright, Enrico Fink when asked, replied, 'Are we simply giving in to a demand for "ethnicity" by choosing to segregate ourselves in a cultural ghetto, so that our art may be more readily accepted - and bought -by the audience?'.⁶ Edna Nahshon, in her introductory essay to Jewish theatre, pinpoints several reasons as to why it can be such an emotive topic. It is due to ‘the intersection of the broad, slippery and continuously evolving concepts of “theatre” and [of] “Jewishness” or Judaism”, both of which reflect changing realities, perceptions and agendas’.⁷ In other words, in her view, the answer is extremely hard to determine when Judaism is continuously debating, often with great passion, whether it is in fact a religion, a culture or both due to it lacking ‘geographic and linguistic underpinnings’.⁸

Her introduction outlines the many publications that have tried, and in her opinion failed, to define Jewish theatre. She begins with encyclopaedias, however, quickly concludes that most encyclopaedias ‘shy away from the fuzziness inherent in the term and either avoid it altogether, or, when offering an entry, tend to

⁴ M.G, ‘Jewish Theatre Issue’, *The Drama Review*, 24. 3 (1980), 2-4 (p.2).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Julia Pascal, ‘Creating Space for Jewish Theatre’, *Jewish Quarterly*, 50.3 (2003), pp. 73-76 (p. 73).

⁷ Edna Nahshon, ‘Introductory Essay: What is Jewish Theatre?’, in *Jewish Theatre: A Global View*, ed. by Edna Nahshon (Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 1-11 (pp 1 – 2).

⁸ Nahshon, p 2.

immediately subdivide it into separate units'.⁹ *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (2003), leads the reader off to separate categories of Judio, Teatro and Yiddish theatre, whilst *The Encyclopaedia Judaica* offers an extensive history but never gives a definition. Nahshon documents a number of articles, conferences and institutions from the French *Perspectives* through to Bar-Ilan University, that have all attempted to find a definition. In 2005, Mira Hirsch, then president of the AJT – the Association of Jewish Theatres - in New York acknowledged this was a question that arose at every single AJT conference she'd attended:

For each one of us [. . .] Jewish Theatre had its own definition. For some—a theatre based on spirituality, for others—theatre originating in Jewish texts, for many more—theatre with a culturally-specific connection to a people, a history, and a tradition.¹⁰

Nahshon states that none of these definitions are 'academically satisfying'¹¹ and it is not hard to agree. The language based argument is flawed as E. Harris observes, 'even the linguistic frontiers are not clearly defined',¹² whereas Yiddish theatre is only one type of performance under the umbrella of Jewish theatre. For any play involving Jews - be they writers, directors, actors, characters - to qualify as Jewish theatre, is too broad. Judi Herman asked, 'Is *Volpone* with Henry Goodman, Jewish' solely due to the religion of its lead actor?'.¹³ Furthermore, Jewish theatre simply being about Jews could then reasonably include anti-Semitic works and so 'authorial intent would need to be introduced into the formula'.¹⁴ Despite none of these commentators producing a clear answer, they are still helpful, for in qualifying what Jewish theatre is not or to be accurate, qualifying the many things it could be, it may become possible to construct a definition.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nahshon, p 7.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Judi Herman interview conducted on 08 July 2015.

¹⁴ Nahshon, p 4.

Eli Rozik, writing in *Jewish Drama and Theatre* (2013), is far more definite about what he considers Jewish theatre to be. He states that a piece of theatre is Jewish if it contains the following:

(a) the medium of theatre; (b) a Jewish or Judaized narrative; (c) a Jewish set of beliefs and/or values; (d) a Jewish language, including nonverbal codes shared by playwrights, actors and spectators; and (e) an obvious Jewish author (playwright or director).¹⁵

However, it is important to note, he documents the origins of theatre in Judaism through to modern Israeli society. Nahshon's definitions are drawn from conference papers and writings from France, the USA, Vienna. In other words, neither of them give any major focus to work in the UK. Therefore, I will make use of Rozik's criteria, but will qualify them with reference to interviews with UK practitioners and responses of audiences in this country, thus allowing development of a useful definition.

The Medium of Theatre

Rozik defines theatre as a text that 'describes a human or other interaction by means of indexes of actions imprinted on the bodies of actors'.¹⁶ These indexes can be verbal or nonverbal and using the subject of speech act theory, states that a speech act is when language is used for performing speech that indicates action. Theatrical speech acts are therefore 'imprinted images of real speech acts'.¹⁷ He claims the theatrical medium is neutral in terms of its cultural representation and as such cannot be identified as Jewish or otherwise. It is 'an instrument of thinking and conveying thinking'.¹⁸ In other words, cultures and styles are imposed on the medium rather than there being a specific medium depending on the culture. This is a logical argument as a book is a book regardless of the words or images that it contains or who put it together. The four remaining elements, according to Rozik, are specific to each culture.

¹⁵ Rozik, p.2.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rozik, p.3 – for further examination of these theories read Peter Wilfred Hesling Smith, *Speech Act Theory, Discourse Structure and Indirect Speech Acts*, (Leeds: The University of Leeds, 1991).

¹⁸ Ibid.

A Jewish or Judaized Narrative and a Jewish set of beliefs and or/Values

Rozik describes the former as being part of the 'Jewish cultural baggage'.¹⁹ As for the latter, he states they are those that are 'shared by Jewish authors and spectators'.²⁰ Since the narrative of Judaism is inextricably linked with its beliefs and values, I believe it is justified to explore these two headings simultaneously. But in attempting to understand Jewish ethics, it must be understood that 'in the last three millennia of Jewish existence this yardstick has undergone drastic changes'.²¹ This echoes Nahshon's statement that Judaism is made up of continually changing realities, perceptions and agendas. The last two hundred years alone, with the Jewish Enlightenment, Zionism, the Holocaust, to name but a few culturally defining events, means that it is very difficult to find a general definition of what this narrative and these values may be. However, through speaking to UK practitioners, it will be possible to get a sense of what is contained in this cultural 'baggage' and to therefore determine whether Jewish theatre in the UK corresponds with Rozik's criteria.

Ellie Ruhan defines Jewish theatre as a 'display of identity and culture within the acting world; a celebration of an identity in whatever form it takes; an education of identity to either Jewish or non-Jewish audiences'.²² This certainly seems to marry with Rozik's criteria whilst introducing a more altruistic aim, that of education. This reflects a fundamental value of Judaism, namely that the Jewish people should be like a 'light unto the nations – ohr lagoyim'.²³ The explanation of this phrase, first appearing in Isaiah 22. 1, is a complex one. Some rabbis, such as Rabbi Joshua Cahan, explain the phrase to mean 'we are the custodians of Torah, of a deep rich tradition that has things of great import to teach the world about how we as mere mortals can strive to walk in God's ways'.²⁴ Others, such as Rabbi Michael Zedek

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rozik, p.4.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ellie Ruhan interview conducted on 08 July 2015.

²³ *Jewish values online* <<http://www.jewishvaluesonline.org/665>> [accessed 21 May 2018].

²⁴ Ibid.

believe it means the Jewish people must 'inform, inspire and uplift others'.²⁵ Though, he adds that the absence of a definite article in the phrase means Jews are not the only ones with this responsibility. But the idea of Jewish theatre being something that has a duty to educate is one picked up by writers such as Deborah Freedman. In *Jewish Renaissance Magazine* (2005), she wrote that Jewish theatre should 'reflect and illuminate'²⁶ the world. And there are examples of this practice being carried out by Jewish theatre makers working in the UK today.

In 2012, the production company *Tall Stories* decided, as their Christmas production, to create a piece around Daniel Handler's Hanukkah story, *The Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming*. Olivia Jacobs (joint artistic director) spoke about how 'We live in troubled times and I really hope there is the opportunity for people to watch a show that is about fitting in and having a place, [...] No matter what faith'.²⁷ This sentiment was further noted by Laura Thompson of *The Telegraph*, who referred to the show as being a 'gently educative little Christmas story'.²⁸ Anthony Sher's *Primo* (2005) about Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, is another example of theatre exploring the cultural baggage of Judaism in order to educate, inform and illuminate. John Heilpern writing in *The Observer* states that the play compels 'us to listen to things we know and will never know'.²⁹ But to define Jewish theatre solely as educative is to present a rather narrow and possibly worthy image of what this genre can be.

Playwright Diane Samuels is no stranger to creating theatre that educates - *kindertransport* has been produced all over the world since its London premier in 1993 – but offers something new. She states that Jewish theatre is 'an expression of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nahshon, p 7.

²⁷ Judi Herman, 'A tall story about a small latke', in *Jewish Renaissance* <<http://jewishrenaissance.org.uk/archive/latke.html>> [accessed 9 July 2015].

²⁸ Laura Thompson, 'The Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming, The Roundhouse, review', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9746102/The-Latke-Who-Couldnt-Stop-Screaming-The-Roundhouse-review.html>> [accessed 9 July 2015].

²⁹ John Heilpern, 'Anthony Sher's Primo Levi: Can the Holocaust Be Staged?', in *The Observer* <<http://observer.com/2005/07/antony-shers-primo-levi-can-the-holocaust-be-staged/>> [accessed 20 July 2015].

someone's psyche from their heritage or acquainted in their own lives'.³⁰ And so for Samuels, Jewish theatre should contain 'an irreverent, dark appreciation of how you deal with being oppressed'.³¹ Theatre that is so influenced by the darkness in Jewish history is the opposite to Ruhan's definition of a theatre that should be a light unto nations, but highlights how values and narrative are so inexorably linked. Jewish performance has so often been associated with comedy and it is interesting to explore whether this irreverent darkness is an essential element of the Jewish narrative and of its values.

Dark humour is present in a great deal of Jewish work. Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews* premiered in Bath in 2014, transferred to the West End, then embarked on a UK tour. The play focuses on brothers, Jonah and Shlomo – who calls himself Liam – and a cousin, Daphna. The fourth cast member is Shlomo's non-Jewish girlfriend, Melody. Following the death of a beloved grandfather, the family members fight over who should have his necklace hidden during his time in a concentration camp. *The Spectator* review observed the rhetoric used throughout as being 'tear gas oratory',³² and Michael Billington, in *The Guardian*, thought the play had 'something of the verbal firepower of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*'.³³ This is a clear example of Samuel's definition, but she goes further saying that within the 'dark and wounded humour' inherent in Jewish work is a 'desire to heal'.³⁴ Here, perhaps is some of the light that Ruhan touched upon. *The Spectator* echoes this sentiment stating how 'writer Joshua Harmon skilfully varies the emotional mood and finishes each hate-filled passage with a moment of tenderness that unites the characters in a brief

³⁰ Diane Samuels interview conducted on 22 July 2015.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Henry Hitchings, 'Bad Jews at the Arts Theatre Reviewed: Strange, Raw, Obsessive and Brilliant', in *The Spectator* <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts/theatre/9486982/bad-jews-arts-theatre-review-strange-raw-obsessive-and-brilliant/>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

³³ Michael Billington, 'Bad Jews Review – Scalding Rhetoric Between Hissing Cousins', in *The Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/aug/13/bad-jews-review-joshua-harmon-jewish-identity>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

³⁴ Diane Samuels interview conducted on 22 July 2015.

interlude of goodwill'.³⁵ So, Jewish theatre can be dark, savage and combative, can veer from one extreme emotion to the other, often within a sentence, but with an ultimately positive viewpoint. Samuels again: 'It is a theatre created by the ones who survive and are determined to survive'.³⁶ I captured this in my Radio 4 play, *From A To B*, 2003. The play follows Joanne as she is forced to travel in a people carrier with her estranged family to bury the aunt who raised her. The play is about loss and abandonment, should be very sad, but is full of humour, because as Joanne's uncle David explains:

You've got to move on, get to the next stage. That's what life's about. You move from A to B and then to C and so on. Things don't get resolved, not really. You've just got to try to keep moving.³⁷

This dichotomy between darkness and light is worth exploring further. It is useful to note a response from Mel Brooks, American film maker and comedian. On being asked by the *New Yorker* why he had played Hitler so many times, he replied 'I work well with the man'; but in more serious fashion is well aware that 'telling bad borscht-belt jokes defeats them'.³⁸ This co-existence between comedy and tragedy can be found again and again in works by Jewish writers. Mike Leigh's 2005 production of *Two Thousand Years* is set in North London and follows a middle class family through the course of a year. When Danny and his wife Rachel discover their son Josh is wearing a *kippah* (skull cap) and praying, 'they react with all the concerned horror of concerned parents who discover their beloved child is shooting

³⁵Henry Hitchings, 'Bad Jews at the Arts Theatre Reviewed: Strange, Raw, Obsessive and Brilliant', in *The Spectator* <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/arts/theatre/9486982/bad-jews-arts-theatre-review-strange-raw-obsessive-and-brilliant/>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

³⁶ Diane Samuels interview conducted on 22 July 2015.

³⁷ Robert Messik, *From A to B*, p. 22.

³⁸ Culture Desk, 'You've Got Mel', in *The New Yorker* <<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/youve-got-mel>> [accessed 27th December 2015]. The Borscht-belt was the nickname given to the summer holiday camps in the Catskill mountains of New York. These camps were popular among New York City Jewish families and also provided the training ground for many Jewish comics and performers.

up heroin'.³⁹ There is an absurdist element to this play akin to the dependency of Beckett's Clov and Hamm or the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot*:

Estragon Well, shall we go?

Vladimir Yes, let's go.

(*They do not move*).⁴⁰

For Leigh the family are the epitome of the ridiculous in the sense that they love each other, but cannot stand to be with each other, but can't leave each other. Linda Grant, writing about the play in *The Guardian*, sums up the definition of Jewish family life perfectly: 'Argument is at its heart, and complaining and taking sides and storming out in a huff, and falling out with people and not speaking to them for years'.⁴¹ It is at once funny and tragic and seems to epitomise Rosenthal's point.

Judaism is a culture that has defined itself through being oppressed, through being a stranger in a community and it is yet again an example of how narrative has led onto values. Rachel Mars explains that the 'minority figure is a Jewish place to be – wisecracking, intelligent and on the outside'.⁴² It is reasonable therefore to suggest that Jewish theatre will have elements influenced by three millennia of being the stranger and the scapegoat; think of Shylock, think of Fagin. I would not suggest contemporary Jewish theatre is simply portraying Jewish characters as victims, but do believe the plays will be, if not wholly defined by this, certainly heavily influenced by the fact that one doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. An example being in Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass* (Tricycle, 2010). At its climax Anthony Sher's Phillip Gelburg is killed by a massive heart attack, a physical representation of all his repression and denial. As Anthony Sher captured this moment, hurling himself about

³⁹ Charles Spencer, 'Terrific – This is Vintage Leigh', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3646590/Terrific-this-is-vintage-Leigh.html>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

⁴⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (1955), in Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 7 – 88 (p.52).

⁴¹ Linda Grant, 'It's Kosher', in *The Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/sep/20/theatre.religion>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

⁴² Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

the stage, almost tearing himself in two in order to draw breath, the audience's first response was to laugh.

One final comment from Josephine Burton (co-artistic director of Dash Arts) is useful in defining what exactly Jewish values are and how they contribute to Jewish baggage: 'If pushed to state my personal opinion, I would narrow my definition to focus on artistic experiences which created work inspired by Jewish festivals, ritualised Jewish life and religious communities today'.⁴³ Rozik concurs with this statement by concluding that he is not interested in religious elements per se but more in 'the values of the Jewish audiences contemporaneous to the analysed play-scripts or performance-texts'.⁴⁴ So far then, the material produced through interview corroborates Rozik's theory.

A Jewish language, including nonverbal codes shared by playwrights, actors and spectators

Rozik's next category presents a clear issue for Jewish theatre in the UK. He considers Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish as Jewish languages and when the purimshpil was performed it would have been in one of the above languages. However in the contemporary UK this would seriously hamper an audience's understanding. Outside of an ultra-orthodox Jewish community, the vast majority of an audience would not speak those languages. But, as mentioned, Rozik is categorising Jewish theatre by tracing the history of Jewish performance up to the modern day in Israel and therefore one needs to step into the wider diaspora to determine what replaces Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish?

Mars explained that when she writes pieces that have no connection to Judaism such as her 2011 production, *Tomboy Blues – The Theory of Disappointment*, 'people say it's really Jewish. It's slightly inescapable'.⁴⁵ She glibly remarked this was probably to do with the way she looks, but when pushed, her answer was more considered: 'It's to do with rhythm. The rhythm of storytelling'.⁴⁶

⁴³ Josephine Burton interview conducted on 02 October 2015.

⁴⁴ Rozik, p.5.

⁴⁵ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The way characters speak has arisen numerous times in interviews. The idea of a Jewish play being identified by the way the characters speak, the rhythms and cadences used, can be argued to be a manifestation of language and therefore does correspond to another one of Rozik's criteria. Neil Marcus, Managing director of The Stable which develops and produces musical theatre, claims 'there is a cadence that regardless of language is still Yiddish'.⁴⁷ Indeed after a performance of my play, *Pineapple* in 2006, an absurdist piece about phantom pregnancies and pizza, I was asked by an audience member where I was from as I did not write like an English person. It would seem the rhythm of the dialogue is as important as content and theme. Continuing this thought, Samuels made the point that 'English culture is more restrained' and that Jewish culture shares a lot with the Irish in terms of 'our love of talking and storytelling and music'.⁴⁸ For her, Jewish work 'comes from the heart and the spirit. A sharp wit is brought to it; saying what hurts and what you care about; it is sensual'.⁴⁹

Ryan Craig, whose play *Risky Business* – about the rubber trade in London - played at the *Hampstead theatre* in 2017, warmed to this line of argument. He explained that in Jewish conversation there is a constant 'living outside yourself and reassessing the moment'.⁵⁰ Craig's work tends to have a more overtly Jewish subject matter, then say, the Jewish writer Patrick Marber.⁵¹ Still, Craig would claim that even in plays such as *Red Lion* (Live Theatre, 2017) and *Don Juan in Soho* (Donmar Warehouse, 2006), 'there are things that are giveaways such as sentence structure or in the rhythm of a phrase'.⁵² Ben Naylor, course leader in classical acting at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, agreed, saying he was convinced

⁴⁷ Neil Marcus interview conducted on 24 July 2015.

⁴⁸ Diane Samuels interview conducted on 22 July 2015.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ryan Craig interview conducted on 20 August 2015.

⁵¹ *Howard Katz* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001) would be a notable exception to this.

⁵² Ryan Craig interview conducted on 20 August 2015.

Shakespeare knew Jewish people because of how he writes Shylock, 'based on his rhythm and word orders. It is the English of an outsider. It is gestural'.⁵³

However, this shouldn't suggest that Jewish theatre can't use Hebrew or Yiddish. When Amy Rosenthal adapted her father's play *Barmitzvah Boy* for radio, there were numerous discussions about whether she should change the cultural terminology or at least explain what they meant to aid audience understanding. She refused to change anything, because 'every culture has an equivalent and sometimes you need your audience to take a leap of faith'.⁵⁴ This echoes something I was told in 2001 at the National Student Drama Festival. I needed to fully embrace the Yiddish and Hebrew language in my play, *The King of Schnorrers*, because, 'the more specific you are, the more it relates to everybody'.⁵⁵ In *Two Thousand Years*, Mike Leigh uses countless Hebrew and Yiddish phrases without explaining them. He was originally inspired by listening to 'Black actors talking patois'⁵⁶ in a production of Kwame Kwei-Lamah's play, *Elmira's Kitchen* (The National theatre, 2003). Again, characters speaking Hebrew in Julia Pascal's *Crossing Jerusalem* (Park Theatre, 2015) was in no way a barrier for me, because as Craig points out, 'Sometimes the sound of the word is the point. You don't have to understand'.⁵⁷

A key element of the purim-shpil was the fact it was performed by and for a small, tightknit community, where everyone knew each other's business. Satirical comments were particularly effective because the butt of the joke might be sitting next to you. I asked Craig whether he thought it would be possible to re-create that community 'feel' and whether a joke about, say Brexit, would have the same effect. He was quick to focus on the concept of a 'global community'⁵⁸ and how we now live in a time when everyone knows everyone's business. Ellie Ruhan asked another

⁵³ Ben Naylor interview conducted on 20 August 2015.

⁵⁴ Amy Rosenthal interview conducted on 09 July 2015.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Golda Zaffer Smith, 'Mike Leigh Comes Out', in *Jewish Renaissance* <<http://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/taste-jr/mike-leigh.pdf>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

⁵⁷ Ryan Craig interview conducted on 20 August 2015.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

question, 'where are you staging it? Because it makes a big difference. Edinburgh and Leeds and Glasgow are very much one community, whereas London is far more fragmented'.⁵⁹ As Ruhan explained, further North, Jewish communities are shrinking and aging, and will therefore come together over cultural celebrations regardless of their particular way of practicing the religion. Yet in London, there is very little chance of an Orthodox community coming together with a Reform community to watch a play. However, regardless of inter-faith squabbles 'the Jewish community do love to celebrate their own culture'.⁶⁰ Indeed when I was watching recent productions with a Jewish theme, *Crossing Jerusalem* and *Tik-sho-ret Theatre's 5 Kilo Sugar* (Etcetera Theatre, 2015), I experienced the wonderful community feel to them. The theatre bar resembled a Saturday morning *Kiddush*⁶¹ with old friends bumping into each other and catching up on the gossip. As Craig noted: 'A feisty aunt of mine came to an early Saturday Matinee and said afterwards "I knew half the audience and half of *them* I wasn't speaking to"'.⁶²

To sum up this category, although the notion of shared language doesn't quite fit in with Rozik's definition, there is clear evidence to suggest Yiddish rhythms, nonverbal codes and an injection of cultural language, still serve to identify a piece of work as being Jewish theatre.

An obvious Jewish author (playwright or director)

Rozik immediately qualifies his final criteria by adding the 'crucial contribution of the playwright'.⁶³ It is the playwright who, not only contributes to the dialogue, but also 'designs other vital aspects of the eventual performance on stage'.⁶⁴ He therefore decides the playwright should also be seen as 'a contributing author of a theatre

⁵⁹ Ellie Ruhan interview conducted on 08 July 2015.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ A ceremony held before the Sabbath on a Friday evening and after the Saturday morning service that traditionally is full of food and gives communities a chance to talk and catch up.

⁶² Ryan Craig, 'Wesker's Dream', in *The Jewish Quarterly* <<https://www.exacteditions.com/read/jewish-quarterly/vol-61-no-1-spring-2014-38963/57/1?dps>> [accessed 21 August 2015].

⁶³ Rozik, p.6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

work'.⁶⁵ In the above discussion of language and non-verbal codes, I have already covered the importance of the writer and so examined Rozik's last criterion.

In attempting to define Jewish theatre in the UK, Rozik's criteria have been supplemented and developed by consultation with UK practitioners. It would therefore be justified to define UK Jewish theatre as follows: Jewish theatre can be classified as presenting through the medium of theatre, a Jewish or Judaized narrative which is often integrated with a Jewish set of beliefs and/or values. Often these will reveal a reflection of the world as seen somewhat from the outside that reflects a heritage of oppression, yet deals with those experiences through an acknowledgement that tragedy and comedy are so closely related as to be two sides of the same coin. Ultimately the aim is to heal through sharing. There should be present, a Jewish language, be it, Hebrew, Yiddish or more commonly nonverbal codes reflected in the rhythm and cadence of speech, shared by playwrights, actors and spectators. Finally, there should be an obvious Jewish author, playwright or director.

The above is hardly succinct. Nor can I claim that it is definitive, for when every single interviewee was asked how they would define Jewish theatre, one thing remained a constant. Though their answers all varied enormously, there was always a long pause with several aborted attempts to speak. This was then followed by either an apology for the quality of their answer or a direct refusal to answer. However, this definition does provide a sufficient set of criteria on which to classify and examine Jewish theatre in the UK and to try and understand how it is faring commercially, critically and artistically.

However, there is one other factor to consider when attempting to define Jewish theatre. Ben Naylor stated 'I can't imagine a situation where I would wish or need to define it. To me it feels parochial'.⁶⁶ But although some may feel the classification segregates and ghettoizes Jewish artists as Frink did, the search for an explanation is undoubtedly important. It raises valuable insights into this genre just as Martin Esslin's seminal work did, regarding the Theatre of the Absurd. Despite

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ben Naylor interview conducted on 20 August 2015.

none of the writers in the book, Beckett, Albee, Ionesco, ever claiming to be writing an absurdist play, the very process provoked a deeper understanding of the subject. *The Times Higher Education* website: 'this is a book that literally created the movement it defined, changing not only scholarly and public perceptions but also the nature of contemporary theatre'.⁶⁷ Dawn Walton, the artistic director of the *Eclipse Theatre*, a London-based black theatre explained the value of categorising theatre: 'Black practitioners are uniquely placed to deliver an incisive view of Britain today because we view it from two perspectives—black and white. We ask more questions, we challenge perceptions, we stimulate more debate.'⁶⁸

It is precisely the stimulation of debate that this thesis wishes to create. What it means to be Jewish in the UK today is continually shifting and evolving. The old adage, ask two Jews a question and get three opinions, is starkly illuminated in attempting to define Jewish theatre. However, the fact that an answer is not necessarily attainable, does not mean, as Esslin and Walton would attest, that the search is without immense value. And now, having elucidated what Jewish theatre in the UK actually is, I will explore how it is faring in the UK, attempting to unpack the reasons for its successes and the reality behind the more challenging hurdles it faces.

The state of Jewish theatre in the UK

There are around 290 000 Jews living in the UK today, roughly '0.5 per cent of the population'.⁶⁹ If only Jewish audiences were going to watch Jewish plays there could be no hope of success. This would then suggest that a myriad of different people are flocking to see Jewish theatre. *Bad Jews* for example, enjoyed a sell-out run at the Theatre Royal Bath and the Jewish population of Bath is not particularly large. Therefore it would seem, on initial examination, that Jewish theatre appeals to a

⁶⁷ 'The Canon: The Theatre of the Absurd. By Martin Esslin', in *The Times Higher Education* website < <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/books/the-canon-the-theatre-of-the-absurd-by-martin-esslin/406986.article> > [accessed 23 May 2018].

⁶⁸ Nahshon, p 10.

⁶⁹ Simon Roker, 'Census 2011: The Jewish Breakdown', in *The Jewish Chronicle* < <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/94111/census-2011-the-jewish-breakdown> > [accessed 21 August 2015].

varied audience and that its future is bright. However, there is another factor to explore before one can draw any conclusions.

Amy Rosenthal believes 'it's a challenging time for Jewish artists'.⁷⁰ Rachel Mars stated that although there are 'a lot of Jewish playwrights, a healthy load of performers and writers. The interesting question is how 'out there' are they? For every one of them there are ten who don't want to talk about it'.⁷¹ There seems to be a major stumbling block in the way of Jewish theatre flourishing in the UK and both Mars and Rosenthal agree that this is Israel. Mars explained: 'There is still an uncomfortable link with Israel and that is very much an English thing, a deeply ingrained upper middle class anti-Semitism that combines with anti-Israel'.⁷² Steven Berkoff is even more forthcoming:

As soon as Israel does anything over the top it's always the same old faces who come out to demonstrate. I don't see hordes of people marching down the street against Mugabe when tens of thousands are dying every month in Zimbabwe.⁷³

The way that Israel is perceived in the United Kingdom is a highly complex and an entirely separate study, however, it does appear that Israel is quickly condemned before many other countries. On the fourteenth June 2018, the Palestinian Great March of Return came to a head with the death of sixty Palestinians at the hands of the IDF, the Israeli military. But there was very little coverage that, according to Hamas official Salah Bardawil, 'Fifty [sic] of the martyrs

⁷⁰ Amy Rosenthal interview conducted on 30 September 2015.

⁷¹ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Tim Walker, 'The British are anti-Semitic says Steven Berkoff', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/mandrake/4323785/The-British-are-anti-Semitic-says-Steven-Berkoff.html>> [accessed 05 November 2017].

were Hamas',⁷⁴ who, according to its co-founder Mahmoud al-Zahar, believe that if ' Hamas liberated 99.9% of the land of Palestine, it will not give up on the rest'.⁷⁵

It is a troubling time to be a Jew in Britain and that directly affects Jewish theatre. According to the Community Security Trust – a UK charity protecting the Jewish population from anti-Semitism – 'Antisemitic [sic] hate incidents have reached a record level in the UK, with the Jewish community targeted at a rate of nearly four times a day'.⁷⁶ The article states there were 1,382 hate incidents and a 34% increase in violent assaults against Jewish people in 2017. Anti-Semitism seems to be on the rise and nowhere more surprising than in the Labour party. Journalist Melanie Phillips claimed that Jeremy Corbyn and Emily Thornberry's refusal to attend a dinner marking the centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017, revealed 'the vicious reality of the Labour party and the malevolent threat to the Jewish people that it has become'.⁷⁷ And there seems to be no sign of this debate going away with Dame Margaret Hodge calling Corbyn a 'racist and antisemite [sic]' following a decision to not adopt the full IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.⁷⁸ With this climate in the UK, the attitude towards Judaism and its association with Israel cannot be overlooked.

⁷⁴ Judah Ari Gross and Toi Staff, ' Hamas official: 50 of the 62 Gazans killed in border violence were our members', in *The Times of Israel* <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-official-50-of-the-people-killed-in-gaza-riots-were-members/>> [accessed 24 May 2018].

⁷⁵ Dov Lieber, ' Hamas assures critics Israel's destruction still its goal', in *The Times of Israel* <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-assures-critics-israels-destruction-still-a-goal/>> [accessed 18 August 2018].

⁷⁶ Nadia Khomami, 'Antisemitic incidents in UK at all-time high', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/feb/01/antisemitic-incidents-in-uk-at-all-time-high>> [accessed 24 May 2018].

⁷⁷ Melanie Phillips, 'The Malevolent Guest at London's Balfour Dinner', in *Melaniephillips.com* <<http://www.melaniephillips.com/malevolent-guest-londons-balfour-dinner/>> [accessed 01 November 2017].

⁷⁸ Pippa Crerar and Sarah Marsh, 'Hodge stands by comments accusing Corbyn of antisemitism (sic)', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/23/hodge-stands-by-comments-accusing-corbyn-of-antisemitism>> [accessed 01 August 2018].

For a full definition of anti-Semitism as outlined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance see Daniel Sugarman, 'What is the IHRA definition of antisemitism? (sic) And why has Labour outraged Jews by rejecting it?', in *The Jewish Chronicle* <<https://www.thejc.com/comment/analysis/what-is-the-ihra-definition-of-antisemitism-and-why-has-labour-outraged-jews-by-rejecting-it-1.467511>> [accessed 01 August 2018].

There are worrying manifestations of this perception directly connected to theatre as well. Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* was written in response to the 2008 – 2009 military action in Gaza and played at the Royal Court. This is a ten minute play which references events over a seventy year period up to the modern day concerning Jewish parents' decisions over what to tell their children. Critics such as Michael Billington in *The Guardian* and Dominic Maxwell in *The Times* gave it four out of five stars with the latter claiming it provided 'an impassioned response to the events in Gaza that is elliptical, empathetic and illuminating'.⁷⁹ On the other hand there were statements of its anti-Semitism and bigotry, with Dominic Cavendish of *The Telegraph* claiming it was one sided and provocative, summing up his article in a purposeful reference to the language of the play: 'If you see her [Churchill], tell her she can do better than this'.⁸⁰

On September 29th 2017, the Young Vic re-staged Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner's play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*,⁸¹ compiled from Corrie's diary entries. She was crushed to death by a bulldozer whilst protesting in Gaza at the age of 23; an accident according to an Israeli court. Billington referred to the play as a 'deeply moving human document'.⁸² Daniel Sugarman however documents Paul Charney, chairman of the Zionist Federation's, comments as the play being an 'opportunity to fan the flames of hatred'.⁸³ The play was clearly a polarising event, but as Clive Davis wrote in *The Times* on seeing the original production, it is 'an unabashedly one-sided tribute' with statements in it that 'even the late Yasser Arafat

⁷⁹ Dominic Maxwell, 'Seven Jewish Children at the Royal Court, SW1', in *The Times* <<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/theatre/article1869189.ece>> [accessed 30 December 2015].

⁸⁰ Dominic Cavendish, 'Seven Jewish Children – A Play for Gaza at the Royal Court', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/dominic-cavendish/4601683/Seven-Jewish-Children-A-Play-for-Gaza-at-the-Royal-Court-review.html>> [accessed 30 December 2015].

⁸¹ It was first staged in 2005 at the Royal Court.

⁸² Michael Billington, 'My Name is Rachel Corrie review – vivid testimony of a hyperactive activist', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/05/my-name-is-rachel-corrie-review-young-vic>> [accessed 01 November 2017].

⁸³ Daniel Sugarman, 'Fury at Young Vic Revival of Notorious Gaza Play', in *The Jewish Chronicle* <<https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/fury-at-young-vic-revival-of-notorious-gaza-play-1.442355>> [accessed 01 November 2017].

might have blushed at'.⁸⁴ Theatre is a form of expression that is never going to satisfy all parties, but in light of the current climate in the UK, the subject matter and the date the Young Vic chose to revive it - Kol Nidrei, the holiest night of the Jewish calendar - it is hard not to ask whether there was a further agenda here.

Negative events connected with UK theatre and Israel are more frequently occurring and they accurately reflect Mar and Rosenthal's comments. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe 'is the largest arts festival on Earth, an inspiring celebration of the best performance and entertainment coming out of every continent of our planet'.⁸⁵ However, in 2014, the festival saw an incident that according to Brian Ferguson of *The Scotsman* should see the event 'hanging its head in shame'.⁸⁶ Large street protests took place and an open letter was signed by many Scottish artists and writers, among them the playwright David Grieg and the *Scots Makar* (poet laureate), Liz Lochhead. It concerned the Israeli, Incubator theatre company's production of *The City* which was subsequently cancelled and withdrawn from The Underbelly venue. The protestors, led by organiser Albie O'Neil said that 'protestors had vowed to attend every day until the state funding [of the Israeli Government] is withdrawn. We need to send the message to the Israeli government that the killing has to stop'.⁸⁷ *The Underbelly* put out a statement saying it would have been untenable for the show to continue given 'the logistics of policing and stewarding protests – and the effect they had on other shows'.⁸⁸ This was followed by an Israeli student dance group, Pola, pulling their show over the threat of further demonstrations. John

⁸⁴ Clive Davis, 'My Name is Rachel Corrie', in *The Times* <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/my-name-is-rachel-corrie-h0hpbjfhckw>> [accessed 01 November 2017].

⁸⁵ The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, 'Participants' FAQs', in *Edinburgh Festival Fringe Website* <<https://www.edfringe.com/participants/useful-resources/faqs>> [accessed 18 August 2015].

⁸⁶ Brian Ferguson, 'Edinburgh should be ashamed of Israeli Boycott', in *The Scotsman* <<http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/theatre-comedy-dance/edinburgh-should-be-ashamed-of-israeli-boycott-1-3507484>> [accessed 06 July 2015].

⁸⁷ 'Israeli group have show cancelled after protest', in *Edinburgh News* <<http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/what-s-on/theatre/israeli-group-have-show-cancelled-after-protest-1-3494010>> [accessed 06 July 2015].

⁸⁸ Mark Brown, 'Israeli theatre group has performances cancelled at Edinburgh Fringe', in *The Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/aug/01/israeli-theatre-group-performances-cancelled-edinburgh-fringe-gaza>> [accessed 06 July 2015].

Stalker, a leading Scottish theatre producer, felt that the festival suffered real damage to their reputation sending a clear message that “artistic freedom within Edinburgh is subject to the whim of whichever fanatical protestor shouts the loudest”.⁸⁹ When one is determining the state of Jewish theatre in the UK, it is impossible not to take this event and others like it into account as a potentially inhibiting factor. And many more examples could be given, from the Tricycle theatre’s cancelling of the Jewish Film Festival in 2014 to TFL removing the poster for *Bad Jews* from the underground for fear it might ‘cause widespread or serious offence to members of the public’.⁹⁰

The fact is that the relationship between Israel and the UK is a difficult one and many people, regardless of agenda, confuse Judaism and Israel as being one and the same thing. Rachel Mars refers to it as being ‘our British guilt for our role in Israel and for our desire to gun for the underdog’.⁹¹ But for the present, the two are not separated by the mainstream and that does have repercussions for the future of Jewish theatre in the UK. Artists are dealing with this in different ways and it is interesting to see how two productions faced the inevitable connections head on, Julia Pascal’s *Crossing Jerusalem* and Ariella Eshed’s *Five Kilo Sugar*.

Crossing Jerusalem was originally staged at the *Tricycle theatre* in 2003. It is a powerful look at the absurdity of modern life in this troubled city. At the centre of the play, the characters’ fears over driving across Jerusalem for a meal to celebrate a birthday. Despite characters being in the army and the Jews supposedly being the dominant community, everyone is scared. In an interview with John Nathan at *The Jewish Chronicle*, Julia Pascal bemoaned the ‘simplistic Israel-bad/Palestinian-good point of view’.⁹² Her play aims to deliver different opinions that are ‘much better at

⁸⁹ Brian Ferguson, ‘Edinburgh should be ashamed of Israeli Boycott’, in *The Scotsman* <<http://www.scotsman.com/what-s-on/theatre-comedy-dance/edinburgh-should-be-ashamed-of-israeli-boycott-1-3507484>> [accessed 06 July 2015].

⁹⁰ Josh Jackman, ‘Bad Jews poster banned from Tube by TFL’, in *The Jewish Chronicle* <<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/131188/bad-jews-poster-banned-tube-tfl>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

⁹¹ Rachel Mars interview conducted on 12 August 2015.

⁹² John Nathan, ‘Interview: Julia Pascal’, in *The Jewish Chronicle* <<http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre/141694/interview-julia-pascal>> [accessed 10 August 2015].

raising difficult questions than at providing any kind of answer'.⁹³ According to Pascal this seems to be the best one can do in dealing with 'the intractable reality of the Middle East'.⁹⁴

The aims of Tik-sho-ret Theatre Company (meaning communication) are to promote Israeli and Jewish theatre and to encourage notions of co-existence. *5 Kilo Sugar* is referred to as an 'hour-long comical whimsy'⁹⁵ and tells the story of a young man living in Tel Aviv who is constantly visited by the spirit of his grandfather. His grandfather appears by possessing the bodies of passers-by that range from a school girl to a taxi driver to a prostitute. The reason for these visits is to get the grandson to right a wrong that took place in post war Europe and is now being immortalised in a soon to be published book. The play is performed by four actors who play all the parts. It is a stripped down performance with direct address and a few chairs creating the different locations.

Director, Ariella Eshed is well aware that often plays about Israel can be 'a bit less commercially appealing though *5 Kilo Sugar* is not really about Israel, not in the sense of what one might expect'.⁹⁶ No mention is made of the troubles or the Territories, it is simply a snapshot of everyday people living in Tel Aviv. For Eshed, there is enough about Israel in the news and she made an interesting distinction between Jewish theatre and Israeli theatre:

It is based on that [Jewish traditions] but it is also based on trying to go against it. We do not want to just be like traditional Jewish theatre. We want to have our own way. If you say Jewish theatre you don't expect it to be political, could be about the Holocaust, Jews in Europe, anything, but for Israeli theatre you expect it to be political.⁹⁷

⁹³ Aleks Sierz, 'Crossing Jerusalem, Park Theatre', in *The Arts Desk* <<http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/crossing-jerusalem-park-theatre>> [accessed 10 August 2015].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ John Nathan, 'Review: 5 Kilo Sugar', in *The Jewish Chronicle* <<http://www.thejc.com/arts/theatre/141687/review-5-kilo-sugar>> [accessed 10 August 2015].

⁹⁶ Ariella Eshed interview conducted on 17 August 2015.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Indeed in their untroubled run at the Edinburgh Festival 2015, Eshed pointed out that one audience member was angry because the play wasn't political. The audience member wanted to know 'why isn't it talking about the Palestinians?'.⁹⁸

Still, despite attempts to embrace connections, challenge them or ignore them, UK Jewish practitioners are 'enmeshed with the conflict in the Middle East'.⁹⁹ This, as Rosenthal expounds, creates an 'implication that we're all right-wing, which is untrue and puts us at odds with the largely left-wing artistic community'.¹⁰⁰ The association between Jewish theatre and Israeli theatre is a wonderful opportunity to develop theatrical understanding and experience, but is also something that can be used to tarnish work that has nothing to do with the Middle East.

Another acknowledgement that must be made is the fact that there are a lot of Jewish practitioners who do not want to be labelled with the Jewish or ethnic moniker. When I approached Mike Leigh to interview him for this thesis, he replied very politely by saying 'I'm afraid talking to me about current - or any - Jewish theatre, English or otherwise, is quite out of the question, as it's a subject about which I am more than totally ignorant'.¹⁰¹ Writer, David Schneider said a similar thing. And objectively, it seems unnecessary to suggest that a practitioner should be classified by their ethnicity. Nicholas Hytner is an example of this; a hugely influential theatre director, only the second man to have been artistic director of the *National Theatre* for more than ten years and responsible for the opening of the Bridge theatre, which according to *The Times* is the first commercial theatre to be built in London since 1937,¹⁰² but he has no wish to be labelled as Jewish. He is "just a

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Amy Rosenthal interview conducted on 30 September 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Mike Leigh email, received 09 July 2015.

¹⁰² Alice Thomson and Rachel Sylvester, 'Nicholas Hytner Interview', in *The Times* <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nicholas-hytner-interview-jeremy-corbyn-i-m-a-jewish-theatre-director-i-find-him-uncomfortable-ggdrm5n03>> [accessed 4 November 2017].

director'.¹⁰³ Judaism is clearly an aspect of who he is, but to define himself solely in this way is highly simplistic as there are so many other aspects of his character.

In summary, it is not difficult to find a plethora of successful plays that according to the definitions outlined above can be classified as Jewish theatre. This is regardless of negative connections with the Middle East or artists wanting to resist being pigeon holed. Some productions display their Jewishness for all to see, such as *Bad Jews* or the 2016 sell out run at the Manchester Royal Exchange of Simon Bent and Howard Jacobson's *The Mighty Walzer*. Others are more surprising in that they don't portray an image of Western Jewry, but offer an alternative such as *5 Kilo Sugar*. But possibly the best example of a successful piece of Jewish theatre in recent times - in terms of the venue profile, the run-length, it selling out within hours of going on sale, being shown in cinemas and transferring to Broadway - is the 2017 National Theatre revival of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*.

This 'mad, eight-hour quasi-religious 'gay fantasia on national themes',¹⁰⁴ is a play that conforms to all of Rozik's criteria; the narrative and values are constantly drawn from the 'Jewish cultural baggage' ranging from biblical and kabbalistic references to the culture of being a Jew in New York; the language often uses Yiddish and the nonverbal codes – the rhythm and intonation – are plentiful; the author is Jewish, one of the lead actors is Jewish and two of the central characters, Louis Ironson and Roy Cohn, are completely open about their religion and this informs their characters. *Time Out* referred to the cast as being 'the sort of ludicrous confluence of talent that impresses simply for the feat of harmonising their diaries'.¹⁰⁵ There is no doubt that the casting of Hollywood actors, such as Andrew Garfield was a prime factor in the selling of those tickets. However, this doesn't detract from the fact that Jewish theatre, despite the stumbling blocks of perceptions of Israel, can be and is very successful in the UK today.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ 'Angels in America', in *Timeout* <<https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/angels-in-america>> [accessed 4 November 2017].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

With a definition of Jewish theatre and an examination of the state of this theatre in the UK today, I finally want to briefly examine how this theatre relates to carnival, if at all.

Contemporary Jewish Theatre in the UK and Carnival

Time Out refers to *Angels in America* as being 'Tony Kushner's hallucinatory masterpiece'.¹⁰⁶ It claims that 'the enormously long, enormously arch, symbol-drenched magical realist epic [...] borders on the unstageable'.¹⁰⁷ The play, which is actually two plays, *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika* runs for almost eight hours. It leaps between realism and poetry with everyday life meeting the divine. Running through the play is Prior Walter's sickness from AIDS and the effect that has on the characters around him as well as a Mormon couples' marital struggles. It deals with the Republican era of Reagan's second term and the seeming death of liberalism in the United States. At the same time, angels appear, fiery books shoot up from the stage and characters materialise from the past. The penultimate scene is in heaven, with the final being one of direct address by Prior. Michael Billington was impressed by 'the expansiveness of Kushner's imagination and the rich opportunities he creates for actors'.¹⁰⁸ There is much in this play that appears carnivalesque; each actor multi-roles, playing a number of different parts throughout the epic run time; there are comic and verbal compositions and a use of billingsgate with the focus on the terrible effects caused by the disease on Prior and Roy Cohn's body; there is bleeding and there is defecation, reminiscent of the 'scatological liberties' taken in Bakhtin's folk celebrations or of the 'drenching or drowning in urine' of Rabelais's work;¹⁰⁹ and outside of the text, the production produces a spectacle including giant angels created by multiple actors, corresponding to Bakhtin's writings about giants and masks being 'related to transition, metamorphosis, the violation of natural

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Billington, 'Angels in America review – Garfield and Lane excel in Kushner's surreal epic', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/may/05/angels-in-america-review-andrew-garfield-nathan-lane-tony-kushner>> [accessed 4 November 2017].

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 147.

boundaries, to mockery'.¹¹⁰ The 'catharsis' Rozik references, so integral to carnival celebrations, is ever present in the play, as is the 'danger' and 'anarchy' of Artaud. In her production of *Angels in America*, Marianne Elliott has created an excellent example of Jewish theatre as carnival.

Yet Tony Kushner is American and Marianne Elliott isn't Jewish. If one were to take a sample of Jewish theatre in the UK over the last twelve years, there would be a similarity that runs across all of them. They tend to veer towards a realism, however heightened that may be. Joshua Harmon's *Bad Jews*, Mike Leigh's *Two Thousand Years*, Julia Pascal's *Crossing Jerusalem*, Simon Bent and Howard Jacobson's *The Mighty Walzer* and Ryan Craig's *Filthy Business* and *The Holy Rosenbergs* to pick a handful, all have at their central core the notions of families at war, often given one setting, an office, a living room of a house. These fractious familial relationships are seen again and again in Jewish theatre and are clearly an important aspect for Jewish practitioners. I too, have chosen to have a family at the centre of my work and I would not dare suggest for one moment that any of these highly successful writers are doing anything less than delivering powerful and stimulating theatre, but they certainly don't acknowledge the origins of Jewish performance through carnival and the purim-shpil. There is, of course, nothing to suggest that they should. Yet, it does seem that when one looks to Jewish theatre in the wider world, from Israel, North America or the rest of Europe, there is far more of a tendency to play with style and form.

Tik-sho-Ret's *5 Kilo Sugar* is darkly comic and is reminiscent of the 'magic realism of Isaac Singer'.¹¹¹ To see a woman onstage masturbating a man and then suddenly become possessed by the spirit of his dead grandfather may be said to produce some of the 'gay, triumphant'¹¹² laughter of Bakhtin and the clever use of a limited set ensures that the audience were not sure what to expect. Theaturtle from Canada continues to produce 'essential, ecstatic theatre that touches the earth and

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin, p.40.

¹¹¹ Judi Herman, 'Fivo Kilo Sugar', in *Jewish Renaissance* <<http://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/blog/review-5-kilo-sugar/>> [accessed 30 July 2015].

¹¹² Bakhtin, pp. 11-12

ignites the soul'.¹¹³ *CHARLOTTE: A Tri-Colored Play With Music*, combines a 'witty, haunting and moving score,' from Czech composer Aleš Březina, the 'nimble' lyrics and script of Alon Nashman and the artful 'palette' of director/designer, Pamela Howard.¹¹⁴ It explores Charlotte Salomon's art work that captured life in Germany and France from World War I through to the Nazis before her deportation to Auschwitz in 1943. One review of the production, stated that it was "Wildly experimental, pushing the envelope [...] Works like [this] are essential to the survival of the human spirit";¹¹⁵ a sentiment reminiscent of Bakhtin.¹¹⁶

In the UK, Steven Berkoff in his highly physical, bawdy and aggressive style with an emphasis on total theatre, has produced theatre that can be termed carnivalesque. Whether in his specifically Jewish work such as *Kvetch* or *Ritual in Blood* or *Sit and Shiver* or with his wider canon of plays such as his Kafka adaptations, *The Trial*, *Metamorphosis* and *In the Penal Colony*, he has constantly stretched the boundaries of what theatre can be. *Kneehigh's* 2016 production of *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* is an interesting example of what Jewish theatre could be even though it is created by non-Jewish practitioners. It is a beautiful re-telling of the life of Jewish artist Marc Chagall. 'This is theatre to make the heart soar and the soul sing: inventive, playful, joyous, sexy, a bit crazy and entirely heart-rending'.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ <http://www.theaturtle.com/news.html> [accessed 27 May 2018].

¹¹⁴ Judi Herman, 'Review: Charlotte – A Tri-Coloured Play with Music', in *Jewish Renaissance* <<http://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/blog/review-theatre-charlotte-a-tri-coloured-play-with-music/>> [accessed 27 May 2018].

¹¹⁵ <http://www.theaturtle.com/news.html> [accessed 27 May 2018].

¹¹⁶ There are numerous examples of Jewish theatre from around the world that are drawing on their heritage either consciously or unconsciously, but a fascinating side note deserves mention, that of the Jewish drag queens. In New York and Israel, gay, Jewish men are performing on the drag scene with Jewish personas influenced by an Orthodox Jewish upbringing. There are individuals such as Moshiel, who performs as Lady SinAGaga and Amichai Lau – Lavie – the nephew of the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yisrael Meir Lau – who performs as the elderly Jewish Orthodox widow Rebettezin Hadassah Gross. SinAGaga first performed in 2014 at the High Holy Days party, an event organised by *Hebro* that throws parties ahead of the traditional High Holy Days festivals of *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, to celebrate being gay. What is particularly interesting is that this is a perfect embodiment of carnival wrapped up in Judaism. In an Orthodox, Jewish world, where homosexuality is not permitted, individuals are finding freedoms to express themselves away from what their society deems acceptable. As Yudi K – his drag act is Silvia Sparklestein – notes 'being a drag queen frees you up to say whatever you want.' – Rachel Delia Benaim, 'The Queens of Gefilte Fish', *Jewish Renaissance*, January 2016, pp. 12 – 13.

¹¹⁷ Alun Hood, 'Review: *The Flying Lovers of Vitebsk* (Wilton's Music Hall)', in *WhatsOnStage* <https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/flying-lovers-vitebsk-kneehigh-wiltons-music-hall_45592.html> [accessed 27 May 2018].

However, examples of this type of work from Jewish practitioners in the UK are few and far between and there is a rich, cultural heritage that is being overlooked.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to find a definition of Jewish theatre and to determine what the state of that theatre is in the UK today. Though impossible to find a neat classification and with certain qualifications of Rozik's definitions, it is fair to state that Jewish theatre celebrates the Jewish faith and community but never in a reverential way. It prefers, as Mike Leigh explained, a Talmudic approach in that 'it basically asks more questions than it delivers answers'.¹¹⁸ The rhythm and cadence of text would seem to be a constant among definitions; also the presence of humour, be it dark or otherwise and a sense of being slightly outside the norm. The family structure too, seems to be continually used as a major focal point and I could continue providing varying definitions of what Jewish theatre may be and the more people that were asked, the more slight variations would present themselves; as Amy Rosenthal observed 'we're a self-questioning people'.¹¹⁹ Yet in order for this study to remain useful, a limit must be put on this.

It is also fair to determine that Jewish theatre is doing well in the UK, despite various challenges that it faces. Again, it is not for me to criticise or offer advice to a host of highly successful Jewish, UK practitioners. However, there is evidence that by looking back to the carnivalesque origins of Jewish theatre; by injecting into modern works, the anarchies and freedoms so integral to the *purim-shpil*, there is an opportunity to create a body of work that can help Jewish theatre in the UK find its 'place' and be as innovative as work produced in other parts of the world.

Yet, using Purim as an inspiration for creating contemporary theatre is not without its difficulties and in the following chapter I shall explain just what these challenges are and how through my play, *Petrified*, I have attempted to overcome them.

¹¹⁸ Golda Zaffer Smith, 'Mike Leigh Comes Out', in *Jewish Renaissance* <<http://www.jewishrenaissance.org.uk/taste-jr/mike-leigh.pdf>> [accessed 14 July 2015].

¹¹⁹ Amy Rosenthal interview conducted on 30 September 2015.

We close the blood-stained Book of Esther with feelings of loathing and disgust –
Austin Holyoake

3. POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH THE PURIM-SHPIL

In the previous chapter, I attempted to define Jewish theatre and explored what the state of said theatre is in the UK today. Despite being a cultural celebration, the purim-shpil still has a great deal to offer the theatrical world. There are numerous elements that can be taken and used to great effect; elements that can potentially add Bakhtinian 'life-affirming'¹ qualities to Jewish theatre. Now that the contemporary Jewish theatrical scene has been analysed, it is important to return to the initial question of adapting the purim-shpil into a modern piece of theatre that can appeal to wider audiences outside of the Orthodox Jewish community which is versed in the Jewish scriptures. However, before that is possible, it is necessary to address two major issues that are potentially problematic. Firstly, the violence that is an integral part of the story and secondly, the potentially misogynistic elements that are inherent in both the story of Purim and the ways in which this festival has been celebrated by men over the centuries.

Purim and Violence

At the climax of the Purim story all potential disasters are averted; Mordecai is honoured; Esther confides to King Ahasuerus exactly what Haman's plans were – to kill all the Jews in the land, which just so happens to include her - and Haman goes to the gallows instead. The theme *venahafokh hu* ("and it was reversed") is realised and everyone lives happily ever after. Or so I always believed, because most children growing up in an assimilated Jewish environment are not fully aware of the

¹ Ben Taylor, *Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Library, 1995), p. 58.

whole narrative. But there is another chapter and it adds a very different tone to the story.

The final chapter of the story of Purim details how ‘the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them’.² Haman is hung for his crimes as are his ten sons and eight hundred men are slaughtered in Shushan. We then read how the Jews in the rest of the King’s provinces collected themselves together and then ‘slew of their foes seventy and five thousand’ before continuing with their feasting.³ These are worrying elements. Kenneth Craig compared the massacres in their random targeting to the ‘Allied bombings of Dresden or in the atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima’.⁴ This statement is somewhat distorting a highly complex event, seeming to suggest the decision taken to drop the atomic bombs was one motivated by revenge. However, what is undeniable, is that the story of Purim culminates in immense brutality. The fact that this story is celebrated across the age range in every Jewish community does raise concerns and it would be irresponsible not to explore this in more detail seeing as this thesis aims to use Purim traditions as inspiration to write a play for a contemporary UK audience.

Furthermore, one has to acknowledge, as explored in the previous chapter, the way Jewish people are perceived in Britain and the association that is made between them and Israel. This hasn’t been helped by the fact that in December 2017, applauded by a right wing Netanyahu government, US president Donald Trump declared Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; Yisrael Katz, the Transportation and Intelligence Minister: ‘I praise the decision of President Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and I expect the international community to support Trump’s decision’.⁵ Israel is seen as the aggressor in a Middle Eastern conflict that is

² ‘The Book of Esther, Full Text, 9:5’, in *Jewish Virtual Library* <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Esther.html>> [accessed 19 December 2016].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kenneth Craig, ‘*Reading Esther – A case for the Literary Carnavalesque*’ (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1995), pp.131 - 132.

⁵ Noa Landau, ‘Netanyahu on Trump’s Jerusalem Declaration: Our National, Historical Identity Being Recognized Today’, in *Haaretz* <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-netanyahu-our-national-historical-identity-being-recognized-today-1.5627889>> [accessed 29 May 2018].

continually oversimplified by the media. In March 2017, The British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, commented on the seeming bias of the UN:

Israel is a population of eight million in a world of seven billion. Yet since its foundation, the Human Rights Council has adopted 135 country-specific resolutions; 68 of which [have been] against Israel. Justice is blind and impartial. This selective focus on Israel is neither. Israel is the only country permanently on the Human Rights Council's agenda.⁶

Analysing why a country of a little over 0.11% of the world's population has drawn so much attention from the Human Rights Council, is not the purpose of this thesis, but it does illustrate the unique position Israel occupies in the eyes of the world.

According to Johannes Due Enstad in his 2017 study of anti-Semitism in Europe, anti-Semitic incidents are on the rise with around ten thousand Jewish people leaving Western Europe for Israel, 'the largest number to do so since 1948'.⁷ Is creating a piece of theatre inspired by such a violent biblical story, a sensible decision in this current climate?

The denouement of the book of Esther is certainly hard to justify and it can't even be argued that it is the villains of the piece getting their just desserts. What is more uncomfortable is that over time these verses have been used to validate startling levels of violence. The image on the cover of Elliot Horowitz's *Reckless Rites, Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence*, is unsettling in the extreme. It shows an ultra-Orthodox young man wearing a black hat and *peiot* (side curls worn by men of certain Orthodox sects) in the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Meah She'arim, reading the *Megillah*. It is traditional to keep one's place with a *Yad*, meaning hand, a ritual pointer shaped like a hand with an outstretched finger. In this photograph the man uses a toy gun, an AK-47, and for certain sections of Judaism this photograph sums up exactly what is associated with Purim; a documentation of a victory against the on-going war with the tribe of Amalek.

⁶ Eric Cortellessa, Rebecca Shimoni Stoil and Toi Staff, 'UN 'preposterous' for rapping Israel over Golan Heights, UK's Johnson says', in *The Times of Israel* <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/un-rapping-israel-for-bombing-hezbollah-preposterous-top-uk-diplomat-says/>> [accessed 29 May 2018].

⁷ Johannes Due Enstad, *Antisemitic Violence in Europe, 2005-2015 Exposure and Perpetrators in France, UK, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Russia* (Oslo, University of Oslo, 2017), p. 5.

Amalek appear in different guises throughout Jewish history. At times they are referenced specifically in the *Tanakh* and at other points subsequent interpretations suggest the Amelakites are being alluded to, thus giving the impression that they have always been a key enemy of the Jewish people. An Orthodox belief is that the Amalekites were desert descendants of Esau, the elder son of Isaac. They are referenced in the book of Exodus 17. 8: 'Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim'.⁸ We are later informed that 'HaShem will have war with Amalek from generation to generation'.⁹ By the time the events are re-told by Moses in Deuteronomy 25. 17 – 19, the instructions to 'blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven',¹⁰ are very much placed at the feet of the Jewish people; 'remember what the Amalek did to thee'.¹¹ Later, in the Book of Samuel, King Saul is instructed to 'go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass'.¹² And the crime committed by Amalek causing them to be singled out above all the other nations the Israelites fought? They attacked and killed the weaker people at the rear of the group who were fleeing Egypt.

Avi Sagi writes a fascinating examination of the moral implications of these passages dividing his examination of the stories into two sections, 'the symbolic and realistic approaches'.¹³ The realistic looks at the historical facts of Amalek, whilst the symbolic explores the more metaphorical aspects. Rabbi Aron Moss of the Nefesh community in Sydney Australia, also takes up this dual examination. Looking at the realistic he explains:

⁸ 'The Book of Shemot, (Exodus): Chapter 17', in *Jewish Virtual Library* <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Exodus17.html>> [accessed 19 December 2016].

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'The Book of D'varim, (Deuteronomy): Chapter 25', in *Jewish Virtual Library* <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Exodus17.html>> [accessed 18 December 2017].

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² 'The Book of Shmuel I (Samuel I): Chapter 15', in *Jewish Virtual Library* <<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/shmuel-i-samuel-1-chapter-15>> [accessed 19 August 2018].

¹³ Avi Sagi, 'The Punishment of Amalek in Jewish Tradition: Coping with the Moral Problem', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 87.3 (1994), 323–346 (p. 325).

Amalek was an ancient Middle Eastern nation that had an inborn hatred towards Israel. The Amalekites took any opportunity to attack Jews for absolutely no reason. There was no land dispute or provocation that caused this hatred - it was an intrinsic pathological need to destroy G-d's people. Such hatred cannot be combatted through diplomacy. There was no option to re-educate the Amalekites or review their school curricula. Their hatred was not taught - it was ingrained. As long as an Amalekite walked the earth, no Jew was safe. It was a clear case of kill or be killed. A Jew had to take the command to kill Amalek quite literally - his life depended on it.¹⁴

However, he then goes on to clarify their significance today in a more metaphorical sense, explaining how, 'we each have an Amalekite lurking within our very self. The inner Amalek is unholy cynicism. [...] Cynicism can kill our every attempt to improve ourselves and smother any move towards refining our character and expressing our soul'.¹⁵ This is a very comfortable definition that sits well with those opposed to violence and prejudice, but unfortunately it is not the only interpretation.

Throughout Jewish history, Amalek has been associated with numerous enemies of Judaism; the Roman Empire; Medieval Christianity; Adolf Hitler and for some, the Palestinians. Horowitz mentions that Moshe Feiglin a leading *Likud* activist (a right wing, Israeli party), stated in 2004 that the 'Arabs engage in typical Amalek behaviour'.¹⁶ Horowitz goes on to note a statement made by *Pikuach Nefesh*, an organisation made up of around two hundred rabbis who are against any territorial concessions. They announced that "the day of Arafat's death should be a day of rejoicing," since the Palestinian leader was "the Amalek and the Hitler of our generation".¹⁷ Jeffrey Goldberg, writing in *The New York Times* in 2009 asked one of

¹⁴ Aron Moss, 'Wipe out Amalek Today?', in *Chabad.org* <https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/267677/jewish/Wipe-Out-Amalek-Today.htm> [accessed 29 May 2018].

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites, Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁷ Horowitz, p. 3.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's advisors why he had such an anxiety over Iran, the answer: 'Think Amalek'.¹⁸ Goldberg goes on to explain that Netanyahu's beliefs originated from, 'the scholarship of his father and the martyrdom of his older brother'.¹⁹ Netanyahu's father, Benzion, was a pre-eminent historian of Spanish Jewry, with his most famous work being *The Origins of the Inquisition in 15th century Spain*. In the book he explains how Spanish hatred of the Jews was not merely a theological issue, but stretched back to the ancient world and was based in race hatred. Netanyahu senior believed that 'anti-Semitism is a sui generis hatred, one that is shape-shifting, impervious to logic and eternal. The only rational response to such sentiment [...] is militant Jewish self-defense'.²⁰ Netanyahu's brother, Yonatan, was a decorated IDF officer who was killed when freeing the hostages in Entebbe in 1976; another example of the hostility towards the Jewish people. Unfortunately, there are even stronger views to the right of the Israeli Prime Minister. Horowitz records Goldberg in 2004 interviewing Jewish settlers on the West Bank. When asked whether Amalek currently existed she 'pointed towards one of the Arab villages in the distance'.²¹ Different rabbis and scholars will interpret Amalek in very different ways, yet, one must acknowledge the political climate of the world today; the war in Syria and the US pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal, terrorism on the rise and the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians intensifying. The connection made by right wing Israelis between Amalek and their current form as the Palestinians and Arab nations cannot be overlooked; Feiglin again: 'The Arabs engage in typical Amalek behaviour. I can't prove this genetically, but this is the behaviour of the Amalek'.²²

Horowitz documents numerous accounts regarding how Jewish violence towards Palestinians in the Middle East have been carried out under the banner of

¹⁸ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Israel's Fears, Amalek's Arsenal', in *The New York Times* <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/opinion/17goldberg.html>> [accessed 29 May 2018].

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Horowitz, p. 4.

²² Horowitz, p. 1.

striking out against Amalek. But it is his documentation of how this has coincided with Purim festivities that is of much concern for this thesis. In 1986 a parade through Hebron involved a Kaffiyeh – a traditional Arab headdress most notably worn by Arafat - being placed on a puppet of Haman before it was hung. In 1998, Noam Federman, a resident of the settlement of Tel Rumeida, was taking part in the Purim parade dressed as Leah Rabin, the wife of the recently assassinated Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. He was dressed as a witch with a sticker that read “Shalom Leah” – ‘a ghoulish allusion to Bill Clinton’s famous words of farewell to Yitzhak Rabin at the latter’s funeral’.²³ These are just a few examples, but there are many, many more. The most infamous incident being in 1994 when Dr Baruch Goldstein took a machine gun into prayers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs and fired into the neighbouring room where Muslims were praying, killing 29 and wounding over a hundred more. As Horowitz writes, ‘Since then, for me and for many others, Purim has never been the same’.²⁴

Horowitz’s book makes fascinating, albeit chilling, reading as he goes through history documenting the numerous acts of violence carried out by Jews against Christians and Arabs on and around the festival of Purim. He also lists the numerous scholars, among them Jews, who have called for the banning of this ‘blood stained book of Esther’.²⁵ Purim and violence are inextricably linked, after all it is a celebration where tradition dictates the eating of *aznei Haman* which translates as Haman’s ears. The violence cannot be overlooked, but one must also be aware that there are other factors involved in anti-Purim viewpoints from Jews and non-Jews alike.

Michael C. Steinlauf writes that at the turn of the twentieth century Yiddish culture became entangled in a ‘fateful polemic that [...] would shape the way in which modern Yiddish culture would be created, consumed, judged and developed’.²⁶ He discusses how ‘Essential to this polemic was the postulation of an

²³ Horowitz, p. 8.

²⁴ Horowitz, p. 7.

²⁵ Horowitz, p. 23.

²⁶ Michael C. Steinlauf, ‘Fear of Purim: Y. L. Peretz and the Canonization of Yiddish Theater’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 1.3 (1995), 44-65 (p. 44).

extreme distinction between genres considered good and bad, high and low, ennobling and demeaning'.²⁷ *Kunst* or art should be cultivated and *Shund*, trash, should be eradicated. Purim very much fell into the latter category as it represented everything that is anathema to Judaism. Elazar Shulman, the nineteenth century critic of Jewish literature is very clear on his views of the purim-shpil. He describes it as "the gory show known as Akhashveyresh – shpil' [Ahasuerus play] [...] obviously conceived by some nameless devil, whose bloodthirsty language evokes horror and pain'.²⁸ As a follower of the Lithuanian *Haskalah* – a movement running roughly from the 1770s to 1880s that encouraged rationality and a move away from religious life into a more assimilated and secular existence - Shulman's agenda is clear. His aims are to liberate the Jewish populace from their exclusion on the fringes of society and bring them into modernity. To Shulman this form of celebration is an example of the Jews' archaic lifestyle, stuck in the shtetl and refusing to look to the future. The purim-shpil was as low as it was possible to get and performed by 'the most coarse - butchers, bakers, tanners, coachmen - and in a manner which emphasized their coarse-ness'.²⁹ The poet, playwright and essayist, Y. L. Peretz hated Purim. He stated it was 'the birthday of the first Jewish sycophant, of the first court Jew'.³⁰ There were numerous calls to ban Purim from English Jewry, Claude Montefiore's 1888 essay came very close, but many others called for the complete abolition of this festival. It is worth noting that even today, amongst some, those feelings extend to the purim-shpil. Rabbi Pesach Efune at the Chabad Lubavitch centre in Brighton spoke with me about my thesis and when I explained I was looking into the origins of Jewish theatre, categorically stated that there is no such thing; 'theatre is not permitted in Judaism'.³¹

Horowitz cites a significant number of non-Jews calling for the banning of the festival, but it must be stated they include confirmed anti-religionists such as Austin

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ahuva Belkin, 'The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil', in *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, ed. by Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), pp. 29 – 43 (p. 29).

²⁹ Steinlauf, p. 56.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Rabbi Pesach Efune interview conducted on 15th July 2014.

Holyoake (1826 – 1874) who noted the book of Esther consisted of ‘drunkenness, domestic tyranny, lust, ambition, vacillation, revenge , and wholesale and brutal murder of innocent men, women and children’.³² These negative views can also be found among German scholars writing at the time of the Holocaust such as Paul Heinisch who found Christian sensibilities ‘gravely wounded at the joy which the Jews showed when they were enabled to revenge themselves upon their enemies’.³³ The Purim story is a powerful one that speaks of Jewish strength and revenge, regardless of how extreme that revenge may have been. No wonder there were those that have opposed and even been fearful of it and in the following chapter I shall explain how, in my writing, I attempted to address these issues.

Purim and Misogyny

The second aspect I would claim is potentially problematic in adopting elements of the purim-shpil into contemporary theatre is the treatment of women inherent in the practice. The book of Esther features three influential women in it. In order of appearance, there is Vashti, who refuses to dance naked for her husband and his friends. Second is Esther who risks execution by approaching Ahasuerus in his chamber to ask for mercy and finally there is Zeresh, Haman’s wife. She only appears twice, but is vocal on both occasions by suggesting first how Haman should rid himself of Mordecai by hanging him on a gallows 50 cubits tall (Esther 5. 14) and then later informing her husband that he will not after all be able to vanquish Mordecai (Esther 6. 13). Plenty has been written over the years about these women. Henry Hart Milman wrote about Vashti’s refusal in the mid-nineteenth century as being due to her ‘better sense of her own dignity’.³⁴ Tennyson later referred to her as ‘noble Vashti’.³⁵ Esther also received praise and criticism in equal measure. Holyoake called her a ‘tigress of diabolical ferocity’.³⁶ Harriet Beecher Stowe, the

³² Horowitz, pp. 23 – 24.

³³ Horowitz, p. 37.

³⁴ Horowitz, p. 47.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Horowitz, p. 24.

daughter, sister and wife of Protestant clergymen, thought of her as a woman whose 'beauty and fascination were the moving power' in saving her people.³⁷ Horowitz documents numerous studies written about these women from that of Calvinist preacher Thomas Scott writing in the eighteenth century to Edith Stein who died at Auschwitz having converted to Catholicism. When she was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1987, he compared her to Esther 'who with the sacrifice of her own life, contributed in a decisive way to the salvation of her people'.³⁸ However, these must be put aside as this thesis is interested in the purim-shpil rather than the book of Esther itself. And in the performances, the female characters became something else entirely.

Belkin observes that the role the purim-shpil played within the Jewish community was one of social comment and protest. It was a way for the weak to show resistance against the strong in two key ways. It allowed the oppressed minority, surrounded on all sides by a dominant non-Jewish culture, to feel as though they were standing up for themselves and it also registered 'the perspectives of the poorest and least-powerful male members of the Jewish community within that community itself'.³⁹ Belkin's view would suggest that the purim-shpil clearly played more of a role than simply being *shund*. Like so many examples of carnival before it, Purim was an opportunity for the weakest members of the segregated Jewish community to make fun of those that kept them down, both inside and outside of the Jewish group. However, as Belkin observed, this 'spirit of anarchy and rebellion,' albeit a ritualised one that always saw a return to the status quo at the end of the prescribed time, only served to reinforce, 'the subordinated status of women within the Judaic culture of early modern Europe and beyond'.⁴⁰

To debate whether or not Judaism is a misogynistic religion is outside the scope of this study. One would have to draw on a number of sources and qualify what exactly constitutes Judaism; is it defined by the teachings and laws of the

³⁷ Horowitz, p. 47.

³⁸ Horowitz, p. 58.

³⁹ Ahuva Belkin, 'The Scarf and the Toothache', in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, ed. by Efrat Tseelon (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-113 (p.101).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Tanakh or the Talmud? What has a greater cultural sway, the interpretations by various sects following various rabbis, the *Haskalah* or the Holocaust? Which of the many various modern Jewish groups ranging from Progressive to Orthodox Jewry should one follow? There are so many different elements that inform a continually shifting and developing Judaism, that any quick answer runs the risk of denigrating the religion by oversimplifying. The focus must remain on the purim-shpil and for that the position of women is unfortunately much more straightforward. As Jean R Freedman observes 'The fact that a woman emerges as the saviour of her people is another example of the topsy-turvy world of Purim'.⁴¹ It was celebrated but not so far as in involving women in the actual celebrations. Women did not perform in the purim-shpil. It was an opportunity for the men in the community to let off steam and this was often at the expense of the female members of the community.

The performances originally consisted of versions of the story of Esther. The plot basically remained the same but the characters within it and the atmosphere was changed radically. The three female characters lost the influence they have in the original and became peculiar hybrids; no longer possessing any of their original characters, physicality or femininity. They rather became an object of male ridicule and a male perception of a female character played by men in bizarre states of dress. Moreover, 'rather than speaking, they are essentially spoken about'.⁴² The Vashti praised by Henry Mart Milman and Alfred Lord Tennyson for her dignity and virtue was gone. The Esther, held by the *Marranos* in fourteenth and fifteenth century Spain as a role model, vanished.⁴³ The female characters essentially became objectified. In the Purim story, Esther is seen as the saviour of her people; beautiful and brave. She may be advised by Mordecai but makes decisions for herself, cleverly understanding how to use her tenuous position in court to her advantage. In the play she is portrayed as being pale, skinny and as Belkin notes, the butt of many jokes. In the Song of Songs, found in the *Ketuvim*, (Writings, the last part of the *Tanakh*), a beautiful poem captures the ideal love between a woman and a man. The

⁴¹ Jean R. Freedman, 'The Masquerade of Ideas: The Purimshpil as Theatre of Conflict', in *Jewish Cultural Studies, Volume Three: Revisioning Ritual: Jewish Traditions in Transition*, ed. by Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011), pp. 94 – 132 (p. 120).

⁴² Belkin, *The Scarf and the Toothache*, p. 106.

⁴³ Jews forced to convert to Roman Catholicism but who practiced Judaism in secret.

female character is described in romantic fashion, 'Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy mouth is comely; thy temples are like a pomegranate split open behind thy veil'.⁴⁴ In one purim-shpil the parody is created to say, 'Her nose is as large as a house. Her mouth gigantic. Her brow is like a bear's behind, her ears like those of a donkey. Her breasts are pointed, the nipples like pinheads'.⁴⁵ Many Talmudic interpretations of why Vashti refused to appear before her husband, ranged from a dose of pimples to full blown leprosy to her actually having a tail. By the time of the purim-shpil this tail had moved from the back, to the actor appearing on stage with 'something exceedingly immodest' growing out of his forehead.⁴⁶ This was probably covered by a veil, but the implication was there and according to future Zionist leader Shmaraya Levin who grew up in the small town of Svisloch in Belorussia in the 1870s, 'every boy in Swislowitz knew'.⁴⁷ In Weisenberg's *Dus Purimspiel* a long song is sung before Vashti's execution listing biblical heroines and their character flaws. None escape, Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam.⁴⁸ After each verse comes the line, 'Her end was dreadful death, women are damn nuisance and trouble'.⁴⁹

The fact that this was all portrayed by men for men adds yet another troubling dimension. Part of the festivities included the parodying of the elite to the elite, in their houses or on the streets. Most members of the community were mocked but they were all in on it, whereas women were doubly excluded, as performers and audience members. As Belkin observes, 'the laughter belongs to the men alone'.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ 'The Book of Shir HaShirim, (Song of Songs): Chapter 4, 3', in *Jewish Virtual Library* <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Bible/Exodus17.html>> [accessed 18 December 2017].

⁴⁵ Belkin, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Horowitz, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Belkin, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam are all important female figures from the *Tanakh*. Eve was the first woman; Sarah was the wife of Abraham and considered to be the matriarch of the Jewish faith; Rebecca was married to Isaac, Abraham's son and was instrumental in ensuring that the birth right passed to Jacob and not the older brother Esau; Miriam was Moses' sister who saved him from death, was one of seven Jewish prophetesses and is considered to be instrumental in the destiny of the Jewish people.

⁴⁹ Belkin, p. 109.

⁵⁰ Belkin, p. 111.

Costumes too further delivered the same message. The male characters, whilst still ridiculous had an attempt made to clothe them with some appropriateness and dignity. Even Haman was dressed to suggest splendour. Yiddish journalist and educator, Abraham Sachs, recalled how the role of Haman was traditionally given to Sheikeh, the butcher's son who 'attired himself in a pair of worn out soldiers' boots with clinking spurs, a three-cornered hat, and huge turned up mustachios'.⁵¹ Levin states that the role of Haman was always taken by the organiser of the play because there was plenty of room for 'skill and subtlety'.⁵² But when it came to portraying the female characters, no such care was taken. They were dressed in rags with their own clothes clearly visible beneath. Author and playwright, Sholom Aleichem noted that in order to play Vashti, Mottl the carpenter 'tied up his beard in a white kerchief to 'convince' the audience they were in the presence of a woman'.⁵³ Belkin sums up the negative connotations perfectly through quoting Rebecca Bell-Metereau in her 1985 book *Hollywood Androgyny*. She explains how transvestism is 'always presenting a negative image of women since, in order to accomplish the imitation, the actor must focus on precisely those elements of female anatomy, dress, facial appearance and mannerism that are the most superficial'.⁵⁴

It could be argued that this approach to the female characters came from the fact that women did not act and that this was no different to a long line of classical theatre. Yet, a quick examination of this does little to advocate for the portrayal of women in the purim-shpil. A great deal has been written about whether Shakespeare's plays 'strengthen and support the patriarchy and patriarchal values',⁵⁵ or not, but that aside one could hardly argue that Shakespeare did not write female characters of substance. In her 2010 essay, *Misreading and Misogyny: Ariosto, Spenser, and Shakespeare*, Kasey Evans notes the 'emasculating' effect

⁵¹ Horowitz, p. 84.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Belkin, *The Scarf and the Toothache*, pp. 110 – 111.

⁵⁴ Belkin, p. 108.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Ayub Jajja, 'Women in Shakespearean Comedies: A Feminist Perspective', *Journal of Educational Research*; Bahawalpur, 16.2 (2013), 34 – 44 (p. 34).

Beatrice's speech creates for Benedick in II. 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing*.⁵⁶ He is forced to emphasise the sexual nature of this humiliation by describing 'Hercules' phallic club "clef" like the female genitalia and [being] consumed as kindling in the roasting fire'.⁵⁷ Although female characters often had to submit to the status quo of the time, either through death, marriage or madness as Juliet, Hermia and Ophelia respectively all face, they were characters that had good and bad elements, written with a depth and a complexity. And as a further highlighting of the inadequacies of the purim-shpil, in Elizabethan England, although women were not on the stage, they were represented in the audience as Phyllis Rackin observes in her lecture, *Misogyny is everywhere*.

Greek performance, to pick another classical style which still impacts on contemporary theatre, further highlights just how troubling female representation in the purim-shpil was. Alan Hughes acknowledges that the debate is still going as to whether women would have been admitted to watch Greek theatre. He cites B.B Rogers claiming in 1902 that 'no women were present'⁵⁸ and then documents F.L Lucas' assertion in 1954 that 'women were admitted to tragedy, and probably even to comedy'.⁵⁹ Hughes finally concludes that 'to keep women away from theatre would require greater powers of coercion than Athens seems to have possessed'.⁶⁰ He further writes that there is 'only a massive absence of evidence'⁶¹ regarding whether women appeared on stage or not, before concluding that evidence from Megale Hellas on vases, suggests that women did participate in mime. Yet, what is not debatable, is the fact that female characters again had a complexity, Lysistrata, Electra, Medea, that were a long way away from the two dimensional output of the purim-shpil.

⁵⁶ Kasey Evans, 'Misreading and Misogyny: Ariosto, Spenser, and Shakespeare', *Renaissance Drama*, 36/37 (2010), 261–292 (p.262).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Alan Hughes, 'Al Dionysiazusai: Women in Greek Theatre', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 51 (2008), pp. 1-27 (p.3).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Alan Hughes, p.4.

As a final point on this subject, it is worth noting that Roger Baker in his book, *Drag: A history of female impersonation on stage*, makes a very important distinction in determining how to look at the portrayal of female characters throughout theatrical history. He investigates the importance of distinguishing between real and false disguises of cross-dressing male actors. In other words are the audience meant to suspend their disbelief in viewing a man playing a woman or is the cross dressing meant to enhance the comedy? In the purim-shpil the emphasis was very much on the latter; the men dressed as women were there to enhance the comedy and this again does little to support the purim-shpil in anything other than it's mistreatment of female characters. This was something that I was very conscious of addressing in my writing of *Petrified* and in Chapter 4, I will document how I approached this.

Conclusion

There is no question that there are challenges inherent within the purim-shpil. It represents a story that builds up to an extremely violent and bloodthirsty conclusion; a story that has, for a vocal minority, become the figurehead of their nationalist and racist views. It is a practice where men turned women into shallow creatures defined by their appearances for the amusement of other men. These are without doubt significant stumbling blocks in terms of writing a purim-shpil for the twenty-first century that can appeal to a secular audience made up of a number of different belief systems. As well as these issues, there is the question as to whether it is even valid to refer to the purim-shpil as theatre or whether there is a risk of confusing a ritualistic practice with something else? Ask an Orthodox Rabbi and they will tell you that there is no theatre within Judaism as evidenced by Rabbi Pesach Efune. The purim-shpil, according to them, is not theatre and shouldn't be explored as such. It is a form of celebration originating from the festival of Purim. Judaism does not allow theatre. It is with these questions in mind that I attempted to begin writing my play and in the following chapter I will explain how I faced these problems and dealt with the challenges.

The universality of suffering makes the book of Job appealing, but the treatment of that theme often makes the book difficult to comprehend. – Dr. Roy Zuck.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PETRIFIED

In the previous chapter, I identified two concerning factors in taking elements of the purim-shpil and creating a piece of theatre for a contemporary, secular audience. Firstly, the violence in the Purim story, used by right wing Israeli groups to justify aggressive acts against the Palestinians whom they claim to be descendants of the tribes of Amalek. Secondly, the negative portrayal of women for an exclusively male audience. In this chapter therefore, I will explain how my research provided a basis on which to write the first draft of *Petrified* and how I attempted to deal with the above issues. I will conclude the chapter by exploring whether it is even valid to refer to the original purim-shpil as theatre rather than ritual.

One of the many challenges of the writing process was literally where to start in finding a purim-shpil on which to base my play. There are historical references to Purim festivities that go back as far as Emperor Honorius (393 – 423 AD) decreeing Jews should not burn effigies of Haman on crosses, but there are virtually no plays to study first hand. A possible exception is Ezekiel's *Exagoge* written by an Alexandrian Jew in the second century BCE, which explores the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. Fourteen fragments comprising two hundred and sixty-nine lines exist, but Rozik explains it is actually 'just an embryonic dramatic text', and more of a poem than drama.¹ The *Masekhet Purim* (1320) and the *Book of the Prophet Habakkuk* written in the fourteenth century are parodies, but not plays. Other plays, both by *conversos* – Jews who converted to Roman Catholicism - *La Celestina* (1499) by Fernando de Roja and *The Queen Esther* (1613) by Felipe Godinez, have a connection 'to Jewish theatre [that] is rather extreme'.² Much like

¹ Eli Rozik, *Jewish Drama & Theatre – From Rabbinical Intolerance to Secular Liberalism* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), p. 15.

² Rozik, p.93.

commedia dell' arte, plays were improvised and passed down through families from generation to generation. It isn't until the late seventeenth century that there are examples of written purim-shpil.

However, these plays pose problems of their own and as Belkin explains can often be bewildering as they 'seem to be unstructured: many of the monologues do not belong to the main plot, the entrances are unmotivated'.³ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett adds that since the scripts largely existed in the memories of the actors, not a single one would necessarily know the entire script and as a result, 'the actors depended on each other, or improvised, to reconstruct a full play from the parts they had'.⁴ Therefore what exactly could be used as a model for my play?

The anarchy and chaos of the purim-shpil was crucial to try and capture, particularly if I hoped to bring a sense of carnival into the theatre, but there also had to be some structure or else there would be a real risk of distancing the audience to the point of alienation. Ultimately I needed to write a play that could resonate with a modern, secular audience. I therefore began looking to see if there were any other examples of early Jewish theatre that I could use to influence my work. I found answers in the works of Leone de' Sommi.

Leone de' Sommi (1525 – 1590) was a Jewish-Italian theatre practitioner who lived in Mantua during 'a period of relative ease for the Jewish community.'⁵ Rozik refers to it as a 'symbiotic relationship' whereby the ruling Gonzaga family needed the Jews as their bankers and the Jews needed the Gonzagas as protection.⁶ This relationship allowed de' Sommi to thrive as a writer and as a director. Sadly, the majority of his work was destroyed by fire at the Turin library in 1904. All that remains is one play, *A Comedy of Betrothal* (*Tsahoth B'dihutha D'Kiddushin* to give the Hebrew transliteration) written around 1550 and the *Quattro Dialoghi in Materia di Rappresentazioni Sceniche* (*Four dialogues on Scenic Representation*) written in

³ Ahuva Belkin, 'The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil', in *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, ed. by Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), pp. 29 – 43 (p. 29).

⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Contraband:" Performance, Text and Analysis of a "Purim-Shpil', *The Drama Review*, 24. 3 (1980), 5-16 (p. 6).

⁵ Rozik, p. 103.

⁶ Ibid.

1565. The latter is particularly exciting as it is thought to be the first treatise ever written on the art of stage production, performance and stage direction and is considered 'a major milestone in the modernization of theatre since the Middle Ages'.⁷

As Rozik notes, de' Sommi was writing 'against the background of a two-fold animosity'.⁸ He had to find a way to balance the Christian animosity to anything Jewish at the same time as the Jewish animosity to anything theatrical. Whilst it would be somewhat of an exaggeration to compare our situations, there is a parity to be found in trying to create a piece of theatre that can exist in several different spheres. I want to write a play that can be true to the essence and the spirit of the purim-shpil whilst not distancing an audience that has little connection to the traditions, in-jokes and religious content inherent in the Purim celebrations. Furthermore, the UK society, if it thinks of Judaism at all, largely associates all things Jewish with Zionism and the current policies of Israel. As such *A Comedy of Betrothal* was a very useful starting point on which to base the structure and content of my play.

Plot

Alfred S. Golding writes that *A Comedy of Betrothal* was, 'colloquial, ripe with hyperbole and often impudently direct – seeming to echo the quotidian (even street) Italian of Mantua'.⁹ Despite writing in Hebrew and using 'Biblical metaphor,' the play was very much aimed at a modern audience who would recognise the type of people and situations from their everyday life.¹⁰ Golding clarifies this by explaining, 'I recognised that Leone conceived his characters in psychological terms, while making them conform to the typology of the Italian *commedia*. They were, in fact, both lifelike and emblematic figures'.¹¹ The play creates characters familiar from the

⁷ Rozik, p.104.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Leone de' Sommi, Ebreo, *A Comedy of Betrothal (Tsahoth B'dihutha D'Kiddushin)*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred S Golding (Ottawa: Carlton Renaissance plays in translation, 1988), p 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

theatrical traditions of the day, whilst giving them a depth that would allow a sophisticated audience to be caught up in the story. What is particularly noteworthy is the fact that the play was ‘offered as part of that holiday’s [Purim] religiously required public rejoicing,¹² without telling either the story of Esther or a biblical story. Instead it takes the essence of the story, notably the theme of ‘*venahafokh hu*’ (“and it was reversed”), There are four story strands which follow the shape of the ‘contamnio of Greco-Roman provenance, in which separate story lines intertwine to create an increasingly complex skein of twists and turns of events’.¹³ The chief strand revolves around the relationship between two young lovers, Jedidiah and Beruriah with the remaining three subplots involving other love interests, rabbis and lawyers. Everything is resolved at the end, happily for most, but with a sense of poetic justice for a few of the characters. The idea of a play that used biblical references, but was set in the present day; that referenced the key reversal element of Purim, but was its own original story and that aimed to create recognisable characters a modern audience could relate to, seemed like an ideal way to approach my play, *Petrified*.

Petrified tells the story of Maurice, a forty-something accountant who finds himself slowly turning into a man of clay, a golem, from Jewish folklore. There are no sub plots, as I wanted to keep the focus on Maurice and his family, however, through the use of intermezzi – to be explained later in the chapter - stories are interwoven to provide a wider context to the transformation that is taking place and the effect it has on all concerned. Bakhtin writes about Rabelais’s work having ‘a certain undestroyable nonofficial nature’¹⁴ and de ‘Sommi wished for his work to be for ‘the delight of the people’.¹⁵ I therefore wanted to reflect the importance of the unofficial and the people by exploring the life of an everyman figure rather than the lives of characters in a royal court such as Esther, Ahasuerus and Haman, but without

¹² A Comedy of Betrothal, p 33.

¹³ A Comedy of Betrothal, p 25.

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 13.

¹⁵ Rozik, p.107.

moving too far away from both the biblical and midrashic interpretations of the story of Purim. I found inspiration in the book of Job.

The book of Job, according to Rozik 'was originally a play-script' adapted from a play into the storytelling medium of the *Tanakh*¹⁶ De 'Sommi believed a similar thing although concluded that it predated Greek tragedy and that 'the origin of theatre lay not in Greece but in Israel'.¹⁷ Bakhtin's concept of the "inside out" (a l'envers) and the continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, addresses similar elements of '*venahafokh hu*' and can be found in Job's story as he is suddenly brought low and then returned to normal again. But what really appealed about the story of Job was the fact that he is an everyday figure who, through no fault of his own, gets caught between a heavenly dispute and has his life changed beyond recognition. I felt this resonated perfectly with the levels of absurdism inherent within Judaism and Jewish humour discussed previously in Chapter 1. The streak of absurdism that runs through much of Jewish literature and thought, captured so perfectly in the stories of the Wise Men of Chelm and in Jewish humour that can comfortably tell jokes about Adolf Hitler and left handed tea cups¹⁸ is very much at play in Job. Integral to Judaism and to the celebration of Purim is laughter and it is the same as Bakhtin's laughter 'of the people'.¹⁹ I concluded therefore to

¹⁶ Rozik, p.39.

¹⁷ A Comedy of Betrothal, p 24.

¹⁸Hitler and Goering were arguing about the Jews, Goering stating that they were quite clever people and Hitler vehemently denying they were any such thing. Finally Goering told Hitler that they should go out in the city and Goering would show Hitler it was true. Hitler agreed, so they disguised themselves and went out on the street. Goering took Hitler into a shop, went up to the counter, and asked the clerk: "Do you have any left-handed teacups?" The clerk stared at Goering for a moment and then said no, mein herr, I do not. The two left with Hitler complaining that he did not understand what the point of this was and Goering telling him to be patient. They went to another shop and Goering gave the same act: "Do you have any left-handed teacups?" The clerk stared and shrugged his shoulders. They left with Hitler becoming incensed over this nonsense and Goering begging for patience. Finally they went into a Jewish shop; Goering again asked the clerk: "Do you have any left-handed teacups?" The clerk smiled graciously, went into the back room and made a show of rummaging around, brought out a saucer and teacup, set down the saucer, and carefully placed the cup with the handle pointed so Goering could pick it with his left hand. "There you are, mein herr!" the clerk said. Goering bought the teacup, thanked the clerk, and the two men left. Goering turned to Hitler and said: "See, I told you the Jews were very clever people." "I don't see what was so clever about that," Hitler snapped. "He just happened to have one in stock!" – My Western Wall – Torah-Jewish Insights in a Westernized World, <<http://www.mywesternwall.net/2013/07/08/hitler-goering-and-left-handed-teacups.html>> [accessed 25 July 2017].

¹⁹ Bakhtin, p. 11.

take the elements from the story of Job which still very much resonated in the twenty-first century, namely the idea of pain and suffering, doubt and questioning of God and man's loyalty to a deity, and put them into my play.

And why a golem? Just as Job was visited by seemingly inexplicable suffering, I looked to find a condition that wouldn't become the subject matter of the play; if the protagonist had an illness such as cancer, then it could become a play about cancer. Maurice turning into a golem would achieve this, but would also successfully capture important Bakhtinian elements of the 'boundless ocean of grotesque bodily imagery'.²⁰ Maurice would be a hypochondriac, already obsessed with the state of his body and the condition would cause his worst nightmares to come true: 'Were any medical technology able to penetrate Maurice's thick carapace they would find no heartbeat, no expansion and contraction of lungs, no blood shooting around the highways of veins and arteries.'²¹ It would also allow for the more sordid, in keeping with carnival tradition:

We can almost handle a man turning to clay before our eyes; have cryptic letters etch themselves into his forehead, But to think that this man no longer pisses or shits is something almost too much to speak of in polite company.²²

The *Tanakh* has several key stories about transformation, be they literal or metaphorical. Nebuchadnezzar became a bird, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, Job transformed from a healthy, successful man, into the broken figure that he becomes and then back again. The golem is a non-biblical creation, although the word appears once in Psalms 139. 16 and then a few times in the *Talmud*, (Sanhedrin 38b), where it is suggested that Adam spent the first twelve hours of his existence as a golem before he was granted a soul. The later sixteenth century tales of Rabbi Loew and the golem of Prague are some of the most iconic stories within Jewish culture. These elements could perfectly sum up all of the above – inexplicable suffering, biblical and cultural references, transformation, the grotesque

²⁰ Bakhtin, p. 319.

²¹ Robert Messik, *Petrified* (first draft) p.106.

²² *Ibid.*

and a streak of absurdism – whilst also capturing the existential crisis of an everyman figure who feels completely out of control in his life.

Structure

With the inherent problems implied by a lack of structure in the purim-shpil of Eastern Europe as outlined by Belkin, I decided to follow the five act structure with intermezzi as laid out in de' Sommi's Dialogues. De 'Sommi had little interest in what he referred to as 'static comedy',²³ meaning comedy that didn't move forward. He believed there was real purpose in dividing a comedy up into five acts as it was integral in developing and moving the plot forward. As well as this it was another assurance that the play would be closer in its 'relationship to man' and therefore closer to 'perfection'.²⁴ The number five reflected the two arms, two legs and head of man, all of which combined the whole universe, 'the inferior world, the celestial world, and the spiritual.'²⁵ This theory is not far from Bakhtin's concepts of 'grotesque realism' in that the 'cosmic, social, and bodily elements are given here as an indivisible whole'.²⁶ Bakhtin is interested in the degradation of the body – perfectly captured within Job's physical suffering and Maurice's transformation into a golem. And whilst de 'Sommi is concerned with creating a 'mirror of a perfect human being',²⁷ the two are different paths to the same goal as both are 'deeply positive'.²⁸

Act 1 represents the head, 'the demonstration of the argument',²⁹ where the basic plot principles are laid out. The audience are introduced to Maurice, his wife, Evie and his family. At the end of the act, Maurice discovers a slight, numb, discolouring on his foot.

²³ Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1966), p.261.

²⁴ Nicoll, p.262.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Bakhtin, p. 19.

²⁷ Nicoll, p.263.

²⁸ Bakhtin, p. 19.

²⁹ Nicoll, p.263.

Act 2 represents the left hand, the 'weakest'³⁰ part of the body and as such is where the problematic events occur. Maurice grows increasingly worried as the discolouring starts to spread. He visits the doctor whilst Evie tries to steer him away from his natural hypochondria and to get him to enjoy his life with her and their children. A Shabbat meal is held for his family which culminates in a horrific purging of his body as the transformation really takes hold.

Act 3 represents the stronger right hand which carries 'these affairs to a happier conclusion'.³¹ With the disease spreading, Maurice desperately attempts to find out what is happening, but it only leads to unwanted attention from the media and ambulance chasers, which forces him to become a virtual prisoner in his home. When things look at their blackest, a rabbi appears with a promise to help.

Act 4 represents the left foot where it looks like things 'might result in complete ruin for the characters'.³² Maurice studies with the rabbi, whilst things fall apart around him. The media spread scurrilous rumours about him causing Evie to angrily declare the revenge she wishes to take on them. Maurice, who is now almost a complete golem, does what a golem does and follows her statement out to the letter.

Act 5, representing the right foot, brings 'everything to a fortunate conclusion'.³³ Due to Maurice's golem inspired destruction of the newspaper, he is imprisoned. The rabbi explains to Evie just what the risks of a golem are, namely phenomenal strength and the literal carrying out of instructions. So after saying goodbye, the rabbi performs a ritual to remove the golem and Maurice forever.

The structural traditions of de 'Sommi's period, also dictate the use of a prologue, an epilogue and a series of intermezzi, 'colourful entertainments, having nothing to do with the play being enacted'.³⁴ I have used these to fulfil several

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nicoll, p.82.

functions from the purim-shpil, namely the role of the *marshelik*, *payats*, or *loyfer*, a clown who would either welcome the audience or would knock at their door, their troupe behind them, to be welcomed in to perform. This direct interaction with the audience and the ability to step out of the action and comment on it, draws on the traditional clowning elements found in the above positions as well as within the role of the *badkhan*, the traditional Jewish wedding jester.

Any exploration of structure would not be complete without the examination of 'venahafokh hu.' It is an integral part of the Purim story as the potentially disastrous outcome of Haman's plot is reversed at the last minute. In *Petrified*, Maurice's fortunes are reversed in the sense that he goes from being human to becoming a golem. But when it came to deciding whether he would find a last minute reprieve or not, I didn't feel that delivering the happy ending was true to the story of Purim, where Esther's community are saved, but then go out and slaughter thousands of their enemies. As with everything else in the Purim story, the reversal is ambiguous and I felt that ambiguity needed to be present in *Petrified* as well. When the Rabbi tells Evie about the story of the Golem in Prague, she asks whether the story has a happy ending:

Rabbi Not hugely, no.

Evie Didn't they used to?³⁵

It is worth remembering, that Golding comments on the colloquial elements of de' Sommi's work and the lifelike elements of his characters. A truly happy ending did not feel justified, because in everyday life these don't exist; life is complicated and our lives are rarely gifted with something as black and white as a truly happy resolution. Even if someone recovers from an illness that person and all those around are completely changed by the process and so the concept of 'venahafokh hu' becomes much more about the reversal of the characters' lives than a superficial happy ending. It is through finding a level of acceptance that Maurice reverses his outlook on the world.

³⁵ Messik, p.139.

But what of the violence inherent in the story of Purim? I have primarily addressed this issue by following de 'Sommi's approach of a purim-shpil that follows the themes of Purim without re-telling the story. There are no acts of revenge carried out at the climax and no one is hung or put to the sword. This is a story about one man's relationship with God and how that impacts his family. The only act of violence within it, Maurice destroying the newspaper, is met with shock by all concerned and is the final step towards his end. The intention is that this play acknowledges its origins whilst looking to the future. Eliezer Brodt quotes Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky in stating that 'in eating hamentashen, [a Purim delicacy meaning Haman's pockets], we are fulfilling the commandment (figuratively) of destroying Amalek'.³⁶ The key word here is figuratively. The eating of Haman's pockets or ears on Purim, acts as a symbol for the Jewish victory over their enemies. No one would claim that actual pockets or ears should be consumed. As Belkin notes, the purim-shpil was a 'mimetic revenge'.³⁷ The violence in the story cannot be downplayed, but the strength to be garnered from Esther's story where the Jews are not the victims, should not be underestimated. Rich Cohen, in his 1998 book, *Tough Jews*, explains this viewpoint in relation to learning about Jewish gangsters:

Well, to me, remembering Jewish gangsters is a good way to deal with being born after 1945, with being someone who has always had the Holocaust at his back, the distant tom-tom: *six million, six million, six million*. The gangsters, with their own wisecracking machine-gun beat, push that other noise clear from my head. And they drowned out other things, too, like the stereotype that fits the entire Jewish community into the middle class, comfortable easy-chair Jews with nothing but morality for dessert. Where I grew up it was understood: Even the most reckless Jew winds up in medical school. Well, the gangsters helped me clear this trap, showing me that since the worst is

³⁶ Eliezer Brodt, 'The Origins of Hamentashen in Jewish Literature: A Historical-Culinary Survey Revisited', in *Seforim Blogspot* <<http://seforim.blogspot.co.uk/2008/03/origins-of-hamentashen-in-jewish.html>> [accessed 5 May 2013].

³⁷ Ahuva Belkin, 'Masks and Disguises as an Expression of Anarchy in the Jewish Festival Theatre', *Theatre and the Holy Script*, ed. by Shimon Levy, (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 203-210 (p. 204).

possible, so is everything else. If a Jew can die in the electric chair, anything can happen.³⁸

Unfortunately there will always be those who commit acts of violence in the name of religion, but that cannot mean that the religion or the custom should be overlooked. Theatre provides an opportunity to share ideas and express thoughts and it is vital that platform is used rather than shutting it down completely. Just as the purim-shpil has continued to develop and evolve, so it can very much find a place in contemporary society.

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there was plenty of opposition to the festival of Purim and the purim-shpil within the Jewish community as well. But there was a clear agenda there. Y. L. Peretz wanted to create a Yiddish culture that was 'mit laytn glaykh, equal among equals, like any other European culture'.³⁹ He advocated aspiration, 'the language of aesthetics, morality and mystical spirituality. [...to achieve...] the highest, the best, the most beautiful, the purest'.⁴⁰ The title of one of Peretz's most popular stories was *If not higher (Oyb nisht nokh hekher)* and this summed up everything about him and every reason why he was so against Purim. For advocates of the *Haskalah*, Purim represents everything that was 'unredeemed and unredeem-able, coarse, low and immanent, profane, deformed, shameful, above all, impure. In a word: the carnivalesque'.⁴¹

There remain many questions within the Jewish community about what it means to be a Jew and how we fit in to the wider community. However, one thing we are not trying to do in the UK, is step out of the ghetto. We left that several generations ago and now occupy positions in every walk of life. Peretz's fears and ambitions are no longer valid. A public celebration and exploration of one's culture will only go further in cementing our place within the society we live in, not damage it.

Characters

³⁸ Rich Cohen, *Tough Jews*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p.21.

³⁹ Michael C. Steinlauf, 'Fear of Purim: Y. L. Peretz and the Canonization of Yiddish Theater', *Jewish Social Studies*, 1.3 (1995), pp. 44-65 (p. 56).

⁴⁰ Steinlauf, p.57.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Looking to the purim-shpil of Eastern Europe to determine characters is unsurprisingly not a straight forward process. As explained, there was never just one purim-shpil. 'As frequently happens in folk plays that appropriate elements wherever they can find them, outright anachronisms appear'.⁴² These are performances that sprung up throughout every Jewish community around the world and as such they were an amalgamation of a multitude of sources. Plays that follow a *Megillah* theme, such as *Eyn Sheyn purimshpil (A lovely Purim Play, 1697)* tended to have characters from that story. King Ahasuerus would be portrayed as a fool, Mordecai as a matchmaker, Haman as a frustrated lover and Vashti as a shrew. In *Mekhires yoysef (The Sale of Joseph, c.1707)*, the German jester Pickelherring makes an appearance. In the 19th century, the tradition of the *Royber- bande-shpil* or *Gazln-shpil*, the smuggler play developed. These focused on the interaction of a lawbreaker, his victim and/or the authorities and 'shed light on the relation of innovation to tradition within the form'.⁴³ They were also influenced by Gothic melodrama. In Poland there was the character of the charlatan doctor whilst others seemed to be more heavily influenced by commedia dell'arte. In *A Comedy of Betrothal*, the characters were chiefly based on 'the features of everyday Italian life – the patrician merchant-masters of the city-state, their families and servants'.⁴⁴

What is very clear from all these sources is the fact that no matter the location or community, the characters in the purim-shpil tended to reflect those watching. I explained in Chapter 1, how for Bakhtin carnival was 'hostile to all that was immortalised and complete'.⁴⁵ That it was a way of showing defiance to all those who stood above you, both within and outside of the community, as Freedman explains, 'a form of courage – a way of focusing the mind on action and not on fear'.⁴⁶ At times this defiance was affectionate if perhaps directed towards members of the community. At other times, it would have been outright hostile shown by Emperor

⁴² Belkin, *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, p.37.

⁴³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, P.8.

⁴⁴ *A Comedy of Betrothal*, p 24.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, p 10.

⁴⁶ Jean R. Freedman, 'The Masquerade of Ideas: The Purimshpil as Theatre of Conflict', in *Jewish Cultural Studies, Volume Three: Revisioning Ritual: Jewish Traditions in Transition*, ed. by Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011), pp. 94 – 132 (p. 125).

Honorius's decree which clearly highlighted the level of pent up violence that the Jewish populace were symbolically directing at those more powerful around them. Originally the audience would have all known each other and a significant part of the entertainment that allowed the satirical commentary and parody to exist, was recognising the characters in the play. In *Petrified* I have attempted to present characters and initial situations that an audience, regardless of background and religious beliefs can empathise with.

The circumstances of Maurice's life; the frustrations that he is not doing enough to support his family and give them the lives he thinks they should have and the exhaustion from trying to do more should resonate with many: 'You've hit a mid-life crisis. Suddenly, you're questioning everything you've devoted to the last couple of decades, and all of your carefully-laid life plans don't seem to make sense anymore'.⁴⁷ At its heart, *Petrified*, is about family relationships and whatever our background or religion, this is an immensely relatable subject.

Maurice is the protagonist and the one we in the audience are asked to relate to. He is a father of three, the wrong side of forty, stuck in a job he doesn't particularly like, but without the energy to do anything about this. He is Job and just as Job finds himself beset with challenges on all sides, so too does Maurice, whether it be redundancies at work, complaints from his parents and ultimately his transformation. He is also Mondritsch the clown and his metamorphosis into a golem is really just an outward manifestation of the way in which he has blindly been ambling through life and following instructions without question.

Dr. Totness follows in a long line of charlatan doctors that appear throughout commedia dell' arte and purim-shpil. He is verbose, has no bedside manner and lives in a completely hypocritical manner, smoking and drinking as he delivers his diagnoses.

Rabbi Konopinski is played by the same actor who plays the doctor and is a clear acknowledgement of the tradition of the Purim-rabbi, 'the Jewish equivalent of

⁴⁷ Forbes Coaches Council, '15 Signs You've Hit Your Mid-Life Crisis (And What To Do About It)', in *Forbes* <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/08/31/15-signs-youve-hit-your-mid-life-crisis-and-what-to-do-about-it/#1d437d14573c>> [accessed 3 October 2018].

the fool of the “Feast of Fools”⁴⁸. This tradition can be traced all the way back to the Babylonians and pagan Rome as the creation of a character who is able to say and do things that would not be permitted for the rest of the year. Within the Purim festivities, it is also an example of ‘*venahafokh hu*’ as Rozik explains:

In this sense the *purim-rabbi* too exhibits an anti-ritual reversal of the social and cultural system, which is usually reflected in the interchange of roles in meaningful pairs, such as man/woman, master/servant and, in the case of the *purim-rabbi*, teacher/student, which aims at the catharsis of psychological pressure in the characteristic spirit of *purim*.⁴⁹

By clearly having the actor who has just been ridiculed as the doctor playing the rabbi, I am acknowledging this tradition and suggesting there might be something disreputable about the rabbinate as the Purim traditions demand.

However, the real parodic and satirical commentary is left to the Players, two characters who appear throughout the intermezzi. They are dressed in traditional seventeenth century Jewish garb to acknowledge the origins of this tradition and their presence in an otherwise modern world is a deliberate attempt to highlight the theatricality of the entire piece. They are the ones who comment on a series of stories from biblical and talmudic sources highlighting the unfairness of God and life itself:

Player 1 But it doesn’t matter, whoever you are and however you live your life. Life happens. The Gods...

Player 2 ...Best leave religion out of it...

Player 1 ...Fate, Karma, shit luck, whatever you want to call it, singles you out and then you haven’t got a hope and there’s nothing you can do. How does that make you feel?⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rozik, p.156.

⁴⁹ Rozik, p.157.

⁵⁰ Messik, p.152.

They discuss the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar, the proposed prostitution of his daughters made by Lot to the angels and the story of Job himself. I am never going to be able to create a truly parodical piece of performance as the majority of a secular and for that matter, Jewish audience, are not well enough versed in Jewish liturgy. Nor can I create a satirical piece where the actors play recognisable individuals from their and the audience's immediate community, without alienating the vast majority of an audience. Therefore it is important to create characters that an audience would recognise, that would appear in any community; an archetype. The intermezzi, as well as Maurice's speech in the prologue, can therefore comment on the Bible, the Talmud and on religion in general in an acknowledgement of the traditions that came before. 'But I do hope, if I'm still capable of such a thing, I still hope it was because I stepped on an ant or had one too many milky coffees with my breakfast bacon or masturbated on the Sabbath'.⁵¹

In the previous chapter I mentioned the issues with misogyny that are inherent in both the story of Purim and the manner in which it has been celebrated over the centuries. From the strong, brave woman of the Megillah, Esther became a butt of jokes, spoken about rather than given a key role to play and with her body mocked. Vashti fares no better as she finds herself with a phallus attached to her forehead. If these humiliations weren't enough then the women weren't even allowed to be in the audience and the performances were exclusively male, played by men and watched by men. But is it misogynistic? Bakhtin observes a difference between 'popular comic tradition' and the 'ascetic tendency of medieval Christianity which saw in woman the incarnation of sin, the temptation of the flesh'.⁵² He goes on to explain that:

The popular tradition is in no way hostile to woman and does not approach her negatively. In this tradition woman is essentially related to the material bodily stratum; she is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is ambivalent. She debases, brings down to earth, lends a bodily substance to things, and destroys; but, first of all, she is

⁵¹ Messik, p.2.

⁵² Bakhtin, p 240.

the principle that gives birth. She is the womb. Such is the woman's image in the popular comic tradition.⁵³

I feel that the purim-shpil falls somewhere between the two extremes referenced by Bakhtin. The representation of women portrayed in the purim-shpil performances don't go to the extreme of thinking of women as the incarnation of sin, though I do think to claim that the reason Vashti refused to dance naked before her husband and his friends was due to her having leprosy or a tail is hardly raising her to the status of the life giving womb. However, The Oxford English dictionary defines misogyny as a 'dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women'.⁵⁴ This is not what is happening within the purim-shpil. Writing in his 1995 thesis, Ben Taylor, states that Bakhtin 'credits Rabelais' portrayal of women with the ability to shatter prevailing codes of representation'⁵⁵ and this is much more in keeping with the purim-shpil. Women in Judaism, have a very specific function to play, as do men and I would argue that what one finds within the purim-shpil, is not misogyny but juvenile behaviour. The whole day was centered around 'the logic of the "wrong side out" and of "bottoms up"'.⁵⁶ The men in the Jewish community were given an opportunity to behave how they wouldn't normally; to make jokes about the female form or the role of women because for the rest of the year it was utterly prohibited by the religion. This is not an attempt to defend those actions, men don't come out of this aspect of history in any kind of a positive light, but I would argue that whilst male juvenile behaviour of this sort should not be permissible in normal society, it does not display a 'dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women'.

That said, that kind of behaviour is not anything to be proud of, or in this day and age, to celebrate. Jean R Freedman observes that whilst many of these traditions still continue in the Hasidic communities of Brooklyn, 'In many contemporary American congregations, however, women are active participants in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ English, Oxford Living Dictionaries, Misogyny
<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/misogyny>> [Accessed 9 June 2018].

⁵⁵ Ben Taylor, *Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Library, 1995), p. 42.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, p 240.

all aspects of synagogue life, including purimshpiln'.⁵⁷ It would be unthinkable and undesirable to resurrect a tradition like this to the secular theatre and have it be more than a cultural curiosity. But, the spirit of the purim-shpil should not be ignored. One does not have to bring forward every element in order to capture 'the spirit of anarchy and rebellion'.⁵⁸ It is still possible to experience the power of Greek tragedy without being in an amphitheatre and watching three actors in masks standing above a chorus. No one would now question the dynamic captured by seeing a male and female Benedick and Beatrice sparring with each other, even though Beatrice would have been played by a man in Shakespeare's time. The purim-shpil has elements that can be injected into contemporary Jewish theatre without feeling the necessity to adopt every single practice.

Therefore the character of Evie, Maurice's wife, is a strong, powerful individual, who, like Esther from the original story, drives the narrative. In her first appearance, whilst Maurice is hiding in the laundry room trying to summon the energy to go into to work, she is already awake and doing. She runs the household and she is the one that solves any issues that her children have. She brings Maurice down to earth when he is becoming self-absorbed. She takes him to the doctor and she solves problems. Maurice reacts to his transformation by focusing on himself: 'It's on my legs, my arms, my chest, my...it's everywhere. It's everywhere and I don't know what to do. But I am really, really scared'.⁵⁹ Evie focuses on everyone else apart from herself, defending her home and family with a baseball bat or whatever is at her disposal, 'But you know what I think when I take a look at what's happening around us? You know what I want? I want revenge'.⁶⁰ It is her decision to figuratively switch off the life support machine and end Maurice's existence as a golem and it is she who will go on after the play and continue to be strong for her family regardless

⁵⁷ Freedman, p. 125.

⁵⁸ Ahuva Belkin, 'The Scarf and the Toothache', in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, ed. by Efrat Tseelon (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-113 (p.101).

⁵⁹ Messik, p.85.

⁶⁰ Messik, p.121.

of her loss and pain. She truly is the 'tigress of diabolical ferocity'⁶¹ feared by Austin Holyoake.

The other two key women in the play are Margaret, Maurice's mother, and Abigail his sister. Margaret is another strong character. She also does her best to keep her family together trying to maintain relations between her husband, Randall, who says little, other than to dismiss one of his children and to ensure that Abigail and Maurice are civil to each other. Judaism has long presented the Jewish matriarch as a powerful figure to be respected and feared and Margaret is no different. She doesn't think that Evie is good enough for Maurice, showing immediate suspicion when Maurice asks for a camomile instead of tea: 'Evie not drinking caffeine at the moment?'.⁶² Whereas Evie is direct in most of her communications, Margaret tends to err towards being passive aggressive and my aim is that an audience, regardless of culture, will recognise the mother who interferes, doesn't think their child is eating enough and is worried about them being ill, whilst simultaneously laughing at how annoying that can be. However, due to that recognition, I would want there to still be a great deal of affection towards Margaret's character and whilst the audience would laugh, they would also know how fiercely loyal she is and what an important role in the family a mother plays.

Abigail is a far more selfish character. She is a clear example of what can happen when you don't make an attempt to stand on your own two feet. She is needy, immature and looking for every opportunity to trip up her brother. However, she is also dealing with an absent husband in Stefan and being left to pick up the pieces of her incomplete family and so, whilst not being an overly positive or even likeable character, she is still far stronger than the majority of the men in the piece. Equally, a reaction to the caricatures of women in the purim-shpil should not be simply making every single female character a role model, because that would not provide the "lifelike" figures created by de' Sommi. Abigail, like every character in the play has aspects of her character that she needs to work on.

⁶¹ Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites, Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 24.

⁶² Messik, p.20.

An Eastern European purim-shpil would have been a communal affair with all of the (male) members of the community coming together to celebrate. This tradition has continued into the modern day with synagogue congregants of all ages getting together to hear the *Megillah*. I wanted to try and capture that atmosphere somewhat by having a cast of varying ages that included children. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes how ‘the actors were traditionally boys and unmarried men’.⁶³ Maurice and Evie have three children, Ruth, Josie and Davy and they become a clearer embodiment of what Maurice is losing and what Evie has to fight for. This community feel whereby ‘One actor might play several parts, including female roles, which were a source of hilarity’,⁶⁴ is furthered by having the cast, with the exception of Maurice, all play several different characters regardless of gender or age.

Language

In Chapter 2, I listed Rozik’s criteria for elements of Jewish theatre. He explains how ‘the history of Jewish theatre has roughly followed the trajectory of the main Jewish languages’ and then goes on to discuss them in order, Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, before dispersing into the national languages of host cultures.⁶⁵ By the time of the purim-shpil, Yiddish, perceived as a ‘non-sacred language’ was the main language the plays were performed in as it was considered more suitable for parody.⁶⁶ De ‘Sommi, on the other hand, wrote *A Comedy of Betrothal* in Hebrew, not because he was avoiding the parodic tradition, but because he wanted to prove that the ‘Hebrew language is capable for any artistic work, no less than any other language’.⁶⁷ So where does that leave my work?

I have stated from the start that my intention is to create a play that can stand alone as a piece of theatre for a contemporary, secular, UK audience whilst being able to draw upon a Jewish theatrical tradition that has not often been used. Writing a play in Yiddish or Hebrew only lends itself to connecting with a very specific

⁶³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p.6.

⁶⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p.6.

⁶⁵ Rozik, p.5.

⁶⁶ Rozik, p.150.

⁶⁷ Rozik, p.107.

audience. It also conflicts with Rozik's acknowledgement that a play script presupposes its 'language is shared and mastered equally by authors, actors and spectators.'⁶⁸ However, Rozik also states that contained under his discussion of language are also 'nonverbal codes shared by playwrights, actors and spectators.'⁶⁹ Therefore I felt that writing the play in English would not contradict any of my aims as there exist many nonverbal codes common to UK theatregoers, involving 'facial expression, intonation, proxemics, body postures and hand gestures'.⁷⁰

Another element of language that I wanted to explore was that mentioned by Bakhtin as being an essential part of carnival, namely the 'various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons'.⁷¹ These were commonplace in carnival and I wanted to utilise these language elements in my writing. In the Prologue, Maurice in his full form of a golem speaks to the audience: 'If I did nothing to call this down upon me; if none of this is my fault, then God, the Lord God almighty, Yahew, Elohim, Hakodesh Baruk Hu, is a real...cunt'.⁷² The opening line is deliberately designed to shock as naming God in such a way is sure to offend and it of course makes a clear statement of how Maurice is feeling about his situation. However, there is more behind that decision than simple shock value. Bakhtin explained that 'Language which mocks the deity...was part of the ancient comic cults'.⁷³ He goes on to say that this 'contributed to the creation of free carnival atmosphere'.⁷⁴ The harsh language used in the play is a quintessential part of folk theatre. In *Eyn sheyn purimshpil*, Mordkhe finishes a mock prayer with 'I stick my finger in my arse and Homen licks the dung'.⁷⁵ This serves the same purpose as in Rabelais's novel where armies are drowned in urine or at the Feast of Fools where 'during the solemn

⁶⁸ Rozik, p.5.

⁶⁹ Rozik, p.2.

⁷⁰ Rozik, p. 6.

⁷¹ Bakhtin, p. 5.

⁷² Messik, p.2.

⁷³ Bakhtin, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Bakhtin, p. 17.

⁷⁵ Belkin, *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, p.29.

service sung by the bishop-elect, excrement was used instead of incense'.⁷⁶ Whilst comments and actions such as these are on the surface offensive and destructive, they are according to Bakhtin 'ambivalent' since the lower part of the body also houses the reproductive organs.⁷⁷ This can be seen throughout the play, when the Players kick each other in the groin or Evie lets forth a tirade against the Rabbi for his advice being as useful as a chocolate teapot, 'melted all over the vicar's wife's dress, tea and chocolate everywhere; looked like she'd shat herself'.⁷⁸ I am acknowledging and utilising the language of carnival with the intention ultimately being a positive and life affirming one as through 'the images of urine and excrement is preserved the essential link with birth, fertility, renewal, welfare'.⁷⁹

Performance Space

'In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators'.⁸⁰ So writes Bakhtin in his analysis of carnival in relation to Rabelais's work. I knew that in order to demonstrate that my hypothesis is correct, I would need to think of a way to stage my play that could introduce elements of the carnival into contemporary Jewish theatre. Nicholas Hytner writes that 'London has changed. Audiences will go wherever you invite them if the invitation is worthwhile'.⁸¹ With companies such as *Punchdrunk* and venues such as the Waterloo Vaults, audiences are having more and more opportunities to watch theatre in an unconventional space. The Edinburgh fringe has been doing it for years and an audience member is more unlikely to watch theatre in a theatre, than in any other possible venue.

In his *Four Dialogues*, Leone de' Sommi writes a great deal about how to stage a play and through these writings and *A Comedy of Betrothal* it is possible to get a sense of how he would have staged pieces of theatre with, 'spectators sat

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, p. 147.

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, p. 148.

⁷⁸ Messik, p.101.

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, p. 148.

⁸⁰ Bakhtin, p. 7.

⁸¹ Nicholas Hytner, *Balancing Acts*, (London: Penguin, Random House, 2017), p. 284.

upon benches placed upon the floor, and perhaps as well, in loggia-boxes that were raised above the heads of the other spectators and ran about the rear and sides of the room'.⁸² The set up was reminiscent of contemporary Italian seating and also corresponded to the layout of the seating in a synagogue. It is also believed that the stage would have been raised to help with sightlines with a set on it that may have opted for a Serlian perspective, which was 'formed of angle wings to represent the various houses radiating up the stage to where a backdrop painted in perspective continued the street illusion'.⁸³ There were also likely to have been booths with doors for all of the key characters. However, this was the most expensive to build and not necessarily prudent of the Jewish community to highlight wealth as their position in society was always tenuous.⁸⁴ Whilst it is fascinating to read about the staging methods of one of the earliest pieces of Jewish theatre, there is little about it that would introduce the spirit of carnival into the theatre for a contemporary audience as this staging would be very familiar. For the staging, I therefore needed to find something that was far more carnivalesque.

Bakhtin writes about the 'carnivals proper, with their long and complex pageants and processions'.⁸⁵ This is echoed by Doniach's description, covered in Chapter 1, of the way the men would gather in the town square, all in costumes, before parading through the street banging on instruments to notify the community of their presence. Eventually they would end up at the house of the richest man in town to ask to be allowed in to perform. I have always been interested in theatre capable of blurring the boundaries between the audience and the actors; that acknowledges the audience are watching a piece of theatre and uses that recognition to dictate the stage craft and the entire theatrical experience. In my adaptation of Israel Zangwill's *The King of Schnorrers*, the play begins with two men walking on stage carrying a

⁸² A Comedy of Betrothal, pp. 35-36.

⁸³ A Comedy of Betrothal, p. 36.

⁸⁴ In 1562 for example, Don Cesare Gonzaga, Duke of Ariano, founded an academy for writers and actors called *Accademia degli Invaghiti* – the Academy of the Enamored. He wanted to include de' Sommi, the Jew, which meant declaring him as a *Cavaliere*, a knight. This was met with outrage by his colleagues as it was 'impossible for a Jew to enjoy the rank of *cavaliere*' or 'for a Jew to wear the papal arms.' A Comedy of Betrothal, p. 36.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, p.5.

long stick, a short stick, a table cloth and a chair which prove to be the only props and set in the entire play. They set them up around the stage, look at each other, look at the audience and then say 'Imagine'.⁸⁶ At the end, once they've bowed, they collect up these four items and leave. In my play, *Rudderless*, the narrator Canderlinck, is unhappy with a rhyme in his opening monologue. He therefore gestures to the wings and the stage manager brings him a pen so that he can cross out the existing line in his script and write a new one. This is further compounded by the fact that Canderlinck then appears in the story and continually refers back to the narrator script to see what's going to happen. Later in the play, the stage manager pushes on a large truck containing a polar bear and two penguins. He wears a coat and gloves, because the scene is meant to be set in the North Pole and he's freezing. These were elements that were important to bring to *Petrified* and as explained in Chapter 2, is not a common place sight within contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK.

I decided therefore to stage the play in a large space with three carts in it; 'one end on and one either side forming almost a semi-circle'.⁸⁷ The action would take place on and around the carts with the audience milling around on the floor and thus becoming fully immersed in the world of the play. The actors will be with the audience when not in the action. If a character calls from another space, such as Evie does in the opening act, to suggest she is in another part of the house, she will be standing in amongst the audience and then emerge from them. Schechner in his exploration of "Environmental Theatre" explores space and writes about the 'continuous systematic exchange of space between performers and spectators'.⁸⁸ This was something I very much wanted to explore as it ties directly into Bakhtin's lack of footlights and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett acknowledging that in the purimshpil, 'sets and props were generally minimal and improvised'.⁸⁹ *Petrified* never changes set. It all takes place on and around the carts. Should a different location

⁸⁶ Robert Messik, *The King of Schnorrers*, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Messik, *Petrified* (first draft) p.3.

⁸⁸ Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater, An Expanded New Edition including "Six Axioms For Environmental Theater* (New York: Applause, 1973), p. xxviii.

⁸⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p.6.

need to be made clear, such as being in a radio studio, then the signposts are provided by the characters: 'I'd do anything for love, but I won't do that. Meatloaf. And we're through to our next caller'.⁹⁰ The actors share the same reality with the audience, telling a story and involving them throughout. In the second act when Maurice suffers from a violent purging of his insides due to the transformation, the idea will be that the audience get covered in those fluids. Bakhtin describes the people as being fully immersed in carnival and Richard Schechner asks 'what happens to a performance when the usual agreements between performer and spectator are broken?'.⁹¹ This moment also ties in with the aforementioned Feast of Fools and the Bishop-elect using excrement in his thurible instead of incense.

Ritual and Theatre

When writing about his theatrical experiments in the sixties with The Performance Group, Schechner notes how audiences began to think of his company as 'a community, even a religious community'.⁹² This does find parallels with Bakhtin's description of the folk being unified. He explains how popular-festive forms presented the victory of the people and how there was a collective strength, a power and 'no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole'.⁹³ Just as Bakhtin's carnival folk found strength in numbers, so too did the Jewish communities who used the festival of Purim as a way to remember the defeat of their enemies and used it to comment on those who were currently oppressing them. But is it valid to refer to the purim-shpil as theatre or is there a risk of confusing a ritualistic practice with something else?

Victor Turner wrote about being 'alerted to the "theatrical" potential of social life',⁹⁴ and would argue that there is a very close connection between ritual and performance. He references Arnold van Gennep's work in his *Rites de Passage*

⁹⁰ Messik, *Petrified* (first draft) p.57.

⁹¹ Schechner, p. 40.

⁹² Schechner, p.43.

⁹³ Bakhtin, p.256.

⁹⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), p. 9.

(1908) and his identifying of three phases in a rite of passage, separation, transition and incorporation as well as constructing 'a cultural realm which is defined as "out of time"'.⁹⁵ Carnival corresponds to these criteria, as does the festival of Purim and the purim-shpil within it. The liminoid process of the festival allows certain behaviours before returning once more to the status quo. In earlier chapters, through theorists such as Rozik, I have discussed the reasons and the importance for these processes. I explained the need within a community for a 'levelling process' as Turner would put it.⁹⁶ Rozik refers to it as a 'catharsis', but whatever the terminology, communities need space to break the rules. Schechner continued this theory by stating that 'the phenomena called either/all "drama," "theatre," "performance" occur among all the world's peoples and date back as far as historians, archaeologists and anthropologists can go'.⁹⁷ However, in order to determine whether the purim-shpil can be classed as theatre, it is perhaps more useful to look at the ritualistic elements within established theatre and to determine whether the purim-shpil corresponds with those.

Schechner identifies several basic qualities as being shared between theatre and ritual; (he also groups play, games and sports within this). Time operates differently within these areas to everyday life. 'Clock time is a mono-directional, linear-yet-cyclical uniform measurement adapted from day-night and seasonal rhythms'.⁹⁸ He then goes on to list the major varieties of performance time, namely Event time, Set time and Symbolic time, with the latter being 'when the span of an activity represents another (longer or shorter) span of clock time'.⁹⁹ The purim-shpil tells a story within a number of hours that lasted a great deal longer. *Petrified* does the same. The events of the story take place over months but exist within a play that is a couple of hours long and so fits in with this criteria. Next comes 'Objects'. The contrast between an object having value in real life due to its practical usage compared to within performance activities when all objects 'have a market value

⁹⁵ Turner, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Turner, p. 26.

⁹⁷ Richard Schechner, *Performance theory* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), p.66.

⁹⁸ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.8.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

much less than the value assigned to the objects within the context of the activity'.¹⁰⁰ Again the purim-shpil fits this criteria in that costumes, as rudimentary as they were, would have been 'decisive in creating the symbolic reality'.¹⁰¹ I have emulated this in *Petrified*. The Players wear seventeenth century Jewish outfits and the rest of the characters are in modern dress. A symbolic prop will signify a particular character such as business cards for lawyers or Dr. Totness wearing a stethoscope and then putting on a *yarmulke* for the Rabbi.

The next criteria is 'Non-productivity' and here Schechner quotes J Huizinga in explaining it as being 'a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life [...] "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly'.¹⁰² The purim-shpil was non-productive in that it took up a great deal of time in preparation and performance, yet did little to increase productivity in terms of either study or manual labour. And there are rules that run across all, dictating the behaviour of those partaking and watching before, during and after, such as the *Laufer* who would knock on the door of the house and ask to be let in. He would then introduce the various characters and fill in any confusion about settings with dialogue. In *Petrified*, Maurice plays that role. His opening line is 'Can...you...hear...me?'.¹⁰³ It is a cry for help as he is speaking from the position of being virtually transformed into a golem, but it is also a knocking at the door asking to be let in so the play can begin. The final criteria laid out by Schechner is the use of "Performance Spaces." He writes about large performance spaces 'uniquely organized so that a large group can watch a small group'.¹⁰⁴ The parades of the purim-shpil provided just that and would have fulfilled the 'transformation of space into place'.¹⁰⁵ This returns to my initial point about the staging of *Petrified* where the

¹⁰⁰ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Messik, *Petrified* (first draft) p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.14.

¹⁰⁵ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.174.

audience, the large group, can watch the performers, the small group, whilst they perform on the carts and wagons that are dotted about the performance space.

Schechner states that ‘whether one calls a specific performance “ritual” or “theater(sic)” depends mostly on context and function’.¹⁰⁶ He writes about the *Efficacy-Entertainment Braid*, ‘a braided structure continuously interrelating efficacy (ritual) and entertainment (theater) [sic]’.¹⁰⁷ He claims that in each period one or the other is dominant, but that ‘at all times a dialectical tension exists between the efficacious and the entertainment tendencies’.¹⁰⁸ Adopting this argument, therefore, would mean that it is not a question of determining whether the purim-shpil is ritual or theatre but of deciding where on the scale it fits. Schechner argues that when the braid is tight and efficacy and entertainment are both present in nearly equal degrees, theatre flourishes; the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras being prime examples. There is no doubting that within the history of Judaism this has never been the case, theatre, as has been explained, being a frowned upon practice. Ritual or efficacy has always been dominant with the one sanctioned performance occurring during the carnival period of Purim. The aim with *Petrified* is to tighten that braid so that both strands can benefit the other. Schechner observed that entertainment is far more dominant than religion in Western society and that ‘an attempt is being made for theater (sic) to fill a niche abandoned by religion.’¹⁰⁹ This is the perfect time to introduce the purim-shpil into contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK.

Conclusion

By using records that have survived from the works of Leoni de’ Sommi which provide clear details of many of his theatrical intentions, alongside information garnered from a variety of other European purim-shpil, it has been possible to write a play that both looks back to its origins and forwards in order to resonate with a contemporary audience. I have outlined the ways in which these sources have

¹⁰⁶ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.130.

¹⁰⁷ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.132.

¹⁰⁸ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.134.

¹⁰⁹ Schechner, *Performance theory*, p.221.

informed plot, structure, character, language and performance space and ultimately led to the creation of a first draft. In order to continue this creative process and to hone the play, I began to look at the ways other contemporary practitioners rendered old theatrical forms in order to produce theatre for a contemporary audience and in the following chapter I shall document this process.

And perhaps the humans did create their God. But does that make him less real? Take this arch. They created it. Now it exists. — Helene Wecker

5. DEVELOPING THE DRAFT

The initial development of my play, *Petrified* used inspiration from the Eastern European purim-shpil of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the work of the sixteenth century Italian Jewish playwright, Leone de' Sommi. The play explores our relationship with God and tries to determine our place in a modern world. It plays with biblical concepts of duty as explored in the Book of Job, through the transformation of its protagonist, Maurice, into a golem of Jewish folklore. To develop the play further, I went on to look at other contemporary renderings of older theatrical forms, namely commedia dell' arte and Richard Bean's *One Man, Two Guvnors*; Greek tragedy and Robert Icke's *Oresteia*; and Mediaeval Morality plays and Carol Ann Duffy's *Everyman*. I also drew on discoveries gleaned from my experience of adapting and directing Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*. The current chapter discusses this further research and how it fed into the final draft of the play.

One Man, Two Guvnors by Richard Bean

In the summer of 2011, according to Nicholas Hytner's book, *Balancing Acts*, The scheduling at the National Theatre was looking 'pretty grim'.¹ The season consisted of Chekhov, Ibsen, a Jacobean tragedy and *London Road* by Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork about the trial of a serial killer. To balance this schedule, a search ensued for a comedy and on being reminded of Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, Hytner turned to Richard Bean to write, in Bean's own words, 'a play for people who don't like theatre'.² Hytner was adamant he didn't want to merely recreate commedia dell' arte, but rather find the modern equivalent of it: 'What, I wondered, was the English low-comedy equivalent of Italian low comedy?'³ It is

¹Nicholas Hytner, *Balancing Acts* (London: Penguin, Random House, 2017), p. 259.

² Richard Bean interview conducted on 15 August 2016.

³ Hytner, p. 259.

interesting to note that in attempting to develop a play based on a specific theatrical style, Hytner was looking to create his own interpretation; one that harked back to previous styles and that reminded audiences of ‘end-of-the-pier farce, and the *Carry On* films, and Ealing comedy’ certainly, but one that didn’t pay any particular reverence to its Italian influence.⁴ To quote Bean again: ‘Unless you knew what you were watching, you wouldn’t have known’.⁵ The idea of using a particular theatrical style as a reference point, but not being slavishly bound to it too was definitely something I wished to incorporate into my own work.

One thing the majority of reviews agreed on was how *One Man, Two Guvnors* was ‘deliriously daft.’⁶ Hytner explains that the audience ‘got the hang of it almost as soon as the curtain went up’.⁷ *Petrified* opens with a figure sitting centre stage. He is in shadow and to begin with finds even forming a sentence to be incredibly difficult. This is Maurice and he speaks to the audience, virtually transformed into a golem. He tries to work out why this has happened and also warns of the story that will follow. He fulfils a purim-shpil custom, that of the *loyfer*, knocking to be let in. But this moment also aims to draw the audience in with the mystery of it. I mentioned in the previous chapter about the wish to shock in order to acknowledge the carnivalesque use of language and the original purim-shpil. To that end, I had Maurice call God, ‘a real...cunt’.⁸ Yet, the use of the expletive so early on in the play and especially in connection with God, did the complete opposite of Hytner’s advice to ‘let the audience know as quickly as possible what kind of show they’ve come to see’.⁹ I asked several colleagues to read the draft – a religious rabbi and a theatre critic. They both reacted in the same way and it became clear that through the deliberate harshness of the word and the sentiment, both were alienated and it was reasonable

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard Bean interview conducted on 15 August 2016.

⁶ Paul Taylor, ‘One Man Two Guvnors, National Theatre: Lyttleton, London review’, in *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/one-man-two-guvnors-national-theatre-lyttelton-london-2289003.html>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

⁷ Hytner, p. 264.

⁸ Robert Messik, *Petrified*, (first draft), p. 2.

⁹ Hytner, p. 264.

to surmise that if they felt this way, an audience would be no different. The creatives behind *One Man, Two Guvnors* used their source material when it would benefit the production and disregarded it, when it wouldn't, in order to produce the most successful play that they could. This was a really useful lesson and so I changed the wording to:

MAURICE If I did nothing to call this down upon me; then God, The Lord God almighty, Yahew, Elohim, Hakadosh Barukh Hu, is a real...

A pause.

MAURICE Sshhh. He might be listening. But he knows it.¹⁰

It was important to not lose sight of the fact that the purim-shpil were ultimately fun examples of 'unrestrained revelry'.¹¹ The language of *Petrified*, whilst still containing 'indecencies and obscenities, insults, curses and blasphemies'¹² became less focused on shocking for the pure sake of it and aimed to bring more humour into the play. Evie's questioning of the rabbi's constant use of metaphors, being such an example: 'Does my husband look meta-fucking-phorical to you, rabbi?'.¹³

Parody was all important to the purim-shpil. Initially written in Hebrew, the language of the plays changed so that 'Yiddish was thus attached to the basic configuration of 'carnavalesque permissiveness, parody, and theatre', to become the hallmark of *Purim*.¹⁴ As explained in the previous chapter, writing in Yiddish would prohibit the vast majority of any audience from responding to *Petrified*. Parody would also be a difficult thing to bring to the text, because a contemporary, secular audience would simply not be well enough versed in the prayers and liturgies from sacred Jewish texts as those in Eastern Europe or Italy would have been several hundred years ago. However, *One Man, Two Guvnors* was able to capture elements

¹⁰ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 132.

¹¹ Ahuva Belkin, 'The 'Low' Culture of the Purimshpil', in *Yiddish Theatre New Approaches*, ed. by Joel Berkowitz (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), pp. 29 – 43 (p. 29).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 205.

¹⁴ Eli Rozik, *Jewish Drama & Theatre – From Rabbinical Intolerance to Secular Liberalism* (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), p. 149.

of commedia dell' arte in a 'peculiarly English way'.¹⁵ I therefore searched for Jewish liturgy that would be familiar to a secular audience, in order to achieve parody and to create Bakhtin's sense of required fun to create 'the laughter of all the people'.¹⁶

One such example is the Ten Commandments; an extremely well know text regardless of the level of one's religious observances. In the intermezzi between the third and fourth act, the cast document the advancement of Maurice's disease. They go through his whole body and when describing his teeth, his parents appear:

RANDALL One.

MARGARET I am your mother, who birthed you, raised you. You shall have no argument with anything I have to say.¹⁷

The parody ends with:

RANDALL Ten.

MARGARET You shall not be spending any time looking at your friends doing any of the above and wishing you could do the same. Don't bother. It's not going to happen. Their mothers don't love them like I love you.¹⁸

The relationship between Maurice and his mother is a complex, but recognisable one. She is over bearing and over anxious and it stands to reason that she would supplant God with the one individual she expects Maurice to dedicate his life to, herself. However, thematically, this also continues the trend throughout the play of attempting to re-establish our relationship with God and religion through a questioning and re-examining of stories and elements from liturgical texts. This parodying of a sacred text, one that forms the corner stone of monotheism, also

¹⁵Michael Billington, 'One Man Two Guvnors – Review', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/may/25/one-man-two-guvnors-review>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 11.

¹⁷ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 206.

¹⁸ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 208.

reflects the uncertainty of what Maurice is going through – if something so set can be changed, what else can be?

This happens again at the climax of the play when the rabbi performs the mourners' *Kaddish* – a prayer said by a mourner over the loss of a loved one – as he performs the ceremony to extinguish Maurice and the golem. This breaks with tradition in a number of ways, firstly, the prayer needs a *minyan* – the presence of ten men - to be recited, but more than that, it shouldn't be the rabbi saying the prayer, it should be Evie, as she is the one in mourning. Her response is to sing *Bring Me Sunshine* as performed by Morecambe and Wise. The combination of the sacrosanct with the secular again turns the established order on its head. Through simultaneously parodying and undermining the prayers, the play is tapping into what was so crucial to Rabelais's work, namely a lack of 'dogma'.¹⁹ It also uses the 'continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear'²⁰ of the '*a l'envers*,' the inside out of carnival and the '*venahafokh hu*' of Purim.

Hytner was determined to stick to the style of 'the kind of variety show I used to see at the Manchester Palace Theatre in the 1960s with Ken Dodd, Arthur Askey, or Morecambe and Wise'.²¹ Working with the composer Grant Olding, he therefore put together a four piece skiffle band called the Craze and gave all members of the cast a novelty act to perform. Hytner readily admits he 'filched everything that caught our eye'.²² He had actors playing steel drums, horns, singing and even doing a percussion solo on their chest. This also acknowledged the play's origins as Bean observed how all of the commedia dell'arte shows were 'packed with music and dance'.²³ *One Man, Two Guvvners* took this concept and utilised it with 'elating

¹⁹ Bakhtin, p. 3.

²⁰ Bakhtin, p. 11.

²¹ Hytner, p. 259.

²² Hytner, p. 263.

²³ Richard Bean interview conducted on 15 August 2016.

lunacy'.²⁴ I too wanted to ensure I was using a similar level of fun and saw the opportunity to do this chiefly through the characters of the Players.

In 1999 after leaving university, I set up a theatre company. As we had no money for rights, cast or performance space, we ended up rehearsing in a bedroom with two actors playing around thirty parts each. The play was adapted from Israel Zangwill's *The King of Schnorrers*, (referenced in Chapter 2), and it perfectly captured the 'lunacy' spoken of in Hytner's production. The interaction between the two actors was highly physical and they used a combination of slapstick, martial arts and verbal acrobatics that harked back to Music Hall and Vaudeville, creating 'a hurtling, exhilarating delight'.²⁵ I decided to utilise some of these elements in the interaction between the Players in the next draft.

The Players reference biblical and talmudic stories to suggest profound things are at play, but they also needed to enhance Bakhtin's ideas of carnival being a form of 'temporary liberation',²⁶ as well as capturing the 'unrestrained'²⁷ qualities that Belkin references. When the Players first appear in the first intermezzi, they began as they did in the first draft:

PLAYER 1 To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth...

A second man, dressed identically...

PLAYER 2 May you prosper greatly!

PLAYER 1 May you prosper greatly!²⁸

The rhythm of the language was already in place, but I added live music. They were introduced with a drum roll and after the above line there was a flourish on a fiddle. As the blessings continue with Player 2 echoing Player 1's lines, he takes charge

²⁴ Paul Taylor, 'One Man Two Guvnors, National Theatre: Lyttleton, London review', in *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/one-man-two-guvnors-national-theatre-lyttelton-london-2289003.html>> [accessed 3 August 2017].

²⁵ *The Metro*, July 2000.

²⁶ Bakhtin, p. 10.

²⁷ Belkin, p29.

²⁸ Messik, *Petrified*, (first draft), p. 32.

and says: 'May you stay healthy because you can kill yourself later!'.²⁹ He bows whilst Player 1 watches him, waits for him to straighten up and then kicks him in the groin accompanied by a cymbal crash. Player 2 crumples to the floor whilst painfully uttering 'Oy.'³⁰ In earlier drafts my focus had been far more on retelling the stories then creating the laughs. The Players' scenes were much longer and whilst being more faithful to the stories, created less comedy. With this new concept in mind their scenes became more anarchic. They were pacier and involved the two characters re-telling the stories in a far more physical manner. In the re-telling of King Nebuchadnezzar's transformation, Player 1 talks at such a pace with Player 2 acting it out alongside him that he has to pause to quickly sniff some cocaine before being able to carry on. In their second intermezzi on hearing that Abram was circumcised at 99, Player 2's response is 'Fuck off'.³¹ Their function was to create more and more comedy and to be more disrespectful about it. Even at the climax of the play when Maurice has destroyed the newspaper office and broken the fingers of everyone that has printed the lies about him, the Players appear dressed as female police officers. This is a nod to the cross dressing that existed throughout carnival and Purim, but also is another way of undermining the events. At what will hopefully be one of the more dramatic elements of the play, the Players appear to add in further levels of disrespect. When the Rabbi asks for time to resolve the situation with Maurice their response is:

OFFICER 1 This is all highly irregular, but...

OFFICER 2...Seeing as it's the end of the show.³²

Richard Bean explained how after a performance of *One Man, Two Guvnors*, he received a tweet from the Arsenal football player, Jack Wilshire, saying how much he had loved it. As far as he was concerned that was a great testament to the fact he had fulfilled his remit from Nicholas Hytner of writing a play 'for people who don't like

²⁹ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 154.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 184.

³² Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 230.

theatre'.³³ This is very much something to aspire to; to produce a piece of work inspired by a seldom utilised cultural tradition, in order to produce a play that appeals to people from all walks of life.

Oresteia – A New Adaptation by Robert Icke

The *Oresteia* was written by Aeschylus and won the first prize at the Dionysia festival in 458 BCE. This trilogy of tragedies tells the story of Agamemnon's murder at the hands of his wife, Klytemnestra. She sought revenge for him killing their daughter, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice to the Gods to produce a favourable wind so he could sail his army to Troy. Klytemnestra is in turn murdered by her son, Orestes, in order to avenge his father. Robert Icke's adaptation of this trilogy opened at London's Almeida Theatre on the 29th May 2015 and then transferred to the Trafalgar Studios on the 22nd August 2015. Reviews were, for the main part, extremely positive. *The Guardian* gave it five stars and *The Stage* called it 'bold, accessible, resonant'.³⁴ What was particularly pertinent was that the production was 'making its case as a play for now'.³⁵ This production adapted a series of plays that came from a culture from over two thousand years ago, which had highly specific theatrical conventions and still managed to create 'living, vital theatre'.³⁶ It was an excellent reference point for *Petrified*.

Robert Icke, the adapter and director, explained his views on adaptation, stating that it's 'like using a foreign plug. You are in a country where your hairdryer won't work [...and you...] have to find the adaptor which will let the electricity of now flow into the old thing and make it function'.³⁷ This sentiment echoed similar comments made regarding *One Man, Two Guvnors*, namely the necessity of finding ways to make an older text relevant to a modern audience. In the original staging,

³³ Richard Bean interview conducted on 15 August 2016.

³⁴ Natasha Tripney, 'Oresteia', in *The Stage* <<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2015/oresteia/>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Susannah Clapp, 'Robert Icke, Theatre Director: 'Oresteia? It's quite like the Sopranos'', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/23/robert-icke-director-oresteia-1984-interview>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

there would have been a chorus of twelve men singing *stasimon* – a choral ode - between the *episodes* of the main characters, portrayed by three men in masks, playing multiple characters. In The Almeida production, one actor opened the play with the equivalent of the Greek tragic *parode*: ‘Theous, Zeus, Allah, El’.³⁸ And as the play continued, a ‘chorus of actors’³⁹ fulfilled the traditional role of the chorus. In his introduction to Icke’s adaptation, Professor Simon Goldhill explains how the play ‘demands that each new version of his [Aeschylus] masterpiece speaks to its own modern condition [...It...] needs continual and active re-engagement with its immense potential to make it speak its true insistence and power’.⁴⁰ Due to his take on the chorus, which created a more organic and natural progression from the scenes, Icke did just that.

The freedom of this adaptation allowed me to make further changes to my draft. In the original *Oresteia*, Klytemnestra would have been played by a man in a mask. So too in the purim-shpil would the female characters have been played by men due to the ‘Jewish masculocentric society’ that existed in Eastern Europe.⁴¹ Belkin observes how this society would have shared certain ‘affinities’ with the ancient Greeks in the way in which ‘women had inferior status and were confined to an inner domain’.⁴² She writes how within Greek theatre, according to Sue-Ellen Case, the female figures that appeared on the stage were not meant to represent real women, rather ‘a vocabulary of male-originated signs and gestures engendering an image of archetypal ‘Woman’, institutionalised through a patriarchal culture’.⁴³ The purim-shpil, as explored in Chapter 3, went even further in that it stripped the female figures of their great achievements and acts and reduced them to jokes and punchlines. I have covered how I attempted to deal with this difficult issue, but did not feel I had gone far enough. Looking back to Icke’s approach to the *Oresteia* and

³⁸ Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, A New Adaptation by Robert Icke (London: Oberon Press), p. 15.

³⁹ *Oresteia*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Oresteia*, pp. 6 – 7.

⁴¹ Ahuva Belkin, ‘The Scarf and the Toothache’, in *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality*, ed. by Efrat Tseelon (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 101-113 (p.106).

⁴² Belkin, *The Scarf and the Toothache*, p.106.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the empowerment and humanity given to Klytemnestra, I saw ways to create a greater depth to the female characters in the play.

‘As the husband-slayer Clytemnestra [sic], a magnificent Lia Williams moves catlike from entire poise to unleash a mandrake scream’.⁴⁴ This was a stunning performance that saw Williams capture the love of a mother in all its forms, as a nurturing figure, but also as a fury when her child is murdered: ‘He killed our daughter, my daughter that I carried in my body. And so this right hand had the right to strike’.⁴⁵ Williams explained:

I see her as a doting mother and a loving and passionate wife who is deeply in love with her husband. This is the complexity of it: she has to kill [Agamemnon] because she can’t have him living on the planet with her. It really is an incredible role for a woman.⁴⁶

This is a far cry from the patriarchal interpretation of the archetypal woman described by Case. Williams and Icke created a complex, three dimensional character and if my play was going to fulfil its aims, then I needed to do the same. I thus decided that the actor playing Evie would not multi-role as the other actors do, because that would help to solidify the character and bring her up to the same level of importance as Maurice. But it was in the telling of the story of Job, something that provided a back bone to my entire play, that I found the real opportunity to redress the balance.

Petrified, whilst not being a dramatisation of the book of Job, certainly takes key elements of the story and filters them throughout. It is a crucial element of my play, yet I realised I wasn’t making the most of it. In earlier drafts, in the intermezzi between the fourth and fifth act, the Players re-told the story of Job:

PLAYER 1 Suppose we should...

PLAYER 2 Put it off long enough.

⁴⁴ Susannah Clapp, ‘Oresteia Review – A Terrifying Immediacy’, in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/07/oresteia-almeida-review-lia-williams-angus-wright>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁴⁵ *Oresteia*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Matt Wolf, ‘Oresteia Star Lia Williams on How Klytemnestra is like Wallis Simpson and Why Pasta Turns Her Off’ in *Theatre.com* <<http://www.theatre.com/buzz/182168/oresteia-star-lia-williams-on-how-klytemnestra-is-like-wallis-simpson-and-why-pasta-turns-her-off/>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

PLAYER 1 No delaying it.

PLAYER 2 Nope.⁴⁷

They then proceeded to tell the story with suitably irreverent comments. It delivered the facts, however it was now the third time this set up had been used and there was a real risk that an audience might dismiss it due to its repetitive style. The story of Job is about the man and his response to the trials that he is suddenly afflicted with. His wife is barely mentioned. In chapter 2. 9 she says ‘Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die’.⁴⁸ She is a negative element as if to suggest that whilst Job nobly endures his suffering, she tries to distract and corrupt him: ‘Much like Eve, Job’s wife spurs her husband to doubt God’s use of divine powers’.⁴⁹ She barely appears in the rest of the story and isn’t even mentioned in the so-called happy ending when Job is made well once again and has another seven sons and three daughters to replace the family that were wiped out. By simply re-telling the story, I was merely underlining a lack of any importance to this female character who lost her entire family and was then used to simply create another one. I was guilty of the very accusations I had levelled at the original purim-shpil. I needed to create a female character as powerful and effective as Icke’s interpretation of Klytemnestra so brilliantly realised by Williams and one who was reminiscent of the ‘tigress of diabolical ferocity’⁵⁰ feared by Holyoake.

In the final draft, it is now Maurice who begins by telling the story of Job. He steps out of his shell of a golem, sits down, pours himself a drink and says: ‘So there was a man who lived in the land of Uz. His name was Job.’⁵¹ But after interruptions from Evie he asks whether she would like to tell the story. Her response: ‘I don’t think you’d like how I told the story’.⁵² What follows is the story of Job from the wife’s point of view:

⁴⁷ Messik, *Petrified*, (first draft), p. 123.

⁴⁸ Ilana Pardes, ‘Wife of Job: Bible’, in *JWA.Org* <<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wife-of-job-bible>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Elliot Horowitz, *Reckless Rites, Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 24.

⁵¹ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 220.

⁵² Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 221.

EVIE One day, Mrs Job is pottering around in the kitchen and her heart suddenly breaks in two, just like that. And she collapses onto the floor. That's where Job finds her, crumpled on the floor, marigolds still on, water from the tap cascading over her.

MAURICE What happened?

EVIE Doesn't matter. She doesn't need to know the details; details don't change the facts. Nothing will change the facts. They're all gone. All her babies. There one minute...then...not.⁵³

As Job sits focused on his pain and his suffering, 'Mrs Job' as Evie refers to her, doesn't have that luxury. She gets up from the floor 'even though she could have lain there for the rest of time' and cares for her husband whilst arranging the funerals for all their servants and for their children.⁵⁴ Whilst Job debates theology with his friends and ultimately with God, she is the one who is bringing all the 'balms and ointments' back and forth.⁵⁵ In a play that sets out to re-create the spirit of the topsy-turvy nature of carnival, the focus on the female perspective in such a crucial story, does just that. This is going against the tradition of the story whilst simultaneously challenging the 'patriarchal assumptions' as Icke so brilliantly did in the *Oresteia*.⁵⁶

MAURICE At least there's a happy ending. They get to live their lives again, Job and Mrs Job.

EVIE Mrs Job? She's still there on the floor with the marigolds, getting covered in dirty water. She always will be.⁵⁷

This approach to character informed a number of ways the draft developed to avoid the negative aspects of the purim-shpil's treatment of women. The *Oresteia*

⁵³ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 221.

⁵⁴ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 222.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Susannah Clapp, 'Oresteia Review – A Terrifying Immediacy', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/07/oresteia-almeida-review-lia-williams-angus-wright>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁵⁷ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 222.

developed all its female characters beyond their traditional representations. Jessica Brown Findlay, in her stage debut played ‘a huskily intense Electra’.⁵⁸ She delivered one of the most moving parts of the play as she tries to quantify what it’s like to continue without a father: ‘I sharpen my pen fatherless. I pour a glass of wine fatherless. I don’t drink it fatherless. I hear a song fatherless that I used to [like] – I feel absolutely nothing at all’.⁵⁹ It is a deeply moving and very real part of the production and Margaret in *Petrified* needed a similar depth.

In the first draft she was a strong, yet passive aggressive character. Her function was to largely cause difficulties or to use the Yiddish, *tsuris*, for Maurice and Evie: ‘Why isn’t Evie talking to us herself? I’ve always thought this is a family that could talk to one another. What does the picture say?’.⁶⁰ She forces Maurice to read from the picture hanging in their kitchen detailing what a family should be in what is designed to be a humorous and relatable scene for anyone with a difficult family. In the final draft, she says: ‘Why isn’t Evie talking to us herself? I’ve always thought this is a family that could talk to one another. Now Evie won’t talk. Ariella won’t talk. What’s happening to us? Read the picture’.⁶¹ The intention is still the same, but the addition of the lines starts to add a fragility to the character because her family is not turning out the way she would have hoped. A later scene goes further. Near the end of Maurice’s transformation, she comes to the house to bring some books for her son to read ‘to pass the time’.⁶² On seeing Evie she comments on the cleanliness of the house and the two spar as usual. But after Margaret complains about looking after the children, Evie thanks her for being so kind. She replies: ‘Kind? Please. We’re family. That’s what you do. Through thick and thi...’.⁶³ She stops as the emotion overcomes her; a brief insight into her pain. Evie is losing her husband and the father

⁵⁸ Susannah Clapp, ‘Oresteia Review – A Terrifying Immediacy’, in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/07/oresteia-almeida-review-lia-williams-angus-wright>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁵⁹ *Oresteia*, p. 85.

⁶⁰ Messik, *Petrified*, (first draft), p. 26.

⁶¹ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 148.

⁶² Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 211.

⁶³ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 212.

of her children, but Margaret is losing her son and however fantastic the scenario may be of a man turning to clay or indeed a man being tested by God with unendurable suffering, the women are once again the ones left to pick up the pieces.

In an interview about the *Oresteia*, Robert Icke stated that 'I feel you have to be 100 per cent faithful not to the letter of the original but to the impulse that motors the whole thing forward.'⁶⁴ I have been very conscious of this approach when writing the final draft of *Petrified* and never more so than in trying to capture the essence of Purim, that of '*venahafokh hu*' ("and it was reversed"). Traditionally, this would refer to the sudden reversal of fortune at the end of the story; just when it looked like the Jewish populace was doomed, it was Haman and his sons who found themselves on the gallows. Whilst there is a reversal in Maurice's fortunes, I never felt I had truly captured the essence of '*venahofokh hu*'. I also became aware that as Maurice's condition increases, so too does the distance between him and the audience. Due to the nature of Maurice's condition, at the climax of the play, the audience are cut off from their protagonist, who has completely vanished by the end of the fourth act. Therefore at the height of the ritual to destroy the golem and end Maurice's life there is a sudden change. Maurice becomes Maurice again and when he looks around it is the others, Evie, the rabbi, the Players, who are golems. In a final moment of lucidity, he speaks to the audience:

MAURICE: It's a funny thing, truth. Look at it from a different angle; a distance; a bit of perspective and it doesn't quite seem quite as true as it once did before. Does it? Answers? Explanations? I think it's the same. Step back a little bit and they're not really answers at all, not really, only more questions.⁶⁵

As soon as he finishes speaking, everything snaps back to the way it was; Maurice as a golem and the others as humans. The rabbi finishes the ritual and 'Maurice is gone.'⁶⁶ The audience get one final glimpse into Maurice's head before he's gone and as Icke stated, the piece is faithful to the spirit of the reversal. The moment also

⁶⁴ Susannah Clapp, 'Robert Icke, Theatre Director: 'Oresteia? It's quite like the Sopranos'', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/aug/23/robert-icke-director-oresteia-1984-interview>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁶⁵ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 232.

⁶⁶ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 233.

captures the 'inverted wisdom, inverted truth' that was so crucial to Bakhtin and all aspects of the carnivalesque.⁶⁷

The *Oresteia* showed me I also needed to develop the character of the rabbi. Up to this point, he had served as a conduit of knowledge for Maurice and the other characters, providing reference points to what was going on. My religious Jewish friend read the first draft and gave some interesting feedback, particularly that he thought the play to be anti-religious, which was never my intention. Rozik explained that 'the purim-shpil is parodic in nature and carnivalesque in function',⁶⁸ and I wanted *Petrified* to gift the audience the 'temporary liberation'⁶⁹ of Bakhtin's carnival before returning to the 'existing pattern'⁷⁰ of everyday life. Joseph B. Soloveitchik provided help with this.

Soloveitchik (1903 – 1993), known as the Rav by his followers 'built bridges between Judaism and the modern world; yet, at the same time, he vigorously upheld the integrity and autonomy of the Jew's faith commitment'.⁷¹ This became the significant drive of the rabbi and formed some of his key positions. In the fifth act for instance, he tries to convince Evie that Maurice, now completely transformed, is dangerous and must be destroyed. She rankles at his lack of clear answers and that nothing he is saying is designed to make her feel better:

RABBI I'm not trying to make you feel better. Faith isn't a quid pro quo arrangement. You do something for God, God does something for you. But it's a glimpse, a fleeting glance of the divine. You don't get a cold compress and a hug to make it all better.⁷²

Religion is highly complex, but by using some of Soloveitchik's philosophies, the rabbi is able to respect the depth of belief, even though as Evie comments, 'I'd rather

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, p. 260.

⁶⁸ Rozik, p. 152.

⁶⁹ Bakhtin, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, p. 9.

⁷¹ Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Foreword by David Shatz (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), p.vii.

⁷² Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 226.

have the hug'.⁷³ As a step further in developing the depth of the play, Maurice and Evie's children went from three to two to allow more space for the characters to grow.

The production of the *Oresteia* was a powerful, theatrical experience that fully captivated me through the duration of its three and a half hours. Although I share sympathies with Dominic Cavendish's review of it being 'Clever, yes, but a touch overly so'⁷⁴ there is no doubting that this was a production that managed to take an old text and style and make it feel stunningly modern. Through study of the play and its techniques, I feel I have been able to apply similar elements to my writing and thus get closer to achieving my aim of creating a play that draws from the past in order to create an effective and powerful modern production.

Everyman adapted by Carol Ann Duffy

Everyman was first produced on 29 April 2015 and was directed by Rufus Norris as the first show in his tenure as Artistic Director of the National Theatre. It was hugely successful and not just because of the involvement of Chiwetel Ejiofor, coming off the back of an Oscar nomination for *Twelve Years a Slave*. Michael Billington at *The Guardian* called it 'An Everyman for today',⁷⁵ whereas *The New Statesman's* Mark Lawson wrote that it was 'Visually and verbally magnificent'.⁷⁶ Dominic Cavendish was less positive, writing in *The Telegraph* that 'if anything it swings so far in the direction of looking and sounding with-it and hip that it commits the sin of appearing at once theatrically lavish and dramatically threadbare'.⁷⁷ He does acknowledge that

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Dominic Cavendish, 'Almeida Theatre, review: 'bogged down'', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11656622/Oresteia-Almeida-Theatre-review-bogged-down.html>> [accessed 7 August 2017].

⁷⁵ Michael Billington, 'Everyman review – Chiwetel Ejiofor's rich sinner feels modern wrath of God', in *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/apr/30/everyman-review-chiwetel-ejiofor-national-theatre-carol-ann-duffy-morality-play>> [accessed 9 August 2017].

⁷⁶ Mark Lawson, 'Carol Ann Duffy's Everyman is mordantly funny – yet poignant', in *The New Statesman* <<http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2015/05/carol-ann-duffy-s-everyman-mordantly-funny-yet-poignant>> [accessed 9 August 2017].

⁷⁷ Dominic Cavendish, 'Everyman, National Theatre review: 'Chiwetel Ejiofor'', in *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11571311/Everyman-National-Theatre-review-an-admirable-effort.html>> [accessed 9 August 2017].

part of that is due to the 'limitation of the medieval source material'⁷⁸ and of course there is a vast difference in content and complexity between Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and the text of *Everyman*. However, here was another successful, mainstream production that had taken a script and style of theatre with specific cultural conventions, largely alien from those of the contemporary UK, and found a way to make it speak to a modern secular audience. Parallels were being 'drawn between what we worshipped in the play's original context' and the things that a secular society tends to focus upon now such as 'the concepts of wealth and prestige'.⁷⁹ Like the productions before, it didn't allow itself to be too slavish to the original, but very much remained faithful to the 'impulse' that Icke spoke about. It was this approach that I needed to adopt with *Petrified*.

My original staging idea was to have the play take place on three carts that made a slight semi-circle with the audience in the middle. The action would then move around the carts and on the floor in an effort to capture a sense of the carnival about the play. However, I began to realise that this staging sat poorly with the writing and the style which at times attempted to assume a level of intimacy with the audience. It was more likely to get in the way of their enjoyment. I therefore went back to my notes and considerations of live theatre to change my ideas.

The author of *Everyman* is unknown, but sources suggest it was probably written around the end of the fifteenth century and there are four printed copies dating between 1508 and 1537. This would have most likely been originally staged, according to Allardyce Nicoll, as a pageant: 'The guilds preferred to stage their plays on what came to be known as "pageants" which may be regarded as separate mansions placed upon wheels so that they might be shifted from place to place'.⁸⁰ When the play was staged in the Olivier theatre at the National, there wasn't a wagon in sight. The staging serviced the play, as indeed it should. Apart from the excitement of the theatrical challenge of staging a play on wagons and the clear, but

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Gillian Fisher, 'Coral Messam – interview Everyman, National Theatre', in *Afridiziak* <<http://www.afridiziak.com/theatrenews/interviews/april2015/coral-messam.html>> [accessed 9 August 2017].

⁸⁰ Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap and Company, 1966) p. 59.

superficial, statement of intention that I was producing something new and unseen within contemporary Jewish Theatre in the UK, I found little justification to continue this staging concept into further drafts. True, there was very much a procession element to the purim-shpil, but only initially, because the processions led to a house, that of the richest man in the community. This is captured in an image from Leondes' "Philologus Hebreo-Mixtus," (1637), which shows a group of performers outside a house. They all wear makeshift clothing, one is clearly a man in a dress, one has a puppet head of a horse on a stick between his legs and another has a sheep's head on a stick. Above them are more performers who are banging on a window of a house, demanding to be let in. One can assume that this individual is the *laufer*. Belkin explains:

The locations were not designated places of performance, yet by accepting the invading players who negotiated with them, these dynamic spaces became separated from the mundane world. The interaction between visiting performers and spectators (members of the household and guests) created a shared, overlapping framework where the spectators were not just mute participants invited to attend an iconic space; through the home-based ritual, which repeats the original mythic act, performers and spectators became partners in creating the theatrical fiction, in which the present and the past merged in the very same space.⁸¹

There was something crucial behind the concept of the audience letting the performers in, allowing them to transform their home into a performance space and in becoming partners in creating the theatrical fiction. In the previous chapter, I referenced Richard Schechner and his coining of the phrase – 'Environmental theatre' - to mean a theatre that 'rejects artificial structures, and replaces them with places and instruments of daily life'.⁸² Michael Kirby went onto question just what constituted this type of theatre and determined that more was needed. 'Only when the physical components that surround the spectators constitute an inherent part of the show, and the show, unfolding in an everyday environment, makes use of these

⁸¹ Ahuva Belkin, 'Ritual Space As Theatrical Space In Jewish Folk Theatre', *Jewish Theatre A Global View*, 8 (2009), pp. 13-24 (p. 17).

⁸² *Ibid.*

components' is environmental theatre created.⁸³ My aim was not to create a piece of Environmental theatre – though I did toy briefly with staging the play in a house, but dismissed it due to it largely feeling like a gimmick – but I did want to create an environment where the lines between audience and actors are blurred in order to create a 'festival arena'.⁸⁴

Suggesting the domestic feel, felt true to the spirit of the play and so the stage is taken up with a large table created to a Serlian perspective – much wider downstage and then narrow as it went further upstage. The table is set as if at the end of a meal with food, alcohol and costumes scattered about it. The audience will be encouraged to use the chairs around the table, as well as having tables and chairs throughout the auditorium, cabaret style, which can also be utilised. Ivan Van Hove used this idea in his recent National Theatre production of *Network* to great effect. The actors will stand and sit with the audience when not in the action, due to the fact that the original performances took place inside someone's home and there was often not room for everyone at the same time. Integral to Bakhtin's concept of carnival is the consumption of food and drink, as he writes, 'Feasting is part of every folk merriment. Not a single comic scene can do without it'.⁸⁵ Throughout the story of Purim are numerous feasts – Ahasuerus orders Vashti to dance after a series of feasts and prolonged drinking, Esther confides to the King, Haman's plans to kill all the Jews at a feast and the story ends with celebrations. By having the dinner table central throughout and it being the location for Maurice's transformation, further links are being made between food and drink and Bakhtin's interpretation of Rabelais's images of the 'grotesque body'.⁸⁶ Indeed the most violent part of his transformation, when he expels from his mouth and rear all his bodily fluids, takes place during the Sabbath meal. The props will still largely be 'minimal and improvised',⁸⁷ as suggested by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, so as not to lose the makeshift feel of the story.

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Belkin, *Ritual Space As Theatrical Space In Jewish Folk Theatre*, P. 18.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, p. 279.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Contraband:" Performance, Text and Analysis of a "Purim-Shpil', *The Drama Review*, 24. 3 (1980), 5-16 (p. 6).

After the parade of players, the original purim-shpil actors would bang on the door to be let in and given permission to perform. The *laufer's* role was to enter the house – often dressed as a fool – and ask permission to perform. He would then introduce the characters and would deliver the prologue. In *Petrified*, as mentioned before, Maurice plays that role with his opening speech, but the concept of asking permission is developed further. In an earlier draft, he simply says 'Can...you...hear...me?'.⁸⁸ This represents the knocking at the door and asking to be let in so the play can begin. He now goes further which very much acknowledges Belkin's concept of the actors 'invading' the home to tell their story.⁸⁹

Maybe you should turn away now. Shut the doors, bar the windows, lower the lights, pretend you're not at home. Don't let us in. It doesn't get pretty. Gets pretty nasty to tell you the truth. There isn't a happy ending; no last minute reprieve. Esther doesn't save the day; Haman doesn't hang.⁹⁰

Petrified begins with the actors and audience milling around together, eating and drinking. Slowly the actors begin a *nigun*, a religious tune with no words but repetitive sounds. The aim is to encourage the audience to join in in order to create a 'shared, overlapping framework where the spectators were not just mute participants invited to attend an iconic space'.⁹¹ This is a theme that continues throughout the play. In the second act when the family sit down for a Sabbath meal, the audience are encouraged to join in with the Shabbat prayers and in the same act, when Maurice violently expunges his innards due to his transformation, the audience will very much be in the firing line. Through constant interaction, direct questioning and by creating a fluid space, the audience are involved and implicated in all of the action as they would have been in the original performances thus simultaneously referencing the old whilst creating a very modern theatrical experience.

Mistero Buffo by Dario Fo

⁸⁸ Messik, *Petrified* (first draft) p.1.

⁸⁹ Belkin, *Ritual Space As Theatrical Space In Jewish Folk Theatre*, P. 21.

⁹⁰ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 133.

⁹¹ Belkin, *Ritual Space As Theatrical Space In Jewish Folk Theatre*, P. 17.

Three recent and highly successful UK productions provided a great deal of reference and inspiration for my work. However, possibly the most crucial element in my re-writing came about from my own directorial experience in attempting to stage Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*.

In January of 2015, I was working as Director of Drama at a private school in Brighton. The Easter term of the school was a phenomenally busy one as it consisted of exam performances for years ten to thirteen, each year group having around four separate productions. Plus, the school annually hired out the Theatre Royal for a showcase of all the arts that I had to organise, prepare material for and direct. Due to other school commitments, I had a very brief amount of time to create a piece of theatre for a class of seventeen students, only a handful of whom could be described as strong performers and the school insisted on the highest grades for all. I provide this background because the decisions that followed only came about through intense pressure and an attitude of having to make do in the time that was available.

I needed a play that would allow me to showcase all the students and enable an edited script that could utilise choral, physical work.⁹² It was within this context that I came across Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo*.

Mistero Buffo is Fo's famous one man show. It contains a wide array of references from early representations based on stories from the Bible and the lives of the saints – much of which was what the early English Miracle plays were based on. It includes the work of medieval Italian writers and performers as well as anonymous work from the Czech Republic, Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe, including stories drawn from the apocryphal Gospels. It is also a didactic piece where Fo discusses and illustrates the work and function of the medieval

⁹² I have always made it a habit when preparing students for practical exams to give them broad, physical work to deliver as it tends to be successful in achieving those top marks. It is more difficult for the majority of students to do well in naturalistic performance as it requires them to be more subtle and sophisticated in their interpretation, whereas the physical work offers the weaker students clear performance signposts to focus on. There is also less flexibility in editing and adapting a naturalistic text and there simply wasn't time to get the students to work in smaller groups.

giullare, 'alone on a bare stage, a microphone in hand, without make-up, wearing a polo-neck and dark trousers in a performance lasting up to three hours'.⁹³

The *giullare*, as explained by Stuart Hood in his introduction to the text, is a sort of jester, but more like the juggler, acrobat, 'reciter of literary works' of the French *jongleur*.⁹⁴ Fo sums up his interest in the figure of the *jongleur* by explaining how he went from place to place, 'clowning in the square in pieces which were grotesque attacks on the powerful. [...] a figure who came from the people, and who from the people drew anger and transmitted it through the medium of the grotesque'.⁹⁵ The connections to my studies were apparent, but in all honesty, the overwhelming draw was the fact that the play provided a text to explore with my students and I didn't have the time to choose anything else.

At that time, the GCSE didn't require any faithfulness to the original text and so I set about turning the play from a dramatic one man lecture into a physical performance for seventeen actors. I cobbled together a rough script, taking a monologue called the *Resurrection of Lazarus* and using it as a framing device and then placing other monologues in between sections of the main one such as *The Wedding at Cana*, *The Origin of the Villey* and *Pope Boniface VIII's speech*. Although it is designed to be performed by one actor, the text is full of many different voices and so it wasn't hard to create lots of different parts out of the script. Our studio theatre was a cavernous church hall and I removed all the seats and turned it into a barn with hay on the floor and uplighters creating the effect of fires in the corner. The play was performed on carts and wagons of different shapes and sizes – whatever I could get my hands on - with the cast all dressed in hessian sacks as peasants.

Due to the way I had put together the script, the students had pages of ideas rather than a coherent play; the lines were separated, but not assigned to anyone in particular and I had given little thought about how we would get from one moment to another. I knew I wanted the actors moving the audience and the wagons to different

⁹³ Dario Fo, *Mistero Buffo*, ed. by Stuart Hood (London: Methuen, 1988), p. xvi.

⁹⁴ *Mistero Buffo*, p. xv.

⁹⁵ *Mistero Buffo*, p. xv-xvi.

parts of the stage for different moments, but that was as far as my thinking had gone. We had to work quickly and if an idea came up in rehearsal we used it. This was particularly apparent in our use of music. In the middle of the *Resurrection of Lazarus scene*, I cut in *The Morality Play of the Blind Man and The Cripple* and from there went to *The Wedding at Cana*. In rehearsals, a couple of students happened to be singing *Oh Happy Day*, a well-known gospel song. Others joined in and we decided to use that as a way of transitioning between one part and the next. At another point in the play the entire cast went into a series of Israeli dancing and later, God, played by a girl of African descent – far removed from the conventional Western images of God - appeared, dancing to Beyonce's *Who Run the World?* The reaction from the audience was incredibly positive as they joined in with the songs and the dances and the production became far more communal. More than that they genuinely didn't know what was going to happen next and this added to the whole experience and created a fantastic energy. I had, without realising it, created, to a small extent, the 'community' of which Schechner writes and also 'the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance' that was so integral to Bakhtinian carnival.⁹⁶ More than that however, I had created a piece that was everything I wanted *Petrified* to be. My adaptation of *Mistero Buffo* was vibrant, energetic and dangerous and *Petrified* in its present draft, didn't come anywhere close.

I therefore came back to *Petrified* with the intention of incorporating this sense of fun and unpredictability into the text. The scene where Maurice's body is purged of all his bodily fluids had been a key scene in my mind for a long time as it successfully encapsulated the violence of the change that he was undergoing as well as the discomfort and suffering for all those around him. It was a prime example of the topsy-turvy nature of the play and carnival which is a mimicking of 'death-resurrection; the same body that tumbles into the grave rises again, incessantly moving from the lower to the upper level'.⁹⁷ I had always thought it to be a powerful moment and felt strongly that the audience should run the risk of being covered in what came out of him. But after my production of *Mistero Buffo* I realised I was

⁹⁶ Bakhtin, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Bakhtin, p. 354.

running the risk of losing the sense of playfulness the play should engender. After all, I could wax lyrical about the similarities between that moment and Bakhtinian carnival, but no one in a contemporary audience would very much care if they were covered in detritus, fake or otherwise, which had supposedly come out of the protagonist. Therefore the scene changed. What he vomits and excretes is confetti. The rest of the cast stare at him, utterly stunned as he releases more and more confetti from his mouth and his behind. Then as the characters panic and try to help him or move out of the way, the Players appear:

PLAYER 1 Point of information.

PLAYER 2 This is not confetti.

PLAYER 1 But we thought it would be more palatable for you...

PLAYER 2 ...And easier to clear up for us...⁹⁸

The aim is for the audience to have a sudden realisation of what the confetti represents, hopefully whilst they are playing with it; a mixture of disgust and fun without being unpleasant or damaging. It will create a moment of anarchic freedom whilst at the same time still encapsulate Maurice becoming something altogether new in Bakhtin's grotesque 'act of birth'.⁹⁹

One of the parts of Fo's original text that I used was *Boniface VIII's* speech. It is about the corrupt pope trying to avoid Jesus because of the 'terrible state he's in'.¹⁰⁰ By this stage in rehearsals, I had staged the play in various parts of the space and I was determined, in the spirit of keeping the audience guessing and ensuring that the examiner was positively influenced by the sheer spectacle of the piece, not to repeat anything that had come before. I therefore decided to use a giant puppet as the pope. As highlighted before, time was against me and there wasn't anyone in such a busy environment that I could ask to build me a giant representation of Pope Boniface VIII, so I improvised. The main part of the puppet had to be big enough to cover six actors who would control his eyes, arms, legs and mouth. I built a large cube made of bamboo and held together by reams of gaffer tape. This was then

⁹⁸ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), pp. 181.

⁹⁹ Bakhtin, p. 353.

¹⁰⁰ Mistero Buffo, p. 82.

covered in red, silky cloth with a strip of blue to be the stole. The whole contraption was lowered down from the rig whilst the cast sang Bruno Mars' *Uptown Funk*. His arms were giant Brighton and Hove Albion football gloves, his eyes were drawn onto paper plates and he had a pair of *Rocky Horror Picture Show* lips for a mouth – because those were what I found in the props room. It was a fun addition to the production, whilst still utilising the play's carnivalesque origins that would have seen someone assume the role of Mock Pope as well as the pageantry described by Bakhtin. At the carnival of Lyon, for example, 'the grotesque statue of the glutton "Machelcroute," a typical gay monster, was carried in procession'.¹⁰¹

I have already referenced earlier in the chapter of becoming aware of a discernible pattern of the intermezzi leading to possible audience boredom and so for the third intermezzi, I removed another routine by the Players and decided to treat the audience to a breakdown of the development of the illness via a giant puppet of Maurice. The puppet speaks with Maurice's voice and is controlled by the cast who, at one point, step out of the puppet to reveal themselves. The puppet explains: 'There's nothing to be scared of. I'm a puppet; an effigy, raised up high to ultimately be torn down; traditional at gatherings such as this. Not real. Open me up and you'll see all the workings.'¹⁰² It is another reference point to the Purim tradition of creating an effigy of Haman. Plus it echoes Rozik's statements about mask and disguise for the performer during carnival in that 'by concealing his own identity the mask endows him with momentary freedom, within the time boundaries set by carnival'.¹⁰³ As the Puppet says:

Because this isn't really me, but rather a manifestation of myself created solely to facilitate the development of plot and narrative, I find I am far freer to step to one side and observe the worsening state of myself...himself...ourself; to go into gruesome details that I formerly would have steered away from due to a mixture of politeness, nervousness and personal squeamishness.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Bakhtin, p. 156.

¹⁰² Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 206.

¹⁰³ Rozik, p. 144.

¹⁰⁴ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 205.

The scene continues and the puppeteers reveal themselves, stepping out of the puppet to continue the examination, not as their characters, but simply as the actors. As they do so, the puppet becomes a lifeless shell, a golem, and therefore the scene carries extra poignancy as a metaphor for what is happening to Maurice. They go into great levels of detail about the transformation and make no apology for documenting that Maurice can no longer ‘get hard,’¹⁰⁵ which, as they point out, is ‘an ironic turn of phrase as his entire body is made of clay’.¹⁰⁶ The Puppet and actors describing the decay of Maurice’s body is yet another example of the Bakhtinian concept of ‘grotesque realism’.¹⁰⁷ It is the ‘lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract’;¹⁰⁸ it is the story of Job as he is brought to his lowest point, but in the spirit of *‘l’envers’* and *‘venahafokh hu’* it also represents Bakhtin’s ‘victory over fear’.¹⁰⁹ For in the spirit of carnival and Purim we find, ‘the defeat of fear presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside out, the comic images of death and bodies gaily rent asunder’.¹¹⁰

The dynamic that created in *Mistero Buffo* meant that throughout the play, the audience didn’t know what was going to come next. The production was haphazard and hastily thrown together and it benefitted from it, because the audience responded to the creation of chaos. I hope for the same thing in *Petrified* and that it can develop both from the many theatrical forms that have gone before it as well as the contemporary productions that can teach so much.

Conclusion

Four different productions took texts from different theatrical traditions and had to find ways to communicate to a contemporary audience. It is fair to surmise that the majority of these audiences would not have known or particularly cared, what the original conventions might have been. They were all highly successful and whilst it

¹⁰⁵ Messik, *Petrified*, (final draft), p. 210.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bakhtin, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ Bakhtin, p. 19

¹⁰⁹ Bakhtin, p. 91.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

feels somewhat hubristic to include my work alongside that of Hytner, Bean and Norris, my audience responded extremely positively to the production, laughing, joining in with the songs and dances and all the students achieved full marks from the examiner. What was perhaps most interesting was that all of the aforementioned practitioners picked and chose as they went along. If a convention worked for today, it was used and if it didn't or more crucially, didn't help the narrative, it was discarded. These were valuable lessons in the creation of my final draft, because ultimately the most important element of any piece of theatre has to be the audience. With that in mind, my play is now ready to go before an audience to meet its final test.

I maintain the stage is a tangible, physical place that needs to be filled and it ought to be allowed to speak its own concrete language. – Antonin Artaud

CONCLUSION

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 painting, *The Fight between Carnival and Lent*, is a useful work on which to conclude this thesis. The oil-on-panel work stands at 118cm tall and 165cm wide, and, on the surface at least, depicts the contrast between the anarchy and freedom of carnival and the fasting and abstinence of Lent. It captures, as Art lecturer Jeanne Nuechterlein explains, 'a different rhythm of life'.¹ At the bottom of the painting a large man – personifying carnival - sits on a barrel, wearing a pork pie on his hat, jousting with a thin, sombre looking woman – personifying Lent - who is sat on a simple wooden chair. On the man's side are his followers; some wear masks, one has a cushion shoved up their shirt, another wears a necklace made of eggs and carries waffles, pancakes and sausages. Lady Lent is on a cart pulled by a monk and a nun. She is surrounded by bread and people dressed in ordinary clothes from the period. The two sides are in direct opposition to each other. On the left of the picture is a tavern where people drink, watch a play and dance. Meanwhile on the right of Lady Lent is a church with people praying and beggars receiving charity. Louise Milne, Lecturer in Visual Culture at the University of Edinburgh, describes the painting as portraying 'a God's eye view' of the square where everything can be seen in 'hallucinatory detail'.² It's a fascinating picture and brilliantly captures the 'indissoluble and essential relation to freedom'³ of Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival. However, it also offers a powerful visual metaphor for what contemporary Jewish theatre in the UK both is and could be.

¹ *In Our Time*, 15 Jan 2015 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04xrv9n>> [accessed 30.06.18].

² *Ibid.*

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 89.

In his seminal work, *The Theatre and Its Double*, Antonin Artaud writes about another painting - Lucas Van Leyden's *Lot and his Daughters* (1521). The work depicts in the foreground, 'the deeply incestuous' drunken Lot preparing to sleep with his daughters.⁴ In the background is the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Artaud is fascinated by the way that so much happens in the painting all at the same time and how the eye, although initially being drawn to the foreground, slowly takes in all the action of 'this supremely anarchic' painting.⁵ He concludes: 'I must say this painting is what theatre ought to be, if only it knew how to speak its own language.'⁶ It is certainly an ambitious desire to try and create a piece of theatre that plays on the senses as much as a painting does, but undeniably it was one that helped shape Artaud's theories. I too wish to apply that ambition to *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, for it shows what Jewish theatre ought to be if only it knew how to speak its own language; the language of carnival, Purim and the purim-shpil.

That language is not necessarily polite, nor does it aim to make others feel comfortable, rather it is often offensive and says the unsayable. Throughout Chapter 1, I explored the unique position that Purim occupies in the Jewish calendar and how, historically, it has operated as the Jewish version of carnival. That said, Chapter 3 recognised the more problematic elements of Purim and the purim-shpil. But there is a strength inherent in the story of Purim and in the purim-shpil and it is a strength that comes from a refusal to conform. I have referenced Bakhtin in stating that carnival comes from a 'force that pre-exists priests and kings and to whose superior power they are actually deferring when they appear to be licensing carnival'.⁷ That force can be found in Bruegel's painting and it can contribute to the UK's Jewish theatre.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to explore the virtues and vices connected to Purim and, after settling on a definition for Jewish theatre, analysed

⁴ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti (London: Alma Classics Ltd, 2013), p. 23.

⁵ Artaud, p.25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Holquist, 'Prologue to Mikhail Bakhtin', in *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. xviii.

how it was faring in the UK today. At no point has this been intended as a criticism of Jewish theatre. As shown in Chapter 2, Jewish theatre is largely successful, with many Jewish writers, directors, actors and producers at the top of their industry. Plays such as *Bad Jews* and *Two Thousand Years* prove that Jewish plays can sell out theatres and please audiences and critics alike. However, there is nothing like the works from other countries such as *Angels in America* or that of *Theaturtle* and through this thesis I have hoped to explore why, but also to demonstrate how rich a theatrical heritage exists in Judaism that can match these works. Bakhtin acknowledged how Rabelais's work was not popular with everyone - that 'many were repulsed and still are repulsed by him'⁸ - but that he was well aware of how important carnival was, how it was 'the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance'.⁹ My hope is that *Petrified* is a play that can demonstrate that there is an alternative heritage that we can call upon to produce challenging and fascinating theatrical works; a heritage that taps into something rich and vibrant and that shouldn't be ignored or forgotten.

⁸ Bakhtin, p.3.

⁹ Bakhtin, p. 9.

PETRIFIED
A PURIM-SHPIL

By

Robert Messik

Every effort should be made to change the space so it feels less like a theatre. What is crucial is that there is no divide between actor and audience. Entrances and exits are through the audience and action takes place wherever the actors choose. Its very informality is key and there should always be the impression that everything seen has been thrown together; makeshift and haphazard. Costumes and props should never be of any particular detail, rather allowing the words to paint the details of where scenes are set. Scenes flow directly on from one another.

No blackouts, unless for effect, but certainly not between scenes.

The cast, with the exception of MAURICE and EVIE, play all the other parts in the play. No particular effort should be made to hide that this is the case. They also play the music.

CAST LIST

MAURICE

EVIE

RUTH/DEBATER 1/PROTESTOR/FEMALE CALLER/REPORTER
1/SINGER

DAVY/REPORTER 2/EDITOR/SINGER

ABIGAIL/HOST/LAWYER 2/DIANE

RANDALL/LAWYER 1/SINGER/CALLER 1/DEBATER 2

MARGARET/REPORTER 3/SINGER/INTERVIEWER

PLAYER 1/DJ/POLICE/SINGER/EUROPEAN LAWYER 1

PLAYER 1/DJ/POLICE/SINGER/ EUROPEAN LAWYER 2

DR TOTNESS/RABBI/STEFAN/

The set is a huge dining table, pointing out into the audience, widening as it does so; tablecloth; chairs around it, laid for a meal - wine, remnants of a meal; fancy dress costumes. Action takes place on and around it. Instruments are dotted around the space.

PROLOGUE

The audience mill around, drinks in hand. They are more than welcome to sit at the table or seats around the space.

The cast are dotted about the room with the audience. Very faintly one or two members of the cast start to hum a nigun, Venahafokh hu ("and it was reversed") - a religious song, with this particular, upbeat, one sung at the festival of Purim. It should be barely audible at first, as if the audience are only hearing it in their heads. Then as more of the cast join in, the sound gets louder and more boisterous. The cast pick up the instruments, bang on chairs, tables, dance with the audience.

This is clearly a time of joy and celebration.

Then, without warning, mid-verse, it stops.

Silence.

A voice from the crowd. MAURICE, midforties, suit, glasses.

It should surprise the audience.

A heavy sigh. A movement filled with weight.

To begin with, the words are formed with equal weight.

MAURICE

Can...You...Hear...Me?

A silence as he attempts to move.

MAURICE

Am...I...Even speaking...out...loud?

Another movement, impossibly heavy.

MAURICE

Can no longer...feel my mouth. Lips. Tongue. Teeth. Teeth.
Teeeeetttttthhhhhh. Have I still got teeth? Could have lost every one and have no knowledge of the event. No longer need them. I no longer need.

As a stone rolls down a hill, the words gather momentum and emerge more freely.

MAURICE

Take that away, the need, and what's left? Remove the urges, the desires, the wants, take them away from a man and is it still a man? A woe man? Homo Sap...Are we more than all of that or are we simply made up of...of...of all the things we will never achieve? The disappointments, the disillusion, the let downs and the mighthavebeens? Is the one thing holding us together, making us...recognisably human, an illusion of achievement? Are we merely fuelled by frustrations? Driven by despair? Moved by...

A sound; Might have begun as a laugh. Sudden energy as he moves onto the stage.

MAURICE

See on the inside I'm still remarkably eloquent. On the inside I'm...Prosaic.

He picks up a glass, some food, basically makes himself at home.

MAURICE

(CONVERSATIONAL) A prosaic, ponderous, prick. On the inside I'm still me. I know that. I know it. I'm still here. Somewhere. I must be still here, because if not, then I don't know where I've gone and who this is. I don't know who's in my head and whose head this is and...I don't know. I don't know what happened. I don't know how it could have happened. Why it happened. But I do hope...if I'm still capable of such a thing, I think so. I still hope there's an explanation. I stepped on an ant or had one too many milky coffees with my breakfast bacon or masturbated on the Sabbath, Because if I did...nothing, if I did nothing to bring down the wrath from on high, and see I have suddenly become far more confident that there is a chance of wrath and that there is an on high from which to unleash it, if I did nothing to call this down upon me; then God, The Lord God almighty, Yahew, Elohim, Hakadosh Barukh Hu, is a real...

A pause.

MAURICE

Sshhh. He might be listening. But he knows it.

A sudden rage.

MAURICE

YOU KNOW IT.

Back to conversational. Though it is at a rapid pace. Audience members should be spoken to directly, singled out.

MAURICE

We all think it. Lying if you say otherwise. The books back us up. Him, it, God, being a complete and utter git. (SITTING ON THE TABLE). Numbers 16, Korah, son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab and one son of Peleth became insolent towards Moses

and so...they are swallowed up by the earth to prove that, that isn't a sensible thing to do. All of them, their households, and all those associated with them. People who had done nothing wrong other than know them. Boom, gone. And my favourite part? The text is very careful to state that they went down alive into the realm of the dead. Went down alive? Very keen to point out that they were aware of what was happening. All. The way. Down. No point of a punishment unless you're fully aware of the pain, now is there? I could go on, I've done a lot of research. I've had the time. Leviticus, Jephthah sacrifices his daughter, burns her because of a loophole, a failure to read the small print in a promise he made to the Lord to secure victory in battle. The book of Kings, forty-two children make fun of a prophet's baldness...his baldness...two bears appear from the woods and maul them to death. Job...Job...

A swallow; dry mouth. He drinks.

MAURICE

(MELANCHOLY AGAIN) Look at me with these delusions of grandeur; My suffering at biblical levels. Still, I'm not comparing myself to one of the greats. The successes. The ones who actually achieved. Moses. David. Mordecai. No, just Job. Just Job. Covered in divine shit Job. Shat on from most high Job. What does that say about me...him? Nothing. Neither of us ever did anything of note other than be tormented horribly and come to think of it why are we special? So many people round the world suffer all the time, from the beginning of time. Why should I be any different? See I'm not just prosaic, I am pathetic as well.

A silence.

MAURICE

(BACK TO CONVERSATIONAL) Maybe there will be answers. Maybe this will all make sense. Maybe not. Maybe you should turn away now. Shut the doors, bar the windows, lower the lights, pretend you're not at home. Don't let us in. It doesn't get pretty. Gets pretty nasty to tell you the truth. There isn't a happy ending; no last minute reprieve. Esther doesn't save the day; Haman doesn't hang.

A beat as he pulls out a chair.

MAURICE

Maybe that's what you want. Maybe you should just let us in and be done with it. Maybe you shouldn't. I don't know. I don't know anymore.

A beat as he sits centre stage.

MAURICE

(SOFTER) Maybe there won't be any...more.

A pause.

MAURICE
(SOFTER) Maybe there won't...be.

A pause.

MAURICE
(A WHISPER) May..be.

ACT I: SCENE I

A repeating high pitched beep.

RUTH, 17, bursts on stage; school uniform, make up...

RUTH
(TO MAURICE) Your son is a filthy pervert.

...Followed by DAVY, her brother, 13.

All the actors stay close to each other to emphasise the smallness of the room. They use MAURICE as a centre point, chasing around him and moving in and out past him.

The whole scene should almost be choreographed and vaguely reminiscent of dancing round a maypole to the beat of the beep.

DAVY
(TO RUTH) Yeah, well you're a liar.

RUTH
Don't talk to me like that.

DAVY
Who died and made you God?

RUTH
You're a little shit. And a pervert.

DAVY
I'm not a pervert.

RUTH
You were going through my phone. Trying to find a photo of Lucy.

MAURICE stares. We see what he sees, as they all move and argue in slow motion.

Then it snaps back to normal.

MAURICE

Why are you all in here? No one comes in here.

RUTH

I heard you. Couldn't find Mum.

EVIE, 45, enters, carrying a load of washing in a basket.

EVIE

Didn't look very hard. Who's Lucy?

RUTH

Davy's dream girl. Perv...

DAVY

...Piss off.

EVIE

(TO DAVY) Watch your mouth. (TO MAURICE) If anyone's interested, that beeping sound means the dryer is finished.

Another beeping starts.

EVIE

And that means the washing is finished. They're both God's way of suggesting one of you does something.

Everyone stares blankly at her. She sighs. Turns the beeping off and then starts pulling clothes out from under the table as if it's a dryer.

DAVY

What about what that bitch said?

RUTH

Excuse me?

MAURICE

I didn't hear the beeping.

EVIE

I said watch your mouth young man.

RUTH makes a very threatening gesture towards DAVY.

EVIE

(TO MAURICE) So why are you sat in here?

MAURICE

I was having a think.

DAVY

What about watching her mouth?

EVIE

(TO RUTH) Don't tease your brother.

EVIE now loads clothes under the table. RUTH smacks DAVY. The dance continues.

RUTH

How about telling him not to go through my telephone trying to find pictures of my friends?

DAVY

Don't hit me.

EVIE

How about listening to what I've just said, young lady? (TO MAURICE) Feel free to have an opinion at some point here.

RUTH

I'll fucking kill you, you call me a bitch again.

Again slow motion, then snap to normal.

MAURICE

Of course.

EVIE

What's with all the language? Suddenly everyone has a mouth on them? (TO MAURICE) Why are you in the laundry room?

DAVY

(UNDER HIS BREATH) Bitch.

EVIE

The next person that bloody swears will answer to me. Clear?

MAURICE

I like to come in here and...think. Have a bit of time.

EVIE

That must be nice. That sounds lovely. A bit of time? When was the last time I had a bit of time?

MAURICE

You should take some time. You work too hard.

EVIE

I know I work too bloody hard...

DAVY

...Language...

EVIE

(TO DAVY)...Is that really a game you want to play?

DAVY

(VERY SOFTLY)...No.

EVIE

(BACK TO MAURICE)...And what's going to happen round here when I take some of this time?

MAURICE

I'll handle it.

EVIE

You haven't got off your chair.

The dance continues, but EVIE now stands still and the children move around both her and MAURICE.

EVIE

(SUDDENLY CONCERNED) Why haven't you got off your chair?

RUTH

Mum.

MAURICE

I...don't know.

RUTH

Mum.

EVIE

Do you feel unwell?

MAURICE

Why is illness your go to place?

EVIE

It's not my go to place, it's your go to place. I go there because that's where I know I can find you.

RUTH

Mum, tell him.

MAURICE

Well, I haven't gone there. I've come in here, because this is where I normally go to have a think. And I'm not normally disturbed by the rest of you.

RUTH

Charming.

DAVY

No, you're not.

RUTH

Shut up.

EVIE

Why are you all still in here?

The dance stops as the children are all about to explain.

EVIE

Wait. No time. Davy, Ruth, get out and have some breakfast...

RUTH

...But what about...

EVIE

...And stay away from your sister's room...

RUTH

...And my phone...

EVIE

...And her phone.

As RUTH and DAVY leave...

RUTH

You hear her?

DAVY

You hear this?

He breaks wind.

RUTH

Mum.

EVIE

Any other problems?

RUTH

(AS SHE'S LEAVING) Where do I start?

EVIE

(SHOUTING AFTER HER) And you're welcome. (TO MAURICE) What's wrong?

MAURICE

I need to go to work.

EVIE

You do need to go to work. Why aren't you at work?

MAURICE

Nigel lost his job.

EVIE

Nigel who?

MAURICE

Nigel who? What do you mean Nigel who? Nigel Green...

MAURICE

(TRYING TO REMEMBER)...Nigel Green?

MAURICE

Always talked to your chest.

EVIE

(SHE REMEMBERS) Nigel Green.

MAURICE

He lost his job.

EVIE

That's awful.

MAURICE

It is.

EVIE

You're not worried are you?

MAURICE

Me? No. Why would I be worried? I mean me and Nigel are as different as, as...what he does, did, and what I do, do, couldn't be more different. Couldn't be more different.

EVIE

(TAKING HIS HAND) You'll be fine.

MAURICE

I know. I know. I just...I know. I just...

EVIE

...Need to go to work.

MAURICE

Yes. I...yes...

MAURICE stands and walks to the door.

EVIE

And you need to call your parents. Your mother's laying down the law over the barmitzvah and...

MAURICE

...Then why don't you...

EVIE

...Be very careful. If the next words out of your mouth are, then why don't you call them, I will explain to you why I'm not going to call them, but be warned, this will not be a quick explanation. This will be a very long-winded, drawn out, explanation, one that dregs up every grievance and complaint that's been amassed over the many, many, many years I have had the pleasure of knowing both them and you.

MAURICE

I see.

She kisses his cheek.

EVIE

Go to work.

EVIE watches MAURICE head into the crowd, then gathers the washing and leaves as...

SCENE II

...As ABIGAIL, late forties, storms on.

She paces and then attempts to gain control with deep breaths. The first two are calm but then she rapidly quickens, almost hyperventilating.

She has to sit down. She sits.

She relaxes...for a moment, before tensing again. She taps at her face - pressure points.

Finally under control, she picks at the leftovers from the table, tearing with malice and chewing with violence.

RANDALL, a distinguished man in his 70's walks into the space, newspaper under his arm. He sees ABIGAIL and promptly turns to leave.

ABIGAIL

(SEEING RANDALL) She doesn't get to speak to me like that. Who is she to speak to me like that? I'm her mummy. Her mummy. She won't get another. I'm it. I'm all she's got and if she burns bridges with me...not that she could ever do anything to push me away, I love her, but aren't I also a human being. A human being and don't I also have feelings?

She notices RANDALL is still standing.

ABIGAIL

So, sit already. Why be a stranger?

RANDALL doesn't move.

ABIGAIL

For God's sake, Daddy, sit down. I'm trying to talk to you.

RANDALL looks back, then at ABIGAIL, realises there is no escape and sits.

ABIGAIL

And there's only so much, as a human being, I'm willing to take. You understand that? Because my nerves are shot to...they're frayed. Every nerve is frayed. Every single ner...

Her words dissolve into tears and become unintelligible.

RANDALL unfurls his paper with world weariness and vanishes behind it.

A doorbell rings. No one moves.

MARGARET shouts from the audience.

MARGARET

Can you get that? Randall? Can you?

The newspaper doesn't move.

MARGARET

I'm upstairs and there's someone at the door.

ABIGAIL

(SHOUTING BACK) He's incommunicado

MARGARET

Abigail, sweetie, can you get that? I'm upstairs.

ABIGAIL

Actually having a bit of a wobble at present.

The doorbell rings again. MARGARET continues to talk from the audience.

The dialogue between MARGARET and MAURICE occurs amongst the audience.

MARGARET

I'm coming. I'm down the stairs. And I'm coming. And I'm opening...Oh hello, Maurice. You're early. I wasn't expecting you to be this early.

ABIGAIL

(ONSTAGE) Typical.

MAURICE

(FROM THE AUDIENCE) Sorry, less traffic than I thought.

MARGARET

(WALKING ONSTAGE) Why are you sorry? No need to be sorry. Just next time, you'll call.

A small woman in her 70's walks into the space. She talks to the newspaper, which doesn't move.

MARGARET

Randall, it's Maurice. He's early.

MAURICE

There wasn't as much traffic as I thought there would...

MARGARET

...Abi, it's Maurice.

MAURICE

You look well.

ABIGAIL

(NOT MOVING FROM THE TABLE) Really not in the mood. Okay?

MARGARET

He's a little early.

MAURICE

A406's normally jam packed.

MARGARET

Yes, well it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

MAURICE

I'll call next time.

MARGARET

Only if you can. It isn't important. You'll have some tea?

MAURICE

Can I have a camomile?

MARGARET and ABIGAIL exchange a glance.

MARGARET

Why?

MAURICE

Just trying to cut back on the caffeine, that's all.

ABIGAIL

Evie not drinking caffeine, at the moment?

MAURICE

I'm not drinking caffeine at the moment. What's it got to do with Evie?

ABIGAIL

Calm down.

MAURICE

I'm perfectly calm.

MARGARET

And nobody said otherwise. Honestly, Maurice, you do get worked up about the silliest things.

MAURICE

I'm not worked up.

ABIGAIL

You sound worked up.

MAURICE

Because you're working me up.

They stare at one another; a challenge; neither prepared to look away first.

MARGARET walks over to the table and gets some tea.

MARGARET

I'm sorry.

MAURICE

Why are you apologising?

MARGARET

You said I was working you up.

MAURICE

I said that she was...

MARGARET

...I certainly never intended to get you worked up.

MAURICE

Of course you didn't.

MARGARET

It was never my intention.

MAURICE

I know.

MARGARET

So I apologised.

MAURICE

And there's no need.

MARGARET

I'll do better next time.

MAURICE

Fine. Thank you. Fine. I appreciate it.

MARGARET

You're very welcome. Sit. Tell us how you've been. Biscuit? Or has Evie given those up as well?

MAURICE opens his mouth to say something and then thinks better of it.

MAURICE

(SITTING AT THE TABLE) Hi Dad. How's things?

No answer from the newspaper.

MAURICE

Busy? (STILL NO ANSWER) It's crazy for me. Not getting a moment's rest. Sometimes think there has to be an easier way.

ABIGAIL

Mummy and Daddy don't need to hear everything that's wrong, you know. It adds stress. They don't need it.

MARGARET produces a plate of biscuits. ABIGAIL takes. MAURICE doesn't.

MARGARET

You're working too hard.

MAURICE

It's fine.

MARGARET

I didn't say it wasn't fine. I said you're working too hard.

MAURICE

It's what I do.

MARGARET

So, I shouldn't worry about you?

MAURICE

There's no need.

MARGARET

Believe me I wish I could turn it off. Make my life much easier if I could. But I can't. From the moment I wake up to the moment I go to sleep, I worry. And then you know what I do whilst I'm asleep?

MAURICE and ABIGAIL answer.

TOGETHER

You worry in your dreams.

MARGARET

I worry in my dreams.

MAURICE

I know you do.

MARGARET

It's part of being a mother.

MAURICE

I understand.

MARGARET

You don't understand. You're not a mother.

ABIGAIL

For this be grateful. You do not want to know what I am going through with my Ariella.

MARGARET

She's not well?

ABIGAIL

She won't talk to me.

MARGARET

She won't talk to you? Why won't she talk to you? Maybe she'll talk to me.

ABIGAIL

Why would she talk to you?

MARGARET

I'm her Nana.

ABIGAIL

And she's twenty. And a little madam.

MARGARET

She could be caught up in anything; drink, drugs, prostitution. She seeing anyone?

ABIGAIL

She won't talk to me.

MARGARET

They all have so many sexual partners. Me, I never slept with anyone but your father.

A moment as she considers whether this was fulfilling...It is what it is.

MAURICE

I know Evie worries.

MARGARET

Does she?

MAURICE

Yes, she does.

MARGARET

Well she always has been a little highly strung. Have a biscuit.

ABIGAIL takes. MAURICE doesn't.

RANDALL's hand reaches from under the paper.
MARGARET slaps it away.

MARGARET

It's nice to see you.

MAURICE

Can I have a word?

MARGARET immediately stiffens.

ABIGAIL

Oh oh.

MARGARET

What have we done now?

MAURICE

What? Nothing.

MARGARET

We certainly wouldn't want to be in trouble.

MAURICE

Trouble? Why would you be in trouble? You're not in trouble.

ABIGAIL

It sounds like they're in trouble.

MAURICE

Why? No. Why are you being like that?

MARGARET

Like what? How am I being? I'm certainly not trying to be like anything. I'm just waiting to be told.

MAURICE takes a breath.

MAURICE

Evie asked me...

ABIGAIL

...Here we go.

MAURICE

You know what? Forget it. Just forget it. Forget I ever tried to engage in a rational conversation.

A voice from behind the paper.

RANDALL

My God, you're dramatic.

He unfolds the newspaper.

RANDALL

The moment you come in here, you're walking onto the stage. Lights, overture, let the performance begin.

MAURICE

You with us now, are you, Dad?

RANDALL

You're both as bad as each other.

ABIGAIL

What have I said?

RANDALL

If you're going to storm in here with all this nonsense, I'd rather you never came.

ABIGAIL

I agree. Stress. They don't need it.

MAURICE

Isn't there somewhere you need to be?

ABIGAIL

Stefan's playing golf. I don't like to be in the house on my own.

MAURICE

You're forty-eight.

ABIGAIL

(CRYING) My baby's at university.

MARGARET

(AUTOMATICALLY PASSING A TISSUE FROM HER SLEEVE) He doesn't mean it, Maurice. You don't mean it, Randall.

RANDALL

I most certainly do mean it.

MARGARET

You just wind each other up.

RANDALL

No one's getting wound up. I'm just being honest. You like it when people are being honest, don't you, Maurice?

MAURICE

I actually don't know what's going on here?

MARGARET

Why isn't Evie talking to us herself? I've always thought this is a family that could talk to one another. Now Evie won't talk. Ariella won't talk. What's happening to us? Read the picture.

MAURICE

I don't need to read the picture.

ABIGAIL

I think you should read the picture.

RANDALL

(STANDING) I'm going to make a phone call.

MAURICE
 Could you just...

MARGARET
 ...Randall...

MAURICE
 ...Could you just sit down, please?

MARGARET
 What does the picture say?

MARGARET mouths the words with him.

MAURICE
 (THROUGH GRITTED TEETH) In this house we do real.

A pause.

MARGARET
 (ENTHUSIASTIC) Hmm?

RANDALL
 (STANDING) I'm making a phone call.

MARGARET
 (WITH THE POTENTIAL OF REAL FURY) Sit down.

RANDALL sits.

MARGARET
 (TO MAURICE) Carry on.

MAURICE
 We do mistakes. We do I'm sorry. We do second chances...

MARGARET glares. ABIGAIL grins.

MAURICE
 ...We do fun. We do hugs. We do forgiveness.

The final words are the hardest.

MAURICE
 We do loud. We do family. We do love.

MARGARET
 We do love. Think about those words, Maurice. That's all I ask. Just think about them.

RANDALL
 (STANDING) I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but I'm just not having this nonsense in the house. There's no need for it.

MARGARET

(GUIDING HIM BACK DOWN) You need to take your pills. (TO MAURICE) He shouldn't get worked up. It isn't good for his heart.

ABIGAIL

(STANDING) I'll get them, Daddy.

RANDALL

Your fussing isn't good for my heart. (TO ABIGAIL) SIT DOWN.

ABIGAIL

Don't talk to me like that. Don't raise your voice to me. I won't have it.

MARGARET

Why don't we just all take a breath and work this out? We're a family. We're allowed to disagree.

ABIGAIL

Tell him I won't have it.

MAURICE

What is there to work out? I haven't said anything yet. I mean, I literally haven't said anything. Why can't we have a simple conversation? Why is it so hard for us to have a simple conversation?

MARGARET

Of course we can.

MAURICE

Really?

ABIGAIL

I am a strong, independent woman who won't be spoken to like that.

MARGARET

We could just do without being told off in our own kitchen.

MAURICE

(STANDING) This is ridiculous.

RANDALL

(STANDING) I quite agree.

MARGARET

Families argue, it's what they do. But they make up. Recite the picture.

MAURICE

I am not reciting the picture again.

MARGARET

Have a biscuit.

MAURICE

I don't want a fucking biscuit.

A pause.

RANDALL

(SITTING AND VANISHING BEHIND THE PAPER) I don't know why you bother with him.

MARGARET

I am dealing with this. Now, Maurice, sit down. Sit down. Come on, we all love each other, don't we? Abigail, sit down.

ABIGAIL

Only when he says sorry.

MARGARET

He's sorry. Maurice, don't we?

ABIGAIL

I'm going home. (TO RANDALL) You have hurt me deeply.

RANDALL growls from behind the paper.

ABIGAIL

(GATHERING HER THINGS) I get abuse from my daughter. I come here for refuge. Refuge. And I get it from you. This is not what I need.

MAURICE

(SITTING) I don't want to argue. Nor does Evie. She just thought it'd be easier for me to pop in on my way home. Give me a chance to see you; have a chat whilst I'm here.

ABIGAIL

I'm going home. Mummy, I'll call you later.

MARGARET

Don't leave in a huff.

ABIGAIL

(TEARS RETURNING AS SHE LEAVES) I am not in a huff.

MARGARET

I didn't mean that. I meant...don't leave upset. We love you.

MAURICE

All I wanted to say was I know there's been some confusion about the invite list for the Bar Mitzvah.

ABIGAIL stops.

MARGARET smiles, dangerously sweet.

RANDALL lowers the paper.

EVIE enters and sits down on the other side of MAURICE.

EVIE

I don't believe you.

MAURICE

What's not to believe?

EVIE

That you spelled it out to them and they said nothing. That your dad said, nothing.

MAURICE

You asked me to deliver the message. I delivered the message.

EVIE

And there was no explosion?

MAURICE

No explosion.

RANDALL explodes.

RANDALL

(LEAPING TO HIS FEET) It's a bloody disgrace. I mean an abso-bloody-lutely bloody disgrace.

EVIE

And your mother said nothing?

MAURICE

She said...nothing.

MARGARET purses her lips, says nothing.

EVIE

I'm very impressed. And not a little surprised.

MAURICE

Always good to be surprised.

MARGARET

Okay, Maurice, we'll stick with those numbers. If that's what you want then we'll stick with those numbers. They're our friends. They'll understand. They'll have to. I'm sure they will. So, they wanted to come and show their love for Davy and for you and for us, but they'll have to understand. We're not going to fall out over it.

EVIE

(STANDING UP FROM THE TABLE) Maybe there's hope for all of us.

MAURICE looks at his family. Their faces make it clear there is no hope.

MAURICE

(A WEAK SMILE) Maybe.

As one, MARGARET, ABIGAIL and RANDALL fade into the darkness in a vaguely supernatural manner.

MAURICE

I'll go change.

EVIE

There's chicken in the fridge. I'll heat up some vegetables.

MAURICE stumbles and nearly falls.

EVIE

You okay?

MAURICE

Yes...ow...yes, yes, just went over on my foot slightly. Nothing to worry about.

He sits, removes his shoe and his sock.

Lights close in on him. He is now upstairs, shouting down to EVIE.

MAURICE

Nothing to worry about. Just...something...in...my sock.

He holds up his foot and stares underneath the toe.

MAURICE

What the...

He gingerly prods at his foot and winces expecting pain. Nothing.

A bit bolder, he prods again. Nothing. Harder, then harder. Still nothing.

MAURICE picks up his shoe...and then smacks it, really hard into his foot.

He doesn't feel a thing.

MAURICE

Hmm.

INTERMEZZI

Blinding light.

Drum roll.

A man dressed like a 17th century Jewish peasant; beard, side locks and a skullcap on his head, appears.

PLAYER 1

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth...

A second man, dressed identically...

PLAYER 2

May you prosper greatly!

PLAYER 1

May you prosper greatly!

A flourish from the fiddle.

PLAYER 2

May your livestock be plentiful!

PLAYER 1

May your livestock be plentiful!

Another flourish.

PLAYER 2

May you stay healthy because you can kill yourself later!

He bows.

1 waits for him to straighten up, then kicks him in the groin. Cymbal crash.

PLAYER 2

(CRUMPLING) Oy.

PLAYER 1

For you, a story. A story of transformation. A bubbameiser of unparalleled quality and mystery to engage, enchant and excite; A story to transport, transcend and transform; a story to stun, to stupefy, to...

PLAYER 2

(LEAPING UP)...Stink.

1 throws a punch. 2 ducks. 1 spins 360 and they seamlessly march together.

PLAYER 1

Imagine please, the court of Nebuchadnezzar.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) The magicians...

PLAYER 2

(AS A MAGICIAN)...Kazaaam.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Enchanters...

PLAYER 2

(AS AN ENCHANTER)...Kazoom.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Astrologers...

PLAYER 2

(STRUGGLING TO FIND A WORD)...Ka...planets.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) But they could not interpret it for me.

PLAYER 2

(PROUD OF HIS PUNCHLINE) Ka...sorry.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Finally, Daniel came in my presence.

2 starts to crudely mime. 1 slaps him.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) And I said, Belteshazzar, chief of...

PLAYER 2

(DROPPING THE THEATRICALS)...Who?

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Belteshazzar, chief of...

PLAYER 2

...Who the hell's Belteblablah?

PLAYER 1

(NORMAL VOICE) Daniel.

PLAYER 2

So call him, Daniel.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy god in him.

PLAYER 2

It's very confusing.

PLAYER 1

(NORMAL VOICE) Only if you're an idiot.

They look out at the audience.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) I said, Daniel, chief of the magicians, I know the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.

1 speaks quickly whilst 2 acts it out, almost like he's signing for the deaf. Of course his gestures are a lot less subtle.

The audience should be waiting for a mistake to be made. None are, though 2 can take shortcuts if needed.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

A brief breather. Then faster still.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) There before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.

We think the message finished, but...

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

2 gives up. He glares at 1 who's caught up in the theatricality of the moment.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) Let it be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let it live with the animals among the plants of the earth till seven times pass by.

2's exhausted. He slaps 1 to stop.

PLAYER 1

(GRAND KING VOICE) That's the dream. What's it mean? (NORMAL VOICE)
Then Daniel, also called Belteshazzar...

PLAYER 2

...whoah, whoah, whoah...

PLAYER 1

...Was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him, but nonetheless he explained the dream. (DANIEL VOICE) "My Lord, the tree you saw...

PLAYER 2

...Shut up. Give me a minute.

2 stretches, a few lunges, then mimes cutting up some cocaine, chopping it up and inhaling it through each nostril.

PLAYER 2

Go for it.

This should go even faster.

PLAYER 1

(DANIEL VOICE)"My Lord, the tree you saw which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds...Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

PLAYER 2

Yeesssss!

The speed is getting ridiculous.

PLAYER 1

(DANIEL VOICE) But...

PLAYER 2

Ooooooh.

PLAYER 1

(DANIEL VOICE)...Just as the tree is felled, so too will you be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you

acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

1 stops. 2 collapses.

PLAYER 1

And all this came to pass.

PLAYER 2

(FROM THE FLOOR) No.

PLAYER 1

Yep. Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from his people and ate grass like the ox.

2 heaves himself up and begins strutting around the stage.

PLAYER 1

His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird...What are you doing?

PLAYER 2

A physical representation of the transformation undergone by King Nebukageezer.

PLAYER 1

You look stupid.

PLAYER 2

You look stupid.

1 wallops him.

PLAYER 1

(SERIOUS) At the end of that time, Nebuchadnezzar, raised his eyes toward heaven, and his sanity was restored. Then he praised the Most High and honoured and glorified him who lives forever.

They both clear their throats and sing.

TOGETHER

His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing.

PLAYER 2

Very nice.

PLAYER 1

Thank you. Suddenly, the King's honour and splendor were returned and he was restored to his throne and became even greater than before.

PLAYER 2

And from that point, Nebuchablahblah...

PLAYER 1

...Nezzer...

PLAYER 2

...Yes...continued to praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just.

TOGETHER

We thank you.

They bow and exit in separate directions.

A beat. 2 runs across the stage to follow 1.

ACT II

SCENE I

Bedroom. MAURICE, wearing pajamas, sits on the edge of the table - the downstage half, now clear of detritus.

Later, EVIE uses the bed as a dresser. It shouldn't matter that MAURICE is sat on the edge. The two almost occupy their own space until they come together.

MAURICE stares at his foot. It's covered in grey splotches.

MAURICE

Cancer.

EVIE

(FROM THE AUDIENCE) You haven't got cancer.

MAURICE

Since when did you become such an expert?

EVIE steps out from amongst the audience. She wears a dressing gown and a towel around her head.

EVIE

You haven't got cancer.

MAURICE

Cancer of the foot.

EVIE

(GOING BACK INTO THE AUDIENCE) You can't get foot cancer.

MAURICE

Well it's something.

EVIE emerges and begins her night time routine; a lot of movement contrasting with MAURICE's stillness.

She uses the table as if it is a dresser and begins to 'take her face off.'

EVIE

Everything's definitely something.

MAURICE

(PANIC RISING) So you think it's something?

EVIE

Stop playing with my words. Do I think it's something? Yes, yes I do. Because everything is something. Do I think it's something serious? No, no I don't because...because...I don't. Now get into bed, we need to talk about tasting starters at the weekend.

MAURICE

What about meningitis?

EVIE

Thank you for listening to what I have to say.

MAURICE

Or Ebola. That's a thing.

EVIE

In West Africa that's a thing. In North London, not so much.

MAURICE

I'm really worried.

EVIE

Sweetheart, you're always really worried.

MAURICE

I'm being serious.

EVIE

(STANDING WITH A SIGH, BOTH AFFECTIONATE AND EXASPERATED)
Morry...

She sits next to him on the table.

MAURICE puts his foot on EVIE's lap for her to investigate. She pushes it away.

EVIE

I'm worried about you.

Again with the foot. Again she pushes.

EVIE

I don't mean about that.

MAURICE

I mean about tha...

EVIE

...I mean about everything. You're quiet. You sit in the laundry room on your own...

MAURICE

...It used to be my study...

EVIE

...You're obsessing about your health. I'm worried about you.

Again with the foot. She leaves it.

MAURICE

So you think I do have something?

EVIE

(POINTING TO HER HEAD) Yes, but up here.

RUTH walks in.

RUTH

I'm going to go to...

She sees MAURICE's foot on EVIE's lap.

RUTH

...Oh God. Your children are asleep in the next room.

MAURICE

Can't you knock?

RUTH

Can't you control your urges?

EVIE

Just what exactly do you think we're doing?

RUTH

I'm going to stay at Jo's tomorrow night.

EVIE looks at MAURICE for a reaction. There's nothing, save him contorting his body to stare at his foot.

EVIE

Jo's?

RUTH

Yes, Jo's.

EVIE

You want to stay at Jo's? Captain of the rugby team?

RUTH

What?

EVIE

Serial philanderer?

RUTH

Mum, Jo's a...

EVIE

...Lost his virginity at the age of thirteen, dates teachers, mother not around. You, our beautiful, innocent, seventeen year old girl, want to stay alone with him all night in his bedroom and you expect us to be okay with that?

RUTH

What's the matter with you?

EVIE stares at her unresponsive husband.

EVIE

Nothing. Go have fun.

RUTH

(AS SHE LEAVES) You need so much help.

EVIE

This is what I mean.

MAURICE

I think it's spreading.

EVIE

Exactly what I'm talking about. I want you to see someone. Speak to David.

MAURICE

He's not a doctor, he's a...

EVIE

...There's no shame in it. He can help you.

MAURICE
 Help me with what?

EVIE
 With whatever's on your mind.

MAURICE
 Nothing is on my mind.

EVIE
 What did Ruth just ask?

MAURICE
 Ruth was in here?

EVIE
 Of course Ruth was...

MAURICE
 ...I'm joking.

EVIE
 You're stalling. You're talking to someone and that's final.

MAURICE
 You're not my mother.

EVIE
 Why is she your other go to place? After you've sorted out the hypochondria you can move on to issues with your mother.

MAURICE
 Issues with...It's nuts, I don't have issues with my mother.

EVIE
 Everyone has issues with your mother.

MAURICE stands, hobbling on his foot.

MAURICE
 Okay, this is...this is...and you're getting on my nerves now, okay? This is what's on my mind. What this...thing is on my foot. What it is. Where it's come from and how I get it to go away. Who's got time to worry about my head?

EVIE starts to sing.

EVIE
 Bring me Sunshine, in your smile,
 Bring me Laughter, all the while...

MAURICE

...Maybe there is something drastically wrong with my brain, maybe I do need to talk to some £100 an hour shrink who will sit there in his plush office and make lots of sympathetic noises as I tell him why I wasn't sufficiently breastfed and why I can only get an erection when staring at pictures of the Chief Rabbi...

EVIE

...In this world where we live, there should be more happiness...

MAURICE

...but right now it all seems largely irrelevant when I have this...and I don't know what it is and it seems to be spreading and...

EVIE

...So much joy you can give...

MAURICE

(ONLY TO SHUT HER UP)...To each brand new bright tomorrow.

EVIE

(SPOKEN) Thank you. (SINGING) Make me happy, through the years...

MAURICE

...I hate it when you try to win an argument through song.

EVIE

(SPOKEN) Not win, just, end...(SINGING) Never bring me, any tears. Let your arms be as warm as the sun from up above...(SPOKEN) come on, big finish...

TOGETHER

Bring me fun, bring me sunshine, bring me love.

EVIE walks round the table and climbs up on it. She pulls the table cloth over her as if it's a duvet.

MAURICE stands where he is, not sure he's ready to stop worrying.

Eventually he gets into bed as well.

EVIE

(KISSING HIM ON THE FOREHEAD) Call tomorrow.

Then she reaches out as if turning off a light, lies down and goes to sleep.

Darkness.

Then...

Emet. WHISPERS

More whispers join from all around.

Emet. WHISPERS

And more...

Emet. WHISPERS

...Until the sheer amount of them creates a significant volume.

Then all of a sudden they stop.

Silence. One word. Final.

WHISPERS

Met.

SCENE II

Lights snap on.

EVIE sits on a chair downstage.

A voice from the audience...

TOTNESS

And cough.

MAURICE coughs.

TOTNESS

(FROM THE AUDIENCE) Thank you, Maurice. If you just want to put your clothes back on.

An elderly doctor emerges.

He walks up stage and uses a glass of water to wash his hands.

EVIE

Well?

TOTNESS

Hmm?

EVIE

What do you think?

TOTNESS

What do I think? What do I think? What do I think?

He walks back downstage, pulls out a chair and sits opposite EVIE as if there's a desk between them.

TOTNESS

(SITS) I'll tell you what I think. I think your husband is a wonderful man; a good husband and a father. And I think you're very lucky to have a marriage that is so clearly built on mutual love and trust and admiration.

EVIE

But?

TOTNESS

But I think your husband is Meshugginah.

EVIE

This I know.

TOTNESS

Crazier than a box of frogs.

EVIE

I think he's getting worse.

TOTNESS

No. I think he plateaued at around fifteen when he was convinced, and I do mean absolutely categorically, that he'd caught some form of Denghi fever. Came into my office armed with facts and figures and in those days we're not talking about someone presenting you with their iPhone.com. He was carrying books, encyclopedias. Took him half an hour to go through all the symptoms. Ended up with back strain from all the schlepping. He was on bruprenorphine for a month.

TOTNESS leans forward and attempts to whisper, though his volume doesn't really change.

TOTNESS

I mean his mother doesn't help.

EVIE

No, she does not.

TOTNESS

First sign of a snuffle and he was swept in here to receive the last rites.

MAURICE emerges from the audience doing up his tie.

MAURICE

I can hear you, you know.

TOTNESS

Deafness not one of the symptoms then?

TOTNESS dissolves into laughter which swiftly turns into a coughing fit.

EVIE

Is he...

MAURICE

(POURING HIM A GLASS OF WATER) He's fine. Been coughing like that for thirty years.

TOTNESS

(SHOOING HIM AWAY) I have never been healthier.

MAURICE

Smokes too bloody much.

MAURICE drinks the water himself.

TOTNESS

Just, unlike some people I could mention, I don't feel the need to seek medical attention every time I fucking fart. (TO EVIE) Mrs Schwartzmann, my unreserved apologies.

MAURICE

So you think it's nothing?

TOTNESS

Nothing. A verruca.

MAURICE

A verruca?

TOTNESS

So you wear flipflops at the health club and if you've really got nothing better to do, you write them a strongly worded letter about the cleanliness of their floors, but that's about it.

MAURICE pulls out a chair and sits down next to EVIE opposite TOTNESS.

MAURICE

I've had a verruca before.

TOTNESS

I remember. (TO EVIE) Off school for a week, tests arranged at Great Ormond street.

MAURICE

She was worried.

TOTNESS

She's a control freak.

MAURICE

I'll ask you not to insult my mother, thank you.

TOTNESS

Or what? You'll stop bothering me? I pray for the day.

MAURICE

This is some bedside manner you've got, Doc.

TOTNESS

Well, you leave me no choice. You need to get a grip on this. Thinking you're sick at every creak.

MAURICE

I've lost all feeling...

TOTNESS stands and leans towards them as if leaning on a desk. He shouts.

TOTNESS

...IT'S A VERRUCA; the human papilloma virus, causing an excess amount of keratin, a hard protein, to develop in the top skin layer or epidermis of the foot. The extra keratin produces the rough, hard texture of a wart; a verruca. That's what you have.

MAURICE

But there's more than one.

TOTNESS

(TO EVIE) Please take him away.

MAURICE

Why is there more than one?

TOTNESS

(REALLY SHOUTING) BECAUSE SOMETIMES THEY DEVELOP IN CLUSTERS. You wrap it up when you swim or shower and Mrs Schwartzmann backs off from the toe sucking...

MAURICE

...Can you, please, just for once...

TOTNESS

...But other than that there is sweet Fanny Adams that you can do about it. Now, Maurice, I am very fond of you, always have been, but if you don't leave my office immediately I will call security to have you removed.

EVIE

Thank you, Doctor.

MAURICE

What security?

EVIE

(TO MAURICE AS SHE STANDS) Come on.

MAURICE

Mrs Bloom?

TOTNESS

She can be vicious. Try and undersell her a pound of chop liver.

He moves round the imaginary desk and walks towards EVIE to show her to the door.

TOTNESS

A pleasure to see you, Mrs Schwartzmann. You give my love to your miraculously sane children and try and control your lunatic of a husband.

MAURICE

Verbal abuse, personal insults and attack on family members, I'm building up quite a case against you.

TOTNESS

Or you could run away with me, Evie. I'd show you a thing or two.

EVIE

It's very tempting.

MAURICE

And sexual harassment.

EVIE

But who can afford a divorce? (TO MAURICE) Come on. Maybe they'll find you a wheelchair to help you leave the building.

TOTNESS walks upstage, pulling out a fat cigar as he goes.

MAURICE

(MOVING TO EVIE) Do you think I'm an idiot?

EVIE

Yes. But you're my idiot. Now, we had a deal.

MAURICE

Did we?

EVIE

In my head we did, yes and I mean for you to stick to it. You're going to go and talk to somebody.

MAURICE

Can't I talk to you?

EVIE

(SHE GOES TO LEAVE) Always. But you're going to go and see somebody as well.

MAURICE

I was really scared.

EVIE stops.

MAURICE

I know what I'm like. I know it's stupid, a mark on my foot and I'm like aargghhh...but odds are, sooner or later...

EVIE

(WALKING BACK TO HIM)...Shh.

MAURICE

I contacted Zurich.

EVIE

Dignitas?

MAURICE

Life insurance. Wanted to check on the policy. I'm not scared of dying.

EVIE

Stop it now.

MAURICE

I'm not scared of the pain, not really; but the helplessness, the inevitability. It's like when you're going to vomit. You know it's going to happen and part of you thinks let's just get it out of the way now. The waiting is so much worse than the happening.

EVIE tries to take MAURICE's hand, but he moves away.

MAURICE

You know Sarah died?

EVIE

Sarah Baumtree?

MAURICE

Sarah Feingold. She was our age. Four kids. Went in for a routine check up, never left. And I'm there, crammed in at the shiva, waiting to pay my respects to her husband, who looks like he's been hit by a truck by the way, and all I can think of is when is it my turn? When is it your turn?

He turns back to her.

MAURICE

What would be worse, to be the one in the box or the one carrying the box? Either way, it's only a matter of time before that big hand comes down from the sky, like the shittiest lottery win ever and says, it's you. You should remarry.

EVIE

Oh, I'll definitely remarry.

MAURICE

I mean it.

EVIE

I'm looking now. I took the Doctor's number.

MAURICE

(FRUSTRATED) Why is nothing serious?

EVIE

(EQUALLY FRUSTRATED) Because everything's serious.

A beat.

EVIE

You think you're the only one who's scared? The only one who has these thoughts zooming round their head; bouncing off their brains? You're the only one that's suffering? Morry, we're all suffering. That's the definition of being alive; scrabbling to keep all these things close to you, precisely because you know you can't keep any of them. Every second of being awake means I'm terrified about...not being awake; leaving the children, you. You wouldn't cope. Ruth's not tough, not really. And Davy's barely more than an animal. And think of the pressure on you with work and looking after them. You would have to re-marry...

She fights back tears.

EVIE

...Except then I would have to come back from the grave and strangle the whore.

MAURICE tries to pull her into a hug.

MAURICE

I'm sorry.

She's having none of it.

EVIE

No, no, no. (SUDDENLY ANGRY) You see this is what happens when I lose control. It's why I keep a lid on it.

MAURICE tries again and this time she allows him.

MAURICE

I'm sorry. I've been selfish. I'll get a grip on it. I promise. I've got the all clear. I'm fine. I have a nasty verruca. It's horrible and it's grim...

EVIE

...You're turning me on...

MAURICE

...But that's all it is. And I'm fine and you'll see. I will embrace life. Make the most of every day. You're going to see a brand new Morry Schwartzmann.

A sudden sound of a video game as DAVY walks on, holding a controller.

He sits downstage, where a light flickers on his face as if he's playing a game.

MAURICE walks down to join him. '

MAURICE

Whoah, looks pretty cool. Huh? The guns are cool; that zombie is cool; eating of the brains...pretty cool.

Sounds of death from the screen. DAVY throws the controller down....

DAVY

I'm going to Jack's.

...And walks away...

...As Ruth hurries past, clearly upset, texting on her phone.

MAURICE

Ruth. Ruthie. Ruthert the bear. Come chat. We never chat anymore.

RUTH

Chat? What do you want to chat about, dad? Shall we chat about how my life has come to a juddering halt? How nothing I now do will have any point or purpose to it? How, how, how, no one would notice if I took myself up to the top of a tall building and threw myself off, save stepping out the way to avoid the splatter. Shall we chat about that? Hmm? Shall we?

Ummm... MAURICE

Yeah. Didn't think so. RUTH

She runs off. MAURICE turns back to EVIE.

MAURICE
(TO EVIE) A brand new, Maurice Schwartzmann.

SCENE III

The lights slowly fade as the cast emerge from all over the space.

They sing a Sabbath Nigun.

Moving with grace and poise, they lay the table for Shabbat.

The whole cast gather round the table and light the candles.

WOMEN
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam asher kidishanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu, l'had'lik neir shel Shabbat.

Next comes the wine.

MEN
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

And Challah, traditional sweet bread.

ALL
Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melekh ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

It's beautiful, as all are captured by the sanctity of the ritual....

...Then a sudden lighting change as we're back into the mundane.

Everyone takes seats at the table, whilst STEFAN, ABIGAIL's husband, holds court.

STEFAN
...So we've decided to go for the whole TV package. Everything, kit and caboodle. Including all the sports.

EVIE stands and starts collecting up the plates.

ABIGAIL
 Evie, can I help?

EVIE
 No, no, sit. Enjoy.

RANDALL
 What do you need the sports for?

MAURICE stands to help her.

MAURICE
 Kids.

ABIGAIL
 I really don't mi...

MARGARET
 ...It was a lovely meal.

EVIE
 Thank you, Margaret.

MARGARET
 It's very brave to try something new like that. With all these people. Maurice, sit down. Ruth, help your mother.

RUTH
 Why don't you tell Davy to help?

EVIE
 (A WARNING) Ruth.

RUTH
 And why shouldn't Dad help?

MAURICE
 I'm helping. I'm helping.

MARGARET
 Maurice, sit down. This is not for you to do.

STEFAN
 Watch a bit of the footie and now the Beeb have lost the rights to the Olympics, how long before they lose Wimbledon too or the golf? Tell me that.

MARGARET
 Your father works very hard and it's not fitting on a Shabbes that he should...

RUTH
 ...Help his wife clear up? Really? What century are you living in?

MAURICE

Ruth, hey, it's your Nana.

ABIGAIL

And you watch the cycling, don't you? Stefan's getting very into his cycling.

STEFAN

Mountain biking. Not cycling.

RUTH

I'm expressing an opinion. Is that not allow...

EVIE

...And we're done. Ruth get up, do what you've been asked.

DAVY laughs.

EVIE

(TO DAVY) And you.

DAVY

What? I said nothing. I kept my head down.

They start clearing the table.

MAURICE watches them. They all move in slow motion, weaving in and out, as if in the same dance from the opening scene.

Then STEFAN speaks and everything returns to a normal speed.

STEFAN

Couple of guys persuaded me to come with them on a ride and I'm hooked.

RANDALL

Bicycles?

STEFAN

Mountain bikes.

ABIGAIL

Can't get him off.

STEFAN

Doing the Calderdale marathon in a fortnight, got myself a beauty of a ride, IS carbon construction. (TO MAURICE) Guess how much it weighs.

MAURICE

...um...

STEFAN

...M5 alloy rear triangle, SWAT Door integration, internal cable routing, 142mm dropouts...(TO MAURICE) guess how much...

MAURICE

...I really wouldn't know where...

STEFAN

...Sealed cartridge bearing pivots, replaceable derailleur hanger, 130mm travel, wind tunnel tested. (TO MAURICE) Give me a number.

MAURICE

...I don't...twenty five kilos?

STEFAN

(LAUGHING) Twenty five Kilos...are you having a laugh? Twenty five...he said twenty five kilos...Are you mentally deficient, Morry? Dropped on your head as a baby? Twenty five Kilo...Fifteen pounds. Fifteen pounds. No word of a lie. (AS RUTH COLLECTS HIS PLATE) Thank you sweetheart; good kid.

RUTH

I'm not a kid, Stefan, I'll be eighteen soon.

DAVY

No you won't.

RUTH

I will be eighteen in a few months.

DAVY

In like, seven months.

RUTH

You need to shut up.

MARGARET

I think, Uncle Stefan, darling. Don't use his first name.

STEFAN

You should join me for a ride, Maurice.

MAURICE

Oh, been a while since I've been on a bike. Not sure I'll be rushing...

EVIE shoots a glance over at MAURICE.

MAURICE

...But maybe I should give it a try. Embrace the moment, eh?

STEFAN

Going at twenty something miles an hour, better be giving it more than just a try, buddy.

MARGARET

Excuse me, but you'll be doing no such thing. Evie, how can you even contemplate letting him get on such a death trap?

STEFAN

The chance of death's what makes you feel alive.

MARGARET

You never liked cycling before, Maurice. Every time you got on, you fell off. You've got no balance.

ABIGAIL

No one in our family does; something genetic with the inner ear.

EVIE

It's a great idea. Get you out and about; give you a hobby.

STEFAN

It's not needle craft.

MARGARET

Maurice isn't sporty, never has been. I used to have to come in to school to talk to the PE staff. They didn't understand.

RANDALL

You've babied them from day one, I've always said so.

MARGARET

I love my children, is that a crime?

RUTH

I'm not a child. I'm an adult.

EVIE

Not quite yet.

MARGARET

Of course you are, but you'll always be our babies. We can't ever change that. Your dad and auntie are my babies.

RANDALL

And that's precisely why they still act like babies.

ABIGAIL

Daddy.

MARGARET

Don't get worked up, Randall.

RANDALL

I'm saying what needs to be said. Nothing more. Stefan, I bet you were raised with discipline.

STEFAN

(CHUCKLING) There were moments.

MARGARET

You don't understand what it's like to be a mother. It's hard to break those ties. Evie and Abigail understand. Having Ariella at university can't be...

A weird snort from ABIGAIL.

MARGARET

What? What did I say?

STEFAN

It's nothing, Abigail's just a little tired...

ABIGAIL

...She's dropping out.

EVIE

What?

ABIGAIL

Decided it wasn't for her.

STEFAN

I don't want to discuss this now.

ABIGAIL

What can I do? She's a free spirit.

STEFAN

Not now.

ABIGAIL

Like the wind.

STEFAN

ABIGAIL.

A sudden tension.

STEFAN

I'm going to make a phone call.

A pause as he exits.

EVIE

(FORCED JOLLITY) Come on kids, get a move on.

MAURICE

Everyone, get going. Put them in the dishwasher.

RUTH

Where else we going to put them?

DAVY

When do we get dessert?

EVIE

Go.

They leave.

MARGARET

(TO ABIGAIL) Don't get upset, things don't always go according to plan. Take dinner for example. And Evie's still smiling.

She smiles at EVIE.

EVIE smiles back but tightens her grip on a knife.

MAURICE catches her eye.

MAURICE

(SOFTLY) Let it go.

MARGARET

Randall. Say something.

RANDALL

What? She's a flake; a fruit loop. You were saying that just the other day.

ABIGAIL

Mummy, that's my daughter.

RANDALL

We know who she is.

MARGARET

Maurice, say something.

EVIE

I'm sure it will work out for the best.

MARGARET ignores her.

MARGARET

Maurice, say something to your sister.

MAURICE stands still, staring ahead.

Everything is again moving in slow motion.

The characters move their mouths, but their voices are recorded and come out slower and distorted.

Maurice? Maurice?

MARGARET

The kids walk back in, carrying dessert, all as if under water.

DAVY

I think dessert was discussed.

EVIE

Morry, honey? Your mum's talking to you.

MAURICE moves slowly. His eyes widen with horror as he tries to communicate with his wife.

EVIE

Morry?

STEFAN walks in and everything returns to normal speed.

STEFAN

Sorry about that. Business. Tax law doesn't break for God...

MAURICE vomits a stream of confetti over STEFAN.

No one moves, just stare, open mouthed.

MAURICE shoots out another stream. This time from his bottom.

He staggers back, before doubling over and shooting out more confetti.

Chaos as people try to get out of the way.

The PLAYERS appear.

PLAYER 1

Point of information.

PLAYER 2

This is not confetti.

PLAYER 1

But we thought it would be more palatable for you...

PLAYER 2

...And easier to clear up for us...

EVIE and MARGARET try to get to MAURICE, now brought to his knees with the violence of the purging.

STEFAN, dripping in confetti, lets fly with a stream of confetti himself.

And the WHISPERS begin to rise.

WHISPERS

Emet. Emet. Emet.

...THEN PAINFULLY LOUD...

WHISPERS

MET.

Darkness.

INTERMEZZI

Then the lights snap back on to find the stage clear apart from the PLAYERS, who recline on the table amongst the confetti.

PLAYER 1

Most honoured revellers; most noble witnesses...

PLAYER 2

...Hope you're not sick of us yet.

They jump up as a cymbal crash punctuates the joke.

2 throws bits of confetti into the audience and pretends to be sick.

Then pretends it's coming from his backside.

1 is not impressed. He waits until 2's finished.

PLAYER 2

I'm done.

They both become theatrical once again; each line said with a more flamboyant gesture.

PLAYER 1

...A story for your delectation...

PLAYER 2

...A story of transformation...

PLAYER 1

...Of Angels, Of Missives....

PLAYER 2

...Of magic and mystery....

PLAYER 1

...Of death and destruction and warnings and punishment...

PLAYER 2

...You want any salt with that?

PLAYER 1

We give you, Sodom and Gomorrah.

PLAYER 2

Sod him, sod her, sodom all.

Suitable accompaniment on the drums.

PLAYER 1

To the Bible. Genesis 19.

They run in a tight circle singing the na na na na
Batman theme tune from the sixties.

At the end of the riff, they jump in the air and say,
as if it's 'Batman...'

TOGETHER

...Genesis!

PLAYER 2

The story so far.

With each line they snap into suitably dramatic
tableaux. As with before, this should all be treated
as a vaudeville comedy routine - constant
movement, using the audience, working as a
double act.

PLAYER 1

God picks Abram to be the first of his chosen people on earth. Abram's travelled,
he's fooled around with his servant, Hagar. She's got pregnant and has been sent
out into the desert.

PLAYER 2

That will end well.

PLAYER 1

God makes a covenant with Abram.

PLAYER 2

(AS GOD. SUITABLY DEEP VOICE) Look up at the stars, look at the sand. Your offspring will number even more.

PLAYER 1

Promises him the land from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.

PLAYER 2

That will end well.

PLAYER 1

To mark the covenant, all male members' members are circumcised. His son, Isaac...thirteen.

PLAYER 2

Ouch.

PLAYER 1

Abram himself...ninety nine.

PLAYER 2

(DISBELIEVING) Fuck off.

PLAYER 1

And then God decides to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah...

PLAYER 2

Dah, dah, dah. (THEN REALISING HE HAS TO BE GOD. GOD VOICE) For the outcry against them is so great and their sins, so grievous.

PLAYER 1

Our story begins as two angels travel to the city and come across Lot who invites them in to his house, they say no. He says yes. They come in.

PLAYER 2

Nice.

PLAYER 1

Lot cooks...

PLAYER 2

...Spoil the broth.

Not deserving of a cymbal crash.

PLAYER 1

They eat. They go to bed. Then all the men from every part of the city of Sodom, both young and old, surround the house. They call to Lot, "Where are the men

who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

2 is so stunned at this information that he forgets the routine and just stands there.

PLAYER 2

Shut up.

PLAYER 1

That’s what it says. But Lot refuses.

PLAYER 2

The man’s got morals.

Back into the routine.

PLAYER 1

Tells them not to do this wicked thing.

PLAYER 2

The man’s got heart.

PLAYER 1

Says, “I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

2 has no response.

PLAYER 1

Crowd starts to get lary, the angels pull Lot back into the house, then strike the crowd with blindness so they can’t find the door to Lot’s house.

PLAYER 2

Like it.

PLAYER 1

Now because of Lot’s actions...

PLAYER 2

...Being happy to pimp out his daughters...

PLAYER 1

...Yes, the angels tell Lot to get his entire family out of the city, because it’s going to be destroyed.

PLAYER 2

They’ll never see it coming.

Still no cymbal. 2’s getting cross.

PLAYER 1

Lot tells his family. They think he's joking, so don't go anywhere. The angels are saying hurry up, the place is going to blow, but Lot won't leave because he doesn't want to leave his family behind, but the angels grab his hand and say "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." Lot tries again...

PLAYER 2

...It's very exciting...

PLAYER 1

...Isn't it though?...Eventually Lot manages to drag them out, runs to a town called, Zoar, God rains down burning sulfur on the city and destroys every living thing from the people down to the vegetation. And. As. They're leaving... Lot's wife looks back and is transformed...

PLAYER 2

...Knew we'd get there in the end...

PLAYER 1

...Into a pillar of salt...

They repeat the Batman routine, running in a circle and then saying...

TOGETHER

...Genesis!

1 starts to bow. 2 doesn't.

PLAYER 2

Why?

PLAYER 1

What?

PLAYER 2

Why's she turned into salt? Didn't really deserve it.

PLAYER 1

We're never told.

PLAYER 2

Wow.

PLAYER 1

I know.

1 tries to bow again.

2 still doesn't.

1 is getting annoyed.

PLAYER 2

What happens to Lot?

PLAYER 1

(JUST WANTS TO GET OFF THE STAGE) Next night his two daughters get him drunk, sleep with him and have babies to continue the bloodline.

1 bows, no longer caring about 2, and walks off.

PLAYER 2

We've got to get you reading other books.

2 starts to follow him.

PLAYER 2

Harry Potter maybe? Or the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. There's fauns, everything's covered in snow...

He leaves.

A beat.

He returns.

PLAYER 2

That's the interval by the way. Go have a drink. Have a pee. See you in twenty minutes.

It's a bit awkward. He isn't sure how to end it in a suitably dramatic manner.

So he just walks off.

INTERVAL

ACT III

SCENE I

MAURICE appears in a spotlight, downstage centre. He stares at the audience.

He removes his cardigan and drops it.

He loosens his tie, removes it and also drops it to the floor; then his shirt.

There's nothing of note. He looks like a half-naked, middle aged man.

But he keeps on. He undoes his belt, his trousers and lets them drop.

From just above his boxers to the top of his socks - completely grey.

Maurice silently stares at the audience.

Then he notices his left hand.

It's grey.

Snap to black.

SCENE II

The end of Meatloaf's Bat Out of Hell plays...

MEATLOAF

...And the last thing I see is my heart, still beating.

Still beating.

Oh, breaking out of my body and flying away, Like a bat outta hell...

It fades, as out of the shadows walks PLAYER 1, seventeenth century garb and a pair of headphones.

A cheesy DJ who speaks accordingly.

DJ 1

Welcome back. And that was Meatloaf, Bat Outta Hell. Lyrics are significant. Hope you paid attention. This is VHF radio, the only radio station that can completely reverse your life. We're here to turn you around at the very last moment just when you think all hope is lost. And we're through to our next caller. Hello? Hello? Okay, ghost in the machine, let's move to line sev...

MAURICE enters, now clothed. He stands next to 1, but speaks out to the audience.

MAURICE
...Hello.

DJ 1
Hi. Thought we'd lost you there. What's your...

MAURICE
...Sorry....

DJ 1
...Name...

MAURICE
...Sorry...

DJ 1
...And what's your problem?

MAURICE
I'm not really sure how to begin.

DJ 1
Begin with your name.

MAURICE
M...Maurice...

DJ 1
Okay. Good. Step one. Now what's worrying you, Boris?

MAURICE
Maurice...(TO HIMSELF) Christ, I need a drink.

DJ 1
And how long have you struggled with alcohol?

MAURICE
Excuse me?

DJ 1
Nothing to be ashamed of. Just coming on takes real guts.

MAURICE
Um...

DJ 1
...Real guts. You should be proud.

The cast, from the audience, applaud and discuss with those they're standing next to how well he's doing.

It's a brief burst of noise that starts and stops at the exact same time.

Silence.

MAURICE

I'm not an alcoholic.

DJ 1

Okay, no problem. Not ready to put a label on it yet? Let me pour some advice into your shell like, if I may...

MAURICE

...I'm fine with labels. Labels are fine. But this isn't the correct label.

DJ 1

Denial 'aint just a river in Egypt, my friend, if you'll forgive me for getting a little Biblical. Say the word. Say what you are and own what you are.

MAURICE

I don't know what I am.

DJ 1

Caller, you're on with Boris.

The CALLER steps forward from the audience.

MAURICE

Maurice.

CALLER

Yeah, hi. I just wanted to say to your caller...

DJ 1

...Boris...

MAURICE

...Maurice...

CALLER

...Boris, it's okay. I've battled with the bottle for years. Lost count how long. It's got pretty dark at times...end of the world stuff. I once tried it on with my two daughters...

MAURICE hangs up. They leave.

Another DJ appears on the other side of MAURICE, played by PLAYER 2.

He's a much smoother talking, late night DJ.

DJ 2

And now?

FEMALE CALLER

I'm learning to live with it. With the baldness. Learning to grin and bear it.

DJ 2

It's no longer tearing you apart?

FEMALE CALLER

No, sir.

DJ 2

Thank you, Elisha. You take care.

The caller fades into the shadows.

DJ 2

Can't sleep? Need some one to talk to? Then talk to us through the night and we'll put you right. You're with E.S.T.A Late Night. How can we help you frien...

MAURICE

...I'm not an alcoholic.

DJ 2

Okay. No one's judging. We're not here to march you to the gallows.

MAURICE

That isn't why I'm calling. I'm calling because...because...

DJ 2

...You're safe with us. What's on your mind?

MAURICE

I don't know what's happening. It's spreading. More and more.

DJ 2

(MORE ALERT) Okay. Can you be more specific?

MAURICE

It's...no...I don't know. Nobody knows. My doctor can't even get a needle in...But it's everywhere. Getting everywhere. The grey.

DJ 2

Grey?

MAURICE

Clay.

DJ 2

I don't think I follow.

MAURICE

It looks like clay. It smells like it and feels like it. Clay. I haven't eaten for over a week.

DJ 2

You've covered yourself in clay? To stop swelling, itching?

MAURICE

No, no you're not listening. I haven't covered myself in clay. My body is...Jesus Christ...

DJ2

...Try to keep religion out of this...

MAURICE

...From my foot upwards...It's on my legs, my arms now and I don't know what to do. But I am really, really scared.

A REPORTER appears as DJ 2 fades amidst a volley of camera flashes.

REPORTER 1

It started as a late night phone call to a radio station. Now people want to know just what has happened to a mild suburban family man and more to the point is it contagious?

Others appear, all talking at once. What they say is less important than the build-up of pressure on MAURICE.

REPORTER 2

...Sixty percent of his body now appears to be covered in the clay like substance and no one is any the wiser...

REPORTER 1

...Behind me, an average semi detached house; one you would expect to find in any close in the country. But what lies behind that front door? And what impact could that have on the rest of the country?

REPORTER 3 ...

...The family remain tight lipped, but experts believe the prognosis does not look good...

REPORTER 1 ...

...We'll stay here outside the house of Maurice Schwartzmann until we can get more info about what could be one of the more worrying challenges this country has faced since Brexit...

REPORTER 2 ...

...Some obscure type of tropical disease? How was it brought into the country and perhaps more importantly when? How long has this illness been lying dormant And how many others will be affected before we can get a handle on it?...

REPORTER 3

...Sources are saying almost eighty percent of Mr Schwartzmann's body is now covered in the clay like substance. Whether there can be any come back from this condition is unclear, but now concern is turning to Mr Schwartzmann's family who have been stuck inside the house with him since the story first emerged.

A man, pushes through the crowd and shoves a card in MAURICE's face.

The REPORTERS repeat their lines.

LAWYER 1

Hi, Nicholas Braithcote. Call me Nick, everyone does, why should you be different? We have every reason to believe this condition is something you contracted at work and as such you have every reason to put a case forward. No win. No fee.

He thrusts a card forward and when ignored, drops and produces another as...

...Another lawyer, more smartly dressed steps forward.

LAWYER 2

Mr Schwartzmann, Annie Westbrook. I represent the firm of Stiles, Cooper, Cohen and Futterman and we would really like to help you take things further to fully focus on who we might find to fault for what is currently happening to you. I think you'll find our fees more than reasonable.

She does the same with the cards as the PLAYERS walk in wearing smarter suits.

They flank MAURICE and speak in dodgy Dutch accents.

EUROPEAN LAWYER 1

Ernst Berdunfeld.

EUROPEAN LAWYER 2

Berd Ernstunfeeld.

TWO TOGETHER

Maeterlinck, Furstenberg, Dunne, Dunne, Dunne, Badenhorst, Straufelwebb, Guterlinck and Vleundershteb.

EUROPEAN LAWYER 1

You have rights, sir. And those rights should be taken all the way to the top in Europe...

EUROPEAN LAWYER 2

...Whilst you still can.

They laugh together, but then get serious. It's no laughing matter.

EUROPEAN LAWYER 1

No one should be able to say to you who or what you are.

EUROPEAN LAWYER 2

Permit us to give you our card.

They join in throwing cards at MAURICE...

...Then...

...Everyone on stage, with military precision, turn and face the audience.

PROTESTOR

Equal rights for all. Equal rights for lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Trans-species. What do we want?

ALL

Equal rights for lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Trans-species.

PROTESTOR

When do we want them.

ALL

Now!

Noise, Flashes build to a crescendo around MAURICE. Uncomfortable.

A small man, dark suit, Kippah on his head, walks forward.

RABBI

Mr Schwartzmann?

The crowd freeze round MAURICE.

RABBI

Mr Schwartzmann? May I come in?

MAURICE

I'm not interested. Thank yo...

RABBI

...I'm not from a paper, television. I'm a rabbi.

The crowd disperse; the quiet and stillness, unsettling.

MAURICE

And?

RABBI

I think I can help.

The lights change as the action moves inside.

The RABBI tries not to look but he can't help himself.

Each time MAURICE, notices, he quickly looks away again. Eventually...

RABBI

I'm sorry...

MAURICE

...I understand.

RABBI

No, really, I apologise. (STARING AGAIN) Unforgiveable behaviour. It's just that...well...

MAURICE

I appreciate how I must lo...

RABBI

...I actually thought you'd be worse. If you believe what you read in the papers...

MAURICE

...I've stopped reading them...

RABBI

...They say you're becoming some sort of hideous grotesque, a monster, even putting Merrick in the shade...

A beat.

RABBI

Inexcusable behaviour.

MAURICE shrugs.

RABBI

According to the Pirkei Avot the universe depends on three things, Torah, Avodah, g'milut Chasadim. I try to stick to these things, but sometimes...

MAURICE

...You're a human being.

RABBI

And that's never going to change...sorry.

The RABBI moves around the space as if looking at family photographs etc.

MAURICE

I've never been a big fan of...

RABBI

...The Jews? You're not the first. We're a complicated race.

MAURICE

Of the religion. Shul on the High Holy Days; don't eat pork in the house, but, you know, nothing wrong with a cheeseburger.

RABBI

And yet you're getting ready to Bar Mitzvah your son? Davy?

MAURICE

How do you know that?

RABBI

G-d told me. Appeared in a dream. It's happened ever since I was a child.

MAURICE

You're shi...no way.

RABBI

At Bushey golf club. Dress to party. Starts at 19.00.

MAURICE is lost for words.

The RABBI sits.

RABBI

So, let's talk.

A voice from the audience.

EVIE

Who's this?

The RABBI stands.

EVIE emerges from the audience. She looks awful from lack of sleep.

And she wields a toy lightsaber.

MAURICE

Rabbi...um...

RABBI

...Konopinski.

MAURICE

Rabbi Konopinski.

EVIE

Prove it.

MAURICE AND RABBI

Prove it?

EVIE

Prove to me you're a Rabbi and not another fucking reporter.

MAURICE

Evie.

EVIE

(IGNORING HIM) Do it.

MAURICE

You can't swear in front of a...

EVIE

...Do it or get out.

MAURICE

God told him about Davy's Barmitzvah.

EVIE

No he didn't.

MAURICE

He really did.

RABBI

No, he didn't.

MAURICE

He knows things. Things he couldn't possibly...What?

RABBI

The invite is on the table.

The invite is...

MAURICE

He looks at the table.

MAURICE

...Oh.

RABBI

I thought it would break the ice. Ill judged. I see that now.

MAURICE

I thought you weren't allowed to lie.

RABBI

You're thinking of saints.

EVIE raises the lightsaber and advances.

It glows and makes the noise.

EVIE

Get out now. (TO MAURICE) Call the police.

RABBI

There's no need to call the police. Why would you want to call the police?

EVIE

Because without the threat of their arrival there's nothing to stop me beating you to a pulp.

They all clock the flimsy lightsaber in her hand.

EVIE switches it round so she's holding the blade, which is slightly more substantial.

MAURICE

Evie, please.

RABBI

(BACKING AWAY) Mrs Schwartzmann, may I...

EVIE

...No, no. Because I've had enough of all this. Being stuck in here like we're in some kind of a zoo. I've had to send my children away so they're not leapt upon by reporters the moment they step outside the front door.

Lights upstage. MARGARET, RANDALL, RUTH and DAVY all sit on chairs on the table.

There's tension.

Eventually...

MARGARET

Read the picture.

Lights back up downstage to MAURICE's house.

EVIE continues to advance as the RABBI does his best to avoid her.

MAURICE follows EVIE, trying, but failing to make her stop.

Each time she gestures with the lightsaber, it makes its distinctive noise.

EVIE

Come to gawp, have you?

RABBI

Mrs Schwartzmann...

EVIE

...Get a selfie for Twitter? Hash tag freak?

RABBI

Mrs Schwartzmann, I am a rabbi. I promise.

EVIE

(RAISING THE LIGHTSABER) I want some fucking proof.

RABBI

Um...um...Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Daled, hay.

The lightsaber stops its ascent.

MAURICE

That's the Hebrew Alphabet.

RABBI

I don't act well under pressure.

EVIE continues to advance.

EVIE

Get out.

RABBI

Mrs Schwartzmann, please. I'm here to help. I promise. I am really here to help. I think I know what's happening to you.

The lightsaber gets higher.

RABBI

I don't know why, I mean if it's true, it's possibly the most extraordinary thing to have occurred since, since, well...(HE GETS DISTRACTED THINKING ABOUT THIS) where exactly would it rank...

MAURICE

...Rabbi.

RABBI

(BACK ON TRACK) But I think your husband might be turning into a golem.

EVIE stops. The only sound is the whir of the lightsaber.

EVIE

What?

RABBI

A golem.

MAURICE

What?

The Players walk across the stage.

PLAYER 1

An automaton made of clay most famously created by Rabbi Loew of Prague to protect his people against oppression from the neighbouring communities.

PLAYER 2

Prague you say?

PLAYER 1

The home of Kafka.

PLAYER 2

Kafka you say?

TOGETHER

(TO THE AUDIENCE) Think about it.

Back to EVIE and MAURICE.

MAURICE

So you're...

RABBI

...No.

EVIE

But you think...

RABBI

...No. I'm saying you could...As a possibility...A theory. Could you lower the lightsaber?

EVIE reluctantly does so. It goes off with a distinctive swoosh.

They stand. It's awkward.

EVIE

A theory?

RABBI

Just...a theory.

MAURICE

But you don't know...

RABBI

...I don't know...why.

EVIE

And you don't know how to stop...

RABBI

...No...

EVIE

...Or even change...

RABBI

...No...

EVIE

...Because if you could...

RABBI

...Of course...

EVIE

...That would be...

RABBI

...Of course...

EVIE

...That would be amazing...

RABBI

...I understand...

MAURICE

...A Godsend...

EVIE

...Truly amazing.

RABBI

Brukh zayn tsu got (Blessed be to God)

A pause.

EVIE

But you don't.

RABBI

It's just a theory.

They consider this as the PLAYERS cross the other way.

PLAYER 1

Fun fact, legend has it that the body of Rabbi Loew's golem is still lying in the attic of the Alt-Neu Synagogue in Prague and if you went up there and found it, you would immediately go blind.

PLAYER 2

That is a fun fact.

They leave.

RABBI

I hope I haven't made things worse.

MAURICE

No. No, I don't think so.

RABBI

Because nothing would be further from my intentions.

MAURICE

Of course not.

RABBI

Then should we, perhaps, sit?

MAURICE and the RABBI walk over to the chairs.
EVIE doesn't move.

EVIE

...I don't understand.

RABBI

(AS MAURICE AND THE RABBI SIT) I don't think any of us understand.

EVIE

No. No. No. I don't understand why you've come here today.

MAURICE and the RABBI start to rise again.

RABBI

I was thinking that maybe...

EVIE

...I don't understand, why, in the midst of, what can only be described as a living hell, something right, smack, bang out of Dante, and I do mean one of the really shitty levels, you think it's a good idea to pop round to where my husband has ...only fuck knows what...and tell us a wonderful fairy story; a little tip toe through Jewish history and then conclude with the punch line to end all punch lines, that it makes absolutely no kind of shitting difference whatsoever. Brilliant. Well done. Kolah Kevod. Maseltov.

EVIE's fighting back tears.

RABBI

Your wife certainly has a colourful way with words.

EVIE

No. No. No. No, fucking no. Are you seriously going to sit in my house, now...NOW...and lecture me on whether I can or cannot, cuntin swear when our lives are dissolving into fucking shit right in front of us?

RABBI

I merely meant that...

MAURICE

...Could you not?

RABBI

Of course. Of course. Quite right.

MAURICE

We are going to get through this. I promise.

EVIE

No, baby. No we're not. Look at you. Look at you.

MAURICE

They'll find an answer.

EVIE

Who? Who will? Their worry was whether or not you're contagious. Now they know you're not, that this is only happening to you, they'll just sit back and wait for you to...to...Oh God, I don't even know...Die? Petrify? But you won't be here. You won't be here.

RABBI

Why do they think it isn't contagious?

EVIE

Why are you still talking to me?

RABBI

You seem very certain, your husband's...condition is not contagious. Why?

EVIE

Do you think if I thought for one moment, that we, the kids, could catch what...do you think I would have exposed them?

RABBI

No, of course not, but I find it interesting that you're so sure. I think you know in your heart of hearts this isn't a run of the mill illness. I think you know, just as I do, that something bizarre and unexplainable is occurring in your lives and that you know no medical cure is going to present itself.

MAURICE

Dr Totness says he's going to...

EVIE

...Dr Totness is an old quack.

RABBI

I don't know what's happening to you, sir. Nor do I know why. Nor do I know if there can be any cure. But what I do know is the Lord God, Hakudosh Barakhu, works in mysterious ways and that if he has sent this transformation to you; this biblical, mystical ordeal, then we must try to deal with it in the same way. We must study. We must turn to the books and...

EVIE

...Find the answers? Why this is happening? A way to stop it?

RABBI

A connection. To the myriad of generations who have stood where you have stood with the same questions and curses on their lips.

EVIE

Great.

RABBI

You're not alone in feeling scared, lost, confused, angry. That's the definition of being alive. But why do it on your own? Why not listen to what others have done to try to hold on?

MAURICE

Has this sort of thing happened before?

RABBI

No...

EVIE laughs.

RABBI

...But there are stories of transformations. Of people changing, becoming something they weren't to begin with.

MAURICE

And none of these stories have any kind of solution to them?

RABBI

They do tend to be more metaphorical than anything else.

EVIE

Does my husband look meta-fucking-phorical to you, rabbi?

RABBI

No, of course not, no, but...well...do you have any other options?

By way of answer, EVIE and MAURICE, cross to stage left and climb into a puppet.

INTERMEZZI

Drum roll. Cymbal crash. Spotlight.

Said puppet; thrown together hastily from anything that's lying around, wears a cardigan and a tie.

The puppet speaks with MAURICE's voice.

PUPPET

At this point in the story we think it might be useful, nay crucial, to give you an idea of where I, Maurice Leonard Schwartzmann, am, physically, anatomically and mentally, due to the onset of my present condition. As one we will pick at the collective scabs of my transformation and together we will mutually suck at the raw skin in order to soak up the blood of revelation that is exposed. Because this isn't really me, but rather a manifestation of myself created solely to facilitate the development of plot and narrative, I find I am far freer to step to one side and observe the worsening state of myself...himself...ourself; to go into gruesome details that I formerly would have steered away from due to a mixture of politeness, nervousness and personal squeamishness.

The PUPPET heaves for a moment as if it's going to throw up.

The audience should feel they're are about to be covered in something nasty.

PUPPET

(LAUGHING) There's nothing to be scared of. I'm a puppet; an effigy, raised up high to ultimately be torn down; traditional at gatherings such as this. Not real. Open me up and you'll see all the workings.

The puppeteers reveal themselves - RUTH, DAVY, EVIE and ABIGAIL.

The PUPPET instantly becomes lifeless.

They all speak with exaggerated bonhomie.

PUPPETEERS

Hello.

EVIE

Imagine if we could all take out what makes us tick and stand it next to us so we could truly analyse it. Would that make the world a better or a worse place?

DAVY

Hmm, things to think about.

RUTH

Anyway, we have a job to do.

ABIGAIL

Goodbye.

The PUPPETEERS step back in and the PUPPET becomes animated once again.

PUPPET

So, by this stage in the story, Maurice is seventy five percent transformed - not as much as the papers would have us believe, but plenty. I'm making an educated guess of course, because no one can actually get inside of him to check. Shoulders up to face, still looks like Maurice, a man in his late forties, tired, stressed and dealing with all the beauty and joy life has to throw at him. He has all his teeth, Mama Schwartzmann was always very strict about brushing, flossing and the childhood consumption of sweets.

MARGARET and RANDALL appear upstage on top of the table.

They are bathed in light from above as if from Heaven.

RANDALL

One.

MARGARET

I am your mother, who birthed you, raised you. You shall have no argument with anything I have to say.

RANDALL

Two.

MARGARET

You shall not make for yourself any other figures of authority but me - not your father, not your teacher, not your doctor and certainly not any wife. For I, your mother, am a jealous woman and do not want to have to watch your life go wrong for you, your children or your children's children. I love you and will always love you. So listen.

RANDALL

Three.

MARGARET

You shall not take the name of your mother in vain.

RANDALL

Four.

MARGARET

Remember to call where ever you happen to be and visit at least once a week. But only if it's no problem.

RANDALL

Five.

MARGARET

Honour your father and mother. It means a lot to him. You shouldn't worry about me.

RANDALL

Six.

MARGARET

You shall not eat a meal without brushing afterwards.

RANDALL

Seven.

MARGARET

You shall not go a day without flossing.

RANDALL

Eight.

MARGARET

You shall not drink fizzy drinks.

RANDALL

Nine.

MARGARET

You shall not eat sweets.

RANDALL

Ten.

MARGARET

You shall not be spending any time looking at your friends doing any of the above and wishing you could do the same. Don't bother. It's not going to happen. Their mothers don't love them like I love you.

The light fades upstage and once again find the PUPPET downstage.

PUPPET

He has all his own hair, though it is now thinning and a great deal greyer than it has ever been before. His eyesight isn't good, but then he's been wearing glasses since he was six years old; thick, brown, National Health Service spectacles that on the plus side were free, but...on...the...negative...

One by one the PUPPETEERS step out from the puppet once again and form a line to the right of the puppet.

The puppet convulses each time they do as if it is painful.

They don't speak as characters, but rather more as if giving a scientific lecture.

EVIE

(CLIMBING OUT) But below the shoulders, it is a completely different story. And this story seems unlikely to have a happy ending to it.

ABIGAIL

(CLIMBING OUT) Below the shoulders, Maurice is completely grey. His skin, mottled and rock hard as if the clay has been fired in a kiln at 1800 degrees Fahrenheit.

RUTH

(CLIMBING OUT) Yet this clay...

DAVY

CLIMBING OUT)...At least that's what it appears to be, because so far no one has been able to take a sample...

RUTH

...Yes, is cold to touch.

They all very slowly turn their heads to look at the puppet, now just a MAURICE-esque shell, slumped in the corner.

Their voices soften.

EVIE

For quite a while Evie would hold Maurice's hand to comfort him and tell him it was going to be okay. Then Maurice would take the lead and hold her hand to assure her things would work out, but by this stage neither is forthcoming. It's too painful; for Evie, too painful to feel the cold of the thing that is overwhelming her husband. For Maurice, too painful to see the look in her eyes as she thinks the above.

RUTH

So now they tend to sit near each other, careful to ensure their bodies never quite make contact.

A sudden snap of the head out front and their voices harden, become more scientific once again.

ABIGAIL

Were any medical technology able to penetrate Maurice's thick carapace they would find no heartbeat, no expansion and contraction of lungs, no blood shooting around the highways of veins and arteries.

RUTH

More curious, perhaps...

DAVY

...Although let's be honest we entered the realm of pretty, fucking, freaky a fair while ago now.

A quick burst of laughter from all of them and then it's gone.

RUTH

More curious is that on Maurice's forehead, where once there were merely wrinkles...

DAVY

...Quite a few, since you ask...

RUTH

...Are now the merest shadow of some writing. Three letters. Hebrew. Aleph, Mem, Tav; spells Emet, or Truth.

RANDALL walks on from stage right. Their heads all turn to see him.

RANDALL

Bodily functions have long since ceased. As has any desire for food or drink or indeed, sleep.

MARGARET enters from stage left and they all turn to see her.

MARGARET

Should we spare you the grisly details? Back away from the truth?

They're now in a row across the stage with the shell of the puppet behind them.

ALL

No.

MARGARET

No. You signed up for this. You were warned at the start. You stayed. So no sugar coating for any of you. Possibly, most humiliating is the fact that Maurice can no longer get hard...

ABIGAIL

...An ironic turn of phrase as his entire body is made of clay.

RUTH

Evie checked once, to try and act like nothing had changed.

DAVY

But everything had changed.

MARGARET

She found nothing.

RANDALL

No shmock.

ABIGAIL

No schmeckel.

RUTH

No putz.

RANDALL

No shvantz, shtupper, shlong, petzel, petseleh or shtickl.

MARGARET

From the shoulders up Maurice is...Maurice. From the shoulders down...well...

This is EVIE speaking. Not the scientist and her pain is very clear.

EVIE

...From the shoulders down, he is something else entirely.

All leave taking the puppet with them.

Apart from MARGARET and EVIE who should be standing on opposite sides of the stage.

ACT IV

EVIE stares ahead.

MARGARET suddenly becomes animated.

MARGARET

Maurice? I've brought some books to read; mostly pap, but you mentioned once you liked the author. They'll pass the time.

No answer. She looks around.

MARGARET

Would it kill her to bleach every once in a while?

EVIE becomes animated. And defensive. They knock insults back and forth as if it's a tennis match.

EVIE

I've had one or two other things to think about.

MARGARET

(A SHRIEK) Why are you lurking? You want to finish me off?

EVIE

The thought hadn't crossed my mind.

First point to EVIE.

MARGARET

I thought I'd come by and see how Maurice is. He'll probably be needing company.

MARGARET strikes back.

EVIE

Lovely. He always finds your visits so soothing.

Point to EVIE...

MARGARET

Why get rid of the cleaner? Was that a sensible decision?

...To MARGARET...

EVIE

I thought so, yes.

MARGARET

But You've never really been a copper, have you?

MARGARET wins.

MARGARET

The kids wanted to say hi, but I thought it best they keep their distance. Last thing they need is a bunch of cameras shoved in their faces. Randall would never admit it, but it's doing him a lot of good having them around. I mean once you get beyond the noise and the clothes and the emotions...Those kids are up and down so much, it's like looking after yo-yos...have you ever considered getting Davy tested...but once you get past all that, I think he's rather enjoying the challenge. Though why he couldn't have discovered those parenting skills with his own two is beyond me.

EVIE

It's very kind of you to have them.

MARGARET

Kind? Please. We're family. That's what you do. Through thick and thi...

She almost cracks and only sheer force of will prevents the tears.

EVIE is thrown.

MARGARET

I'm going to clean. Show me where everything is.

EVIE

(GENTLE) You really don't need to.

MARGARET

(A SUDDEN HONESTY) I really think I do.

The two women stare at each other, both understanding what hasn't been said.

Then brusque as the game starts again.

MARGARET

I'm assuming of course you have the right materials.

EVIE

Of course I have the right bloody materials.

MARGARET starts rummaging around.

MARGARET

I'll pick some food up. Maurice is going to need to eat properly if he's going to get over this thing.

EVIE

I've got plenty of food. Thank you.

MARGARET

I'll give the house a once over and then I'll pop out and get you a few things. Can't have my boy starving now can we?

MARGARET bustles away. EVIE allows herself a small, sad, smile as she leaves and...

...A light finds MAURICE downstage.

SCENE II

The RABBI walks over to MAURICE.

RABBI

A big day, in honour of our completion of Tractate Megillah, covering the laws of Purim, we will say Hadran. I've photocopied a transliteration, but if I may take the liberty, as best you can, I want you to try and follow in the original Hebrew. Will be well worth the effort. Like having the opportunity to listen to the Beatles on Vinyl. Are you able to sit?

Great strain as he tries to bend, but...

RABBI

(GENTLY) We'll stand.

The RABBI sings, pouring his whole self into his study. The following text is sung throughout the entirety of the next scene.

RABBI

Hadran alach hashishah sidrei mishnah vehadarach alan, datan alach hashishah sidrei mishnah vedatach alan. La nitnashei minach hashishah sidrei mishnah vela titnashei minan, la be'alma hadein vela be'alma de'atei.

Yehi ratzon milefanecha eloheinu velohei avoteinu shetehe toratecha umanutenu ba'olam hazeh utehe imanu le'olam haba. Chanina bar papa, rami bar papa, nachman bar papa, acha'i bar papa, aba mari bar papa, rafram bar papa, rachish bar papa, surchav bar papa, ada bar papa, daru bar papa.

Ha'arev na adonai eloheinu, et divrei toratecha befinu uvefifyot amecha beit yisra'el. Venihyeh [kulanu,] anachnu vetze'etza'einu [vetze'etza'ei tze'etza'einu] vetze'etza'ei amecha beit yisra'el, kulanu yode'ei shemecha velomedei toratecha [lishmah]. Me'oyevai, techakmeni mitzvotcha, ki le'olam hi li. Yehi libi tamim bechukecha, lema'an lo evosh. Le'olam lo eshkach pikudecha, ki vam chiyitani. Baruch atah adonai, lamdeni chukecha. Amen amen amen, selah va'ed.

Modim anachnu lefanecha adonai eloheinu velohei avoteinu shesamta chelkenu miyoshvei veit hamidrash, velo samta chelkenu miyoshvei keranot. She'anush mashkimim vehem mashkimim, anush mashkimim ledivrei torah, vehem mashkimim lidvarim betalim. Anush amelim vehem amelim, anush amelim umekablaim sachar, vehem amelim ve'einam mekablaim sachar. Anush ratzim vehem

ratzim, anu ratzim lechayei ha'olam haba, vehem ratzim liv'er shachat, shene'emar: ve'atah elohim, toridem liv'er shachat, anshei damim umirmah lo yechetzu yemeihem, va'ani evtach bach.

Yehi ratzon milefanecha adonai elohai, keshem she'azartani lesayeim hashishah sidrei mishnah ken te'azreni lehatchil mesechtot usefarim acherim ulesaimam, lilmod ulelamed, lishmor vela'asot ulekayem et kol divrei talmud toratecha be'ahavah. Uzechut kol hatana'im ve'amora'im utalmidei chachamim ya'amod li ulezar'i, shelo tamush hatorah mipi umipi zar'i vezera zar'i ad olam. Vatitkayem bi: Behithalechecha, tancheh otach, beshachbecha tishmor alecha, vahakitzota hi tesichecha. Ki vi yirbu yamecha, veyosifu lecha, shenot chayim. Orech yamim, biminah, bisemolah osher vechavod. Adonai oz le'amo yiten, adonai yevarech et amo vashalom.

The RABBI and MAURICE stand downstage whilst the rest of the action continues around them and on the table.

Each scene should flow from one to the other so that lights are always raising to find a scene. There should be no gaps.

A television debate ensues.

DEBATER 1

What is concerning me...

DEBATER 2

...Look at the evidence in front of you...

DEBATER 1

...And if you'll let me finish...is the fact that...

DEBATER 2

...Open your eyes, the evidence is right in front of you...

DEBATER 1

...Can you let me finish...

DEBATER 2

...I am...

DEBATER 1

...Can you let me finish, please?

HOST

If we could have one person speaking at a time, please.

DEBATER 1

...Thank you...and should be concerning all of us, is that we know very little about this man's condition. Yes, our medical professionals have assured us this is not contagious but...

DEBATER 2

...What more do you need...

HOST

...Thank you...

DEBATER 1

But things don't just happen. There are reasons. There are reasons and what I want to know is what is the reason for this?

DEBATER 2

I think we would all like to know the answer to that one.

HOST

Why we're here.

DEBATER 1

We've heard very little from the Middle East during all of this and...

DEBATER 2

...What? What? Did you just...what has the Middle East got to do...Israel? You're saying Israel?

DEBATER 1

I'm not saying anything.

The RABBI's voice can constantly be heard underneath all of this.

DEBATER 2

No, but you're making some sort of insinuation.

HOST

Why don't you say what you're thinking?

DEBATER 1

I'm not thinking at all.

DEBATER 2

Clearly.

HOST

(TO DEBATER 2) Okay, none of that. Thank you. (TO DEBATER 1) No. But you are beating around the bush somewhat.

DEBATER 1

Okay. Okay. I'm just going to come out and say this, because I think it's on the mind of a lot of people at the moment. Are we looking at some new type of weapon? Chemical warfare.

DEBATER 2

From Israel?

The debate explodes.

The sing song of the HEBREW study continues.

A singer steps up to a mic; scarves and bangles;
headphone to one ear.

A piano chord.

SINGER 1

To touch someone; to hold someone, is that what makes us whole?
To taste their kiss; to feel their warmth; to share with them our soul.

Another takes up the verse.

SINGER 2

But lose that chance to be so close; Be trapped inside alone. You're on your
knees, you're screaming out, won't someone bring you home?

More singers appear. We're in the middle of a
charity album for Maurice.

SINGERS

Where does the love go?
When it's trapped beneath your skin?
Where does the love go?
Is there any hope within?

Where does the love go?
We'll shoot it out so true.
That's where the love goes.
It's here with us and tonight it's coming home to you.

DIANE, MAURICE's secretary, sits and still the
Rabbi studies.

DIANE

I've been working at the accountancy firm of Greenblatt and Gold for two and a
half years now. Not my dream job, but it was fine. People were fine. Friendly
enough.

INTERVIEWER

You're being very brave.

DIANE

Thank you?

INTERVIEWER

But things changed didn't they? After years of hard work. You got a promotion.

DIANE

Became a secretary.

INTERVIEWER

You'd dreamt of this as a little girl.

DIANE

Um...

INTERVIEWER

...Tell us about the job.

DIANE

I was to be the secretary to Maurice, Mr Schwartzmann.

INTERVIEWER

You were on first name terms?

DIANE

Didn't like being called Mr Schwartzmann, made him feel old.

INTERVIEWER

Did it now?

DIANE

I didn't mind.

INTERVIEWER

You were just doing your job. Didn't have the power to change things.

DIANE

Okay.

INTERVIEWER

Tell us about that evening. You were working late. Office deserted. Not another soul around.

The Rabbi's studying continues.

DIANE

Late afternoon really. He asked me into his office to check on a letter I'd written.

INTERVIEWER

Strange. Couldn't he send an email? Why did this have to wait till after hours? And that's where he pounced?

DIANE

Pounced? No that isn't...

INTERVIEWER

...Took advantage of a poor, young girl, just trying to carry out her job so as to care for her sickly mother...

DIANE

...My mum's fine...

INTERVIEWER

...Maurice Schwartzmann, victim or getting his just deserts? The predator becomes the prey.

EDITOR

Yeah, I like that. Let's run with that. Nice one.

INTERVIEWER

(WALKING AWAY) Cheers.

DIANE

Um...can I get the cab fare home?

The RABBI's singing continues as DAVY and RUTH are found.

She stares at her phone.

DAVY just stares.

DAVY

This sucks.

RUTH

Hmm.

He reaches over and snatches her phone.

RUTH

Oy.

DAVY

When are we going home? There's nothing to do here...

RUTH

...Do a ji...

DAVY

...Say jigsaw and I'll punch you in the face.

A ping as RUTH gets an alert on her phone.

She reads, her face slowly registering disbelief.

RUTH

Oh my God. How do they get to say this? Aren't there laws? We'll get Stefan to...

As they talk EVIE enters, holding a newspaper. She stares at MAURICE and the RABBI studying.

DAVY

...He deals with tax. And he's a solicitor.

RUTH

Then we'll find that little bitch and teach her a thing or two.

DAVY

What are you...

RUTH

...Look at this. Look at it. Look at it.

DAVY

(TAKING THE PHONE) Victim or Violator? You decide. Diane Cooper, 22...

He giggles.

RUTH

...Oh for God's sake, it's only her measurements. We've all got the bits. Just read it.

DAVY READS.

DAVY

Piss off. Dad wouldn't do that.

RUTH

Of course he wouldn't.

DAVY

Then why would they...

RUTH

...Because they're arseholes.

DAVY gives her a massive hug.

RUTH

(WITHOUT CONVICTION) Get off.

The lights fade on them as...

EVIE

You're both amazing.

The RABBI stops his study.

EVIE

We're surrounded by all this and you two just keep your heads in your books and let it wash over you. And I wish, I wish I could be like you. I really, really do, but you know what I want? I want revenge. I want to find the scum that thinks it's okay to spread these lies and filth. Who think it's okay when we're at our lowest and I want you to hurt them. I want you to tear their paper to the ground. And when they beg you to stop, beg you to show some of the mercy they could never

gift to you. I want you to break their fingers, so they can never type this garbage again. That's what I want.

The RABBI and MAURICE are silent.

EVIE

I'm going to see the kids. Enjoy your books.

EVIE walks away.

The lights close around MAURICE who stares out front.

In the darkness a noise builds up. It's too quiet to hear at first, but slowly we become aware of what we're hearing.

Sounds of Crashing...

And Breaking...

And Smashing...

Voices, screaming in fear and panic.

And then there's another noise.

Snapping. Like the bones of small birds.

Throughout, MAURICE stares, impassive as a wave of blue and red washes over him.

Black.

INTERMEZZI

MAURICE moves out of the darkness. He moves freely, unencumbered, completely naturally as if none of the above has happened.

There is a casual manner in which he carries himself. He sits at the table and pours himself a drink.

MAURICE

So there was a man who lived in the land of Uz. His name was Job. And Job was a pretty decent chap who was doing pretty well for himself. Happily married with seven sons and three daughters.

EVIE walks onto join him and sits.

EVIE

This isn't going to end well.

MAURICE pours her a drink. She accepts.

MAURICE

Don't jump the gun. He had 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, more servants than you could shake a stick at and more than all of this...

EVIE

...More than all of this, he was a good man.

MAURICE

Seriously?

EVIE

Story doesn't have impact if things happen to the bad guys.

MAURICE

Do you want to tell the story?

EVIE

I don't think you'd like how I told the story.

MAURICE smiles at her.

EVIE

Okay. So, Job was one of the best. Sacrificed to God. Did it on behalf of his children in case they forgot. Never questioned or challenged the holy one. He treated his wife like an equal...

MAURICE

...Forward thinking...

EVIE

...And he had the good sense to listen to her when she gave him advice.

MAURICE

He'd be a fool not to.

EVIE

Everything is hunky dory; never a cross word said; Home and Gardens are in for photo shoots. The family get togethers are like Little House on the Prairie. Everything is perfect. Until one day it isn't. One day, Mrs Job is pottering around in the kitchen and her heart suddenly breaks in two, just like that. And she collapses onto the floor. That's where Job finds her, crumpled on the floor, marigolds still on, water from the tap cascading over her.

MAURICE

What happened?

EVIE

Doesn't matter. She doesn't need to know the details; details don't change the facts. Nothing will change the facts. They're all gone. All her babies. There one minute, then...not.

A beat.

EVIE

The house is deathly silent, just the sound of that water from the tap. All their servants, butlers, maids, gardeners, everyone. Even the animals. Everyone. Everything. In the blink of an eye, gone. Could be hundreds, could be thousands, doesn't matter, she's lost her babies. Nothing else will ever matter again.

EVIE turns to MAURICE.

EVIE

Then Mr Job...he falls ill. Horribly, horribly ill. And Mrs Job, she gets up from the floor. She has to, even though she could have lain there for the rest of time, she gets up from the floor and she cares for her husband. At the same time as arranging funerals for her children and everyone else that has been wiped out. Job is lost in his own physical turmoil, but it's Mrs Job who goes back and forth bringing him food and drink, balms and ointments. She does it as he sits in the rubble of his life, does it as his mates visit him to get him to turn against God, does it as he has his own personal moment with the Lord of hosts.

A smile.

EVIE

Then suddenly everything changes. Her husband is cured. He's better. He gets up. He starts rebuilding the business. Mrs Job gets pregnant and again and again and again. Pretty soon, the house is ringing with the sounds of children. Money starts coming their way, they get servants, cattle. It's as if the horrors of before never happened. And Job lives to a ripe old age with generations to wait on him and love him.

A pause.

MAURICE stands and walks back to where he began the scene.

MAURICE

At least there's a happy ending. They get to live their lives again, Job and Mrs Job.

EVIE

Mrs Job? She's still there on the floor with the marigolds, getting covered in dirty water. She always will be.

MAURICE doesn't answer. EVIE turns to look at him, but although he's there physically, his eyes stare out seeing nothing.

There's nothing left of the man we knew.

ACT V

EVIE slowly walks over to MAURICE, trying to comprehend what she's seeing.

The light forms into a tight square as if to suggest a cell.

The PLAYERS flank him dressed as female police officers.

OFFICER 1

You've got ten minutes.

They look at MAURICE, shudder and leave.

EVIE raises a hand to touch MAURICE...

...But she can't and her arm drops. She keeps her distance.

EVIE

I was at your parents. They've forgotten what it's like to have teenagers and ours are doing their very best to remind them; driving them to distraction. Good for them.

A little smile. MAURICE stares.

EVIE

I got the call and I laughed. Your husband's been arrested. I told them you once got a parking ticket and had to take a valium. Now look at you. Maurice of Alcatraz.

Nothing.

EVIE

Of course we never made it to Alcatraz, did we? You thought it would bring on your claustrophobia. And you get seasick and oh God, Morry, what's happening?

MAURICE still doesn't respond.

The RABBI enters, flanked by the PLAYERS/POLICEWOMEN.

RABBI

Thank you. Thank you so much.

OFFICER 2

Ten minutes.

RABBI

Not easy to get through. It's all getting quite heated out there. A fight had to be broken up between the Green Party and Momentum. Not really sure who was in favour of Maurice and who wasn't. Not sure they knew either.

EVIE continues to stare at MAURICE.

EVIE

They told me he broke into the newspaper.

RABBI

Of a sort.

EVIE

How bad...

RABBI .

..There's nothing left.

EVIE

Good. They deserved it.

RABBI

Mrs Schwartzmann, there's nothing left. The entire floor...it doesn't exist anymore. Maurice...

EVIE

(VERY SOFTLY)...Was anyone hurt?

RABBI

Only a few people. Their fingers were broken. Even the thumbs.

The realisation sinks in as EVIE turns to him.

EVIE

You're not saying I...I didn't mean it. I mean I did. I did mean it. Of course I meant it, after what they did. But we've been married for twenty three years. Maurice, you know not to take me seriously.

Each time MAURICE doesn't respond it pushes EVIE closer to hysteria.

EVIE

I say things. I say lots of things. It's always been a problem of mine. I speak without thinking. I swear. You know how I swear. I have a mouth like a sailor, I...

RABBI

...Evie.

Suddenly, very small.

EVIE
Okay.

RABBI
Can I tell you a story?

EVIE
Does it have a happy ending?

RABBI
Not hugely, no.

EVIE
Didn't they used to?

He has no answer.

RABBI
I've told you about Rabbi Loew? The Maharal of Prague and his golem?

As the RABBI tells the story. The rest of the cast slowly walk on stage and, as if it is a ritual, lift the tablecloth from the table.

RABBI
So one day the Rabbi was out visiting his community. And the Rabbi's wife saw this wonderful servant that her husband had gotten hold of. She didn't know what he really was. All she knew was he did what he was told, never rested, never argued, never said much of anything.

A light shines from behind the screen. The story is acted out behind them with shadow puppets.

RABBI
He was the perfect servant. And she thought to herself, why shouldn't she benefit from his labours as well as her husband. It was Purim and she...Purim is the Jewish festival that remembers...

EVIE
(FONDLY)...Everyone pretends to be a princess.

RABBI
Of a sort. So the Rabbi's wife approaches the golem, Joseph was what they called him and she said, Joseph, there are two barrels in the next room, fetch water from the well and start filling them up. I'm going out. So the golem does as he's been instructed, they always do, and he goes to the well, fills up the buckets and pours them into the barrels. So far so good. Then he goes to get more water and pours that into the barrels. And then he goes back and he does it again. And again. And again. The barrels have long since been filled, but the golem keeps on

going. Very soon the room begins to flood and the water overflows into other rooms. When the Rabbi returns home and opens the door, he's knocked over by a torrent of water from his house and there's the golem, faithful Joseph, going back to the well, to get some more; never going to stop, because that's what golems do, they follow instructions until they get the next one.

The shadows dissolve behind them.

The RABBI waits, having made his point.

The table, uncovered for the first time, looks stark and bare.

EVIE

It's Fantasia.

RABBI

It's...no.

EVIE

Yes. When Mickey Mouse conjures the brooms and the mops to clean the room and it all gets out of control. This is your great insight? This is supposed to make me feel better? Dancing hippos?

RABBI

I'm not trying to make you feel better. Faith isn't a quid pro quo arrangement. You do something for God, God does something for you. But it's a glimpse, a fleeting glance of the divine. You don't get a cold compress and a hug to make it all better.

EVIE

(VERY SOFTLY) I'd rather have the hug.

RABBI

Maurice, did what he was told. What you told him to do.

EVIE

My sanity is holding on with a very tiny thread and I don't know what will happen when it snaps.

RABBI

Maurice, stand on one leg.

MAURICE does so.

RABBI

Now tell him to stop.

EVIE

I will not.

RABBI

Humour me. Tell him to stand down. Tell him.

EVIE

Can we not play this game, please? Can we not? I know this doesn't have a happy ending. I get that. I...

RABBI

...Maurice, hop up and down.

MAURICE does so as EVIE tries to carry on, regardless.

EVIE

...I know we're not getting him back and I have to come to terms with that...and...the barmitzvah. I, I, I have to think how we're going to pay the bills. Does my life insurance even cover this...(A HYSTERICAL LAUGH) or does it count as an act of God? Morry, bloody stand still.

MAURICE does so. EVIE stares at him.

EVIE

Walk to me.

MAURICE does so.

EVIE

Stop.

MAURICE stops.

EVIE

Rip that door off its hinges.

RABBI

I wouldn't...

MAURICE walks out of the light.

The sound of metal tearing and ripping. Loud, alien, unsettling.

A crash.

MAURICE returns.

EVIE

(FAINTLY) What the..?

An alarm starts ringing.

Sounds of activity outside the cell.

EVIE can only stare at MAURICE. The
POLICEWOMAN appears, taser in hand.

OFFICER 1

Sir, Madam, I'm going to need you to step out of this cell, please.

RABBI

Officer, the situation is being dealt with.

OFFICER 1

Sir, Madam, I will not ask again.

RABBI

A point that had to be made, but it's done now, there will be no further problems. I
apologise for the door.

OFFICER 1

Sir, I...

MAURICE's family appear, OFFICER 2 in their
wake.

MARGARET

Don't you put your hands on me. I know my rights.

OFFICER 2

I really need you to wait back there.

RANDALL

Listen to the woman.

ABIGAIL

Mummy, I really think you should.

RANDALL

Why can't you ever listen?

OFFICER 2

I'm calling for back up.

MARGARET

I want to see my...

Everyone stops as they see MAURICE, now
completely transformed.

MARGARET

Maurice?

EVIE

Who's with my kids? I asked you to stay home with the kids?

RANDALL
(STARING AT HIS SON) Oh no.

EVIE
Abigail?

ABIGAIL
(STARING AT MAURICE) Stefan said he'd pop in on his way back from the club. Cyc...mountain biking turned out to not be his thing.

OFFICER 1
For the last time, step out of this cell. All of you. (TO THE OTHER OFFICER) Can we taser them?

OFFICER 2
Not with all the cameras.

RANDALL
My poor boy.

EVIE turns on MARGARET.

EVIE
I asked you to sit with the kids. They must be beside themselves.

MARGARET more than meets her.

MARGARET
They don't know anything and Ruth's old enough to look after her brother. When I was half her age I was about to get married. Had Maurice a year and a half later.

EVIE
I asked one thing for me...

RABBI
...Everyone, please. Mr and Mrs Schwartzmann, I think it best if you go home to your grandchildren. Evie will call you when it's appropriate. And, officers, we're not going any where. Not until this is dealt with. We are at a very crucial stage in the proceedings and must see this through.

ABIGAIL
I'm sorry, who are you?

MARGARET
I am his mother and I have every right to see my son. He's still my son. Doesn't matter what's happening to him. HE'S STILL MY SON!

RANDALL very gently puts his hand on her shoulder.

RANDALL
There now. Come on, girl.

OFFICER 1

This is all highly irregular, but...

OFFICER 2

...Seeing as it's the end of the show.

OFFICER 1

You have five minutes. (UNDER HER BREATH) Then we'll taser them.

EVIE

I'll...um...I'll come back to you. Okay? Okay.

RANDALL starts to lead them away.

EVIE

Margaret. Say goodbye to your son.

MARGARET stops and looks at EVIE.

EVIE nods.

She turns to MAURICE and stares for a long time...

MARGARET

I love you.

She turns and they all walk away.

A silence.

EVIE

Can't I just keep him around? Saves money for a cleaner. I'm sorry, bad joke. When I get nervous, I...

EVIE is desperately trying to keep from crying.

EVIE

...I'll be good. Promise. Only give good instructions...

RABBI

...This isn't an exact science. I've never actually heard of this happening before, I mean outside of books, but if we're wrong then...then...

EVIE walks up to MAURICE and stares for a long time, trying to find the words.

EVIE

You were right. It was something. (A DEEP BREATH). I miss you so much.

She touches his face. This more than anything confirms he's gone.

RABBI

Your children?

EVIE

They said goodbye a long time ago. And they're not seeing him like this. Get this done.

RABBI

There's a method for rendering a golem...um...sending him back into clay. It is just a theory.

EVIE

Will it hurt?

A beat.

RABBI

I honestly don't know.

EVIE nods her consent.

She never takes her eyes off MAURICE.

The RABBI takes items out of his bag.

The PLAYERS appear, no longer police.

PLAYER 1

And the Rabbi reaches into his bag and pulls out four clay pots. One containing water. One, empty but for the air.

He places these pots around MAURICE.

PLAYER 1

And one he sets alight to acknowledge fire.

He lights the pot; the stage lights lower so we're watching the scene unfold through the flame.

PLAYER 2

For the fourth element, earth, the Rabbi, simply gestures towards the golem in their midst.

PLAYER 1

And then in a low voice, hesitant with the solemnity of what is being undertaken, he begins to pray.

As the RABBI prays, PLAYER 2 translates what he is saying.

RABBI

Vah Yotzrah Et Adam Hofar Min Hadamah Vateepat Vaphon Naseemat Hayim...

PLAYER 2

And the Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life...

As the RABBI walks around he steps on the pot containing water, smashing it.

RABBI

Vahaadam Haphad Yatzon Hi.

PLAYER 2

...And the man became a living being.

Then the pot containing air. He approaches MAURICE.

PLAYER 1

The Rabbi traces the three letters on the creature's head. Aleph, Mem, tet. Emet. Truth.

A sudden change in lighting.

MAURICE looks normal. The letters gone, the grey gone.

He looks around.

The others, EVIE, The RABBI, the PLAYERS all look like golems, slowly lumbering around the space.

MAURICE

It's a funny thing, truth. Look at it from a different angle; a distance; a bit of perspective and it doesn't quite seem quite as true as it once did before. Does it? Answers? Explanations? I think it's the same. Step back a little bit and they're not really answers at all, not really, only more questions.

He looks at EVIE, now so alien to him.

MAURICE

We try to find ways to answer those questions; look within; look without; look to the heavens...only gives more questions. But maybe that's okay, because maybe it's the questioning that keeps us going. Maybe it's the questions that it's all about.

One last look at EVIE.

MAURICE

Maybe.

Back to how it was before. MAURICE as a golem and the others, human.

The RABBI puts his hand on MAURICE's forehead.

PLAYER 2

With a shaking arm, a trembling digit, he removes one letter; just one, the Aleph.

PLAYER 1

And the word now reads Met.

PLAYER 2

Death.

The RABBI steps back.

PLAYER 1

And Maurice is gone.

Almost as if not wishing to disturb them, the PLAYERS move away.

By the flickering flame, the RABBI sings the Kaddish - the Jewish prayer for mourning; low; Beautiful.

RABBI

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba b'alma di-v'ra chirutei, v'yamlich malchutei
b'chayeichon uvyomeichon uvchayei d'chol beit yisrael, ba'agala uvizman kariv,
v'im'ru: "amen."

EVIE starts to softly sing the words to her and MAURICE's song.

She keeps losing lines due to her emotions, but carries on regardless.

RABBI

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach l'alam
ul'almei almaya. Yitbarach
v'yishtabach, v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam
v'yitnaseh, v'yithadar v'yit'aleh
v'yit'halal sh'mei d'kud'sha, b'rich hu,
l'eila min-kol-birchata v'shirata,
tushb'chata v'nechemata da'amiran
b'alma, v'im'ru: "amen."
Y'hei shlama raba min-sh'maya
v'chayim aleinu v'al-kol-yisrael, v'im'ru:
"amen."
Oseh shalom bimromav, hu
ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol-
yisrael, v'imru: "amen."

EVIE

Bring me Sunshine, in your smile,
Bring me Laughter, all the while,
In this world where we live, there
should be more happiness, So much
joy you can give, to each brand new
bright tomorrow.
Bring me Sunshine, in your eyes,
Bring me Rainbows, from the skies,
Life's too short to be having
Anything, but fun, we can be so
content, if we gather little sunbeams.

Make me happy, through the years,
Never bring me, any tears, Let your
arms be as warm as the sun from up

above, bring me fun, bring me
sunshine, bring me love.

The RABBI steps on the final pot, plunging the
stage into darkness.

EPILOGUE

...A spotlight finds PLAYER 1.

He acknowledges the audience and speaks with
solemnity.

PLAYER 1

The flame has gone out and the fire extinguished.
The scenes have now ended; the story has finished.

PLAYER 2 appears, now in modern clothes.

PLAYER 2

Come on, everyone's going to the pub.

PLAYER 1

(WHISPERING SO THE AUDIENCE DON'T NOTICE) We can't end it yet.

PLAYER 2

(DECIDEDLY NOT WHISPERING) Why not. It's gone on long enough.

PLAYER 1

(ANGRILY WHISPERING) It needs an epilogue.

PLAYER 2

(STILL NOT WHISPERING) Why's it need an epilogue?

PLAYER 1

(THE WHISPER'S ALMOST A SHOUT) Because that's how it's done. We need
to tell them what they can learn from what they've seen.

He switches back into his solemn narrator voice.

PLAYER 1

Where once there was chaos, now order's returned.
But out of the ashes what truths can be learned?
And answers to questions, are there any that fit?

PLAYER 2

What's with the rhymes?

PLAYER 1

Tradition, you, tit.

A beat.

PLAYER 2

You're irritable, because you're tired and hungry. You get like this. (TO THE AUDIENCE) He gets like this.

PLAYER 1

We need to finish it properly. Maybe a song. A five, six, seven, eight...

No orchestra joins in.

PLAYER 2

Again. (AS IF EXPLAINING TO AN IDIOT) Everyone...Pub.

PLAYER 1

We can't leave it there. Why did it happen? What's the message?

PLAYER 2

Haven't a scooby. Doesn't matter.

PLAYER 1

It doesn't matter. Let's go to the pub?

PLAYER 2

Finally.

He starts to leave. PLAYER 1 doesn't move.

PLAYER 2 returns.

PLAYER 2

You were being rhetorical.

PLAYER 1

Your life is meaningless.

PLAYER 2

I was thinking of getting a pet.

PLAYER 1

How do you feel if your life is meaningless? If all our lives are meaningless? Things happen because they happen when they happen. And it doesn't matter if you're a good man like Job or a bad man, like...the sons of Izkhar...

PLAYER 2

...Who?

PLAYER 1

...Were rude to Moses? Got swallowed up by the earth? Mentioned them at the start.

PLAYER 2

It was a long time ago.

PLAYER 1

But it doesn't matter, whoever you are and however you live your life, the Gods, fate, karma, shit luck, whatever you want to call it, single you out and then you haven't got a hope and there's nothing you can do. How does that make you feel?

PLAYER 2

Not great.

PLAYER 1

Exactly.

PLAYER 2

Best go to the pub.

1 thinks about this. Eventually...

PLAYER 1

Fair enough.

They go to leave the stage, then stop.

Then slowly, they begin doing the Morecambe and Wise dance and skip off into the darkness.

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