



**PERFORMING BIOGRAPHY:  
CREATING, EMBODYING AND SHIFTING HISTORY  
PART I**

A Thesis submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

*Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* is a practice-led research project that builds upon and challenges Canton's (2011) research into biographical theatre. Canton suggests that biographical theatre cannot shift audience perception of an historical figure if it counters their previous "life world knowledge", regardless of the modernist or postmodernist theatrical devices employed. Through three cycles of observation, reflection, planning and, action two original biographical theatre works are created, embodied and performed. They are designed to test whether biographical theatre can shift audience perception of an historical figure if three emergent biographical theatre-making principles are considered. The modernist *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and the postmodernist *Judy Strikes Back* prove that biographical theatre could shift audience perception.

In extant biographical theatre works featuring the actress Judy Garland, her life is constructed through the tragedy plotting pattern. According to White (1978), Davis (1992), Heddon (2008) and Dortins (2009) such a pattern, or dominant narrative, has the power to limit, distort or police control over the life story of an historical figure. By successfully disrupting the tragedy narrative associated with Garland, this study proposes that 'khorobiognosis' can occur. That is, audience perception can be shifted if the biographer and biographical performers commit to their super-objective, include other people's thinking, and embrace liveness.


This study provides a narrative of my biographical theatre-making practice to ensure that new narratives of historical figures can be revealed and forgotten narratives can be uncovered.

## **KEYWORDS**

biography, biographical theatre, performance, theatre-making, practice-led research, grounded theory, embodiment, disruption, shifting, perception, tragedy, accomplishment, narrative, self, modernism, postmodernism, liveness, Stanislavski, meta-biographical devices, fluid, 'khorobiognosis', Judy Garland.

# CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

This Thesis is entirely the work of Bernadette Anne Meenach except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Signed:  .....

Date: 29/10/2018 .....

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Debra Nairn, Tonia Pawlyszyn, Carmel Pryde (Costumes)

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*Ms. Garland at Twilight:*

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Bob Horstman (Senior Technician)

Teri Steer (Stage Manager)

Brandon Duncan (Lighting Operator)

Alex Cossu (Sound Operator)

Ethan Clifton (Props ASM)

Cindy Laine (Images)

Paul Holt (AV Operator / Editor)

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*Judy Strikes Back:*

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Shane Howarth-Crewdson (Sound Operator)

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

*Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* is a study that has emerged from problems I identified in my practice as an actor in the field of biographical theatre. The study applies a practice-led approach to ascertain biographical theatre's potential to shift perception of historical figures. Two original biographical theatre works *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* were created, embodied and performed to answer three key questions:

- How can I use biographical theatre to shift perception of an historical figure?
- How can I use biographical theatre to recover, rediscover and reframe the life story of a female icon?
- How can I disrupt the tragedy narrative associated with the life story of actress Judy Garland through the medium of biographical theatre?

To tackle the questions through practice, two sub-questions were investigated:

- How can I shift perception of Garland as a tragic figure through the creation, embodiment and performance of a biographical theatre work impacted by a modernist approach to biography? That is, from the position of the 'objective biographer'.
- How can I shift perception of Garland as a tragic figure through the creation, embodiment and performance of a biographical theatre work impacted by a postmodernist approach to biography? That is, from the position of the 'subjective biographer'.

In this chapter, the background of the study is clarified and the significance of the study is posited. The study's operational terms are defined. Lastly, an overview of the chapters is provided.

### ***The Background of the Study***

As an actor and theatre-maker of twenty-five years' experience I had worked in the field of biographical theatre three times prior to this study. I played the historical figures Nancy Spungeon in Brown's *Vicious* (1990), Cleopatra in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* (1974b) and Judy Garland in Enright's *The Boy*

*From Oz* (1998). Each play dealt with events in the women's lives resulting in their deaths. It struck me that each woman was framed through the lens of tragedy. I wondered whether I had been cast in these roles simply because I had a knack for playing victims.

In preparation for another project however I discovered that the biographies of historical figures might be framed through lenses that distort the details of their lives. White (1978, p. 86) argues that historians emplot a complex of events to adhere to particular kinds of stories. In this way, the reader will come to understand historical events through familiar plot structures such as romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire. Davis (1992) posits that like historians, biographers shape their subject's lives to fit such narratives. In the case of Annie Oakley, Davis (1992, p. 300) suggests that the romance narrative, traditionally used to encode her life, results in the omission of significant biographical details. Reflecting upon my experiences preparing to play *Spungeon*, *Cleopatra* and *Garland* it was clear that the plays omitted details I found in other biographical sources. I deemed these details significant to understanding their personalities, motivations and actions. Yet, to give voice to the playwrights' texts I had no choice but to dismiss them. I wondered whether I could re-present these historic figures using an alternative narrative to tragedy. In doing so, I could shift audience perception of these women as tragic through the performance of new biographical theatre works.

Upon discovering Canton's (2011) examination of biographical theatre in the UK I became perplexed. Canton (2011, p. 174) contends that theatre is a place where the construction of our "life world knowledge" could be negotiated. Yet, it is this "life world knowledge", our own first hand experiences, which can prevent negotiation. Biographical theatre may be able to "fill gaps" in an audience's knowledge of a historical figure. However it cannot shift perception of the figure if the play directly counters an audience's previous knowledge (Canton, 2011, p. 166). Her study provides great insight into the modernist and postmodernist strategies used in biographical theatre. Nonetheless, as an actor and theatre-maker with a pre-existing arts practice grounded in the Stanislavski System, I wondered whether something was amiss in her findings regarding audience perception that deserved further investigation.

Stanislavski explains that it is the actor's duty to carry out the playwright's super-objective (Stanislavski, 1936, p. 256). That is, the actors must communicate to an audience the playwright's main purpose for writing the play. Canton provides no evidence to suggest that the plays used in her reception study were expressly written for the purpose of shifting perception of the historical figures portrayed. I contend that to reliably test whether biographical theatre can shift audience perception of an historical figure the playwright's super-objective must be clearly related to this purpose. I wondered whether this oversight in Canton's study could be readdressed by making biographical theatre with the super-objective of shifting audience perception of the historical figure portrayed. In doing so, biographical theatre could indeed become a place for the negotiation of our constructions of historical figures encoded through the tragedy narrative.

My performance of Judy Garland in *The Boy From Oz* in 2011 resulted in many audience members approaching me to express their pity for her. Expressions such as "poor Judy", "what a terrible life" and "what a tragic life" were common. Judy Garland was consequently selected as the focus of this biographical theatre study. Having worked as a practitioner in the Toowoomba region for nearly ten years I knew that Toowoomba audiences regularly attended productions that feature music and biographical material. I felt certain I could attract this *The Boy From Oz* audience to attend more theatre works featuring Garland. Thus, already anecdotally understanding that this audience perceived Garland through the lens of tragedy I believed I could effectively test whether their perception could be shifted through the performance of alternative Garland narratives.

To build on Canton's (2011) research into the impact of modernist and postmodernist thought on biographical theatre it was decided that two Garland biographical theatre works would be produced. The first would use modernist strategies as described by Canton. The second, by the postmodernist strategies Canton identifies. Both works would maintain the super-objective of shifting perception of Garland as a tragic figure. In this way, it would be possible to test whether an audience's perception of an historical figure is best shifted through one approach or the other.

## *The Significance of the Study*

This doctoral study makes a significant contribution to new knowledge in the field of biographical theatre-making and biographical performing.

Dortins (2009, p. 70) has actively deconstructed tragic biographies of the Aboriginal historical figure Bennelong. She states: “Tragedy is not a life, or history, but a dramatic or literary genre with its own logic and genealogy. If Bennelong’s life is ‘tragic’, then it is the storytellers who have made it so”. Like the historian Dortins, I could use the written word to challenge the tragedy narrative imposed upon Garland’s life. Indeed, like Dortins, my doctoral study could be a word-bound document that deconstructs extant Garland biographical plays. However, as a practice-led researcher I heeded Denzin’s (2003, as cited in Haseman, 2007, p. 149) call to “move beyond the purely representational and towards the presentational”. The medium of live theatre was chosen to articulate my concerns regarding the relationship between Garland, the tragedy narrative and audience perception.

Taking on the dual role of biographer and biographical performer was a unique way to investigate biographical theatre’s potential for shifting perception. Tait (2000, p. 4) believes that “live is the starting point for all bodily knowledges”. As both the life writer and the live performer, I used live performance to communicate ideas about the representation of Garland that an audience could embody, feel and thereby know (Tait, 2000, p. 5). The word-bound scripts that have been created are original “knowledge objects” (Baker, 2018, pp. 175-178) disseminating new biographical readings of Garland. Moreover, the interaction between my body and the bodies of the audience has also been crucial for the disruption of perception. Thus, through the performed here and now of the theatrical event (Rokem, 2000, pp. 12-13) the ‘biographer-biographical performer’ guided the audience toward re-discovering an historical figure. It may be true that it is difficult to understand exactly why an individual spectator reacts in a specific way to a performance (Rokem, 2000, p. 202). However, I posit that by transcending the traditional word-bound approach to knowledge, this biographical theatre study successfully shifted perception of Garland. It is the liveness, or the shared lived experience between the subject’s biography, the biographer, the biographical performers and the audience that allow for the shift to occur. The results of the study have led to the coining of a neologism

to explain this phenomenon. ‘Khorobiognosis’ is thereby a form of biographical theatre that can shift audience perception of an historical figure.

*Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* challenges Canton’s findings regarding biographical theatre. New theatre-making principles are thus presented to prove that audience perception of an historical figure can be shifted through the medium of biographical theatre.

### ***Biographical Theatre***

Terms such as bio-play, biographical drama, bio-drama and docudrama have been used to describe live theatrical works that use biographical material. History plays and verbatim, documentary or community theatre can be recognized as biographical theatre. Some biographical theatre aims to present accurate historical accounts of historical figures whereas others may challenge established interpretations (Canton, 2011, pp. 17, 44). For the purpose of this study, biographical theatre encompasses all of the above, as well as other forms of live performance that include biographical material. This study recognizes the Tribute Act, Jukebox Musicals and the Narrative Concert as biographical theatre. Whether the goal of the biographical theatre work is to reinforce, challenge or entertain, if it uses biographical material, it is deemed biographical theatre.

### ***Shifting Perception***

This study created, embodied and performed biographical theatre to shift perception of Garland as a tragic figure. The term ‘shift’ was preferred over ‘change’ due to my pre-existing arts practice. Borrowing from Stanislavski’s method for physical actions (Benedetti, 1998), I posit that the physical movement of shifting better expresses the study’s intellectual aim. To illustrate: if there is an apple on the kitchen bench, to shift it I can move it from one position on the bench to another. To change the apple however would suggest that I would transform the apple into an orange. The study did not aim to transform Garland into a different person. Rather, it aimed to reposition Garland by moving the focus or emphasis from tragedy to the polyphonic nature of her biography. For the purpose of this study then, shifting perception denotes moving the focus or emphasis in the way one may regard, understand or interpret something.

### ***Creating, Embodying and Performing***

As the title of the study suggests, the actions of creating, embodying and performing have been key. The act of creating, or bringing into existence, is evident in tasks such as improvising, script drafting, formal and informal creative team interviews, and creative team rehearsals. The act of embodying, or building a character, is evident in tasks such as character research, singing practice, sense memory and emotion memory exercises, and the rehearsal of psycho-physical actions. Performing is the presentation of the results of the creating and embodying tasks for a live audience.

### ***Tragedy***

According to White (1978, pp. 84-85) no historical event is intrinsically tragic, “we only think of situations as tragic or comic because these concepts are part of our generally cultural and specifically literary heritage”. Tragedy is a type of story historians use to help the reader follow and understand historical events in accordance with their point of view. Tragedy is created when a set of events are configured to match the culturally endowed tragedy plot structure. This form of emplotment links events together using universal laws of causal relationships. The reader experiences the contiguous events as the result of mechanical forces governing human nature. (White, 1978, pp. 86, 128). Frye (1957, p. 41) states “tragedy is intelligible because its catastrophe is plausibly related to its situation”. Thus, to create tragedy historians carefully construct a “nomological-deductive argument” that explains “what happened” and “the point to it all” (White, 1973, p. 11).

Unlike comedy or romance, Frye (1957, p. 162) argues that the mythical movement of tragedy is a downward movement: “the wheel of fortune falling from innocence toward hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe”. Frye (1957, pp. 219-223) identifies six phases of tragedy. The first three phases see the central character, or hero, move from innocence, to the loss of innocence, to the success or completeness of an achievement. It is in the fourth phase that the hero falls through hybris and hamartia, “crossing the boundary line from innocence to experience, which is also the direction in which the hero falls” (Frye, 1957, p. 221). The fifth phase is concerned with lost direction and lack of knowledge, and the sixth phase sees the

“hero in too great agony or humiliation to gain the privilege of a heroic pose” (Frye, 1957, p. 222). This downward movement of tragedy drives an audience to a point whereby they can simultaneously see the hero’s road to what “might have been” and to what inevitably “will be”. Yet, Aristotle (1960, p. 138) argues that we do not blame the hero. Instead, an audience experiences pity for the hero’s undeserved misfortune, and fear that we too could suffer due to some error of judgment or flaw.

Frye (1957, p. 210) tells us that the tragic hero has had “an extraordinary, often nearly divine, destiny almost in his grasp, and the glory of that vision never quite fades”. The tragic hero is much greater than us, but his pride, passion, obsession and soaring mind will bring about isolation and moral catastrophe. He is at the top of the wheel of fortune. Like a great tree in the landscape, he is a conductor of power. However, like the tree, he is more likely to be struck by lightning than us, the metaphoric clump of grass. His unlimited fortune reverses, narrowing into a process of causation. It is through this process that we accept that the hero “must fall” and that it is “too bad” that he falls. The tragic hero’s hamartia triggers his peripeteia and eventual sacrifice. Thus, the tragic hero becomes “a vision of death which draws the survivors into a new unity” (Frye, 1957, p. 215).

Unlike Aristotle’s ideal character, who has an unshakable inward happiness, the tragic hero fails to achieve happiness. The ideal character has the ability to recognize the myriad facts and forces he may be dealing with and subsequently balances and directs his impulses using reason. Whereas the tragic hero is recognized as:

The man that sees but one side of a matter, and straightway, driven on by his uncontrolled emotions, acts in accordance with that imperfect vision, meets a fate most pitiful and terrible, in accordance with the great laws which the gods have made. (Barstow, 1960, p. 184)

White (1973, p. 110) warns against framing the lives of historical figures through the lens of the tragedy. He argues that this combination of aesthetic and moral sensibility can render their lives as meaningless, dependent upon fate. Worse still, Dortins (2009, p. 68) implies that our cultural familiarity with hamartia allows us “to confuse tragedy with ‘inevitable misfortune’”. In this way, rather than the tragedy narrative possessing the power to disturb our sense of self and society, we may become



immune to it. Consequently, we may fail to be transformed by the narrative and simply blame the historical figure for their reversal of fortune.

It is evident that my definition of tragedy is grounded in the journey of the male hero, precluding any reference to the female heroine. I have deliberately chosen to interpret the tragic heroine using this traditionally male lens. Murdock (2013, p. 10) argues that women have emulated the male heroic journey because there have been 'no other images to emulate'. Borrowing from Murdock, this study uses the male tragic journey to identify the dominant image of Garland, and in turn, discover new lenses through which to perceive this female historical figure.

### ***An Overview of the Study***

The two live biographical theatre works *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* constitute 60% of what is examinable.

The audio and / or visual recordings of the theatre works, play scripts, musical scores, photographs, relevant rehearsal resources and media coverage that accompany this exegesis are designed to provide the reader with a virtual experience of the live theatrical events. Please note that the audio-visual version of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* was recorded during the final dress rehearsal. No audience members attended this event. It was decided that the obvious presence of cameras in the USQ Arts Theatre during the live event could affect an audience's perception of the play. In turn, this could contaminate the audience questionnaire data collected. There is however, an audio recording of the live production that accompanies this exegesis. In this way, the reader can hear the lived experience of the biographical theatre work and come to appreciate how a shared experience between the subject's biography, the biographer, the biographical performers and the audience can shift perception<sup>1</sup>. The audio-visual version of *Judy Strikes Back* was recorded during the live performances at the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts. In this venue the

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<sup>1</sup> The editor of the audio-visual version of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* has included simulated audience reactions, such as applause. We believe the inclusion of such effects ensures that the theatrical timing of each unit of action approximates that of a live performance. However, the audio-visual version of the play does not approximate how the biographical performers respond to a live audience.

cameras could be more discretely located so as not to directly affect the audience's viewing of the play. There is no separate audio recording of this biographical theatre work. Rehearsal footage from a unit of action that was cut from the play just prior to the performance season has also been included.

This exegesis comprises the remaining 40%. It does not aim to interpret the biographical theatre works. Instead, it serves to guide the reader out of the complexity of the practice (Haseman, 2007, p. 156) toward an understanding of how biographical theatre can shift perception of historical figures.

Chapter One introduced the research questions that emerged from my practice, the significance of the study and the key terms. Chapter Two discusses biography, biographical theatre and the impact of modernism and postmodernism. The chapter provides an overview and an analysis of extant Garland biographical theatre works. Chapter Two subsequently argues for a reframing of the historical figure Garland. Chapter Three explains the practice-led methodology adopted for the study. Chapter Four focuses on my approach to the creation, embodiment and performance of the modernist biographical theatre work *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. This chapter also reports on audience reception of the work highlighting biographical theatre's potential for shifting perception. In turn, Chapter Five focuses on my approach to the creation, embodiment and performance of the postmodernist biographical theatre work *Judy Strikes Back*. Again, audience reception of the work is reported, confirming that biographical theatre is capable of shifting perception. It is in this chapter that the neologism 'khorobiognosis' is used to define a distinct form of biographical theatre; that is, one that can shift audience perception. Chapter Six is the final chapter. It summarizes the findings of the project by arguing that biographical theatre can indeed shift perception of an historical figure if the tasks of creating, embodying and performing adhere to certain emergent theatre-making principles.

## **Conclusion**

Henry: This thing here, which looks like a wooden club, is actually several pieces of particular wood cunningly put together in a certain way so that the whole thing is sprung, like a dance floor. It's for hitting cricket balls with. If you get it right, the cricket ball will travel two hundred yards in four seconds, and all you've done is give it a knock like knocking the top off a bottle of

stout, and it makes a noise like a trout taking a fly... What we're trying to do here is to write cricket bats, so that when we throw up an idea and give it a little knock, it might...*travel*... (Stoppard, 1983, pp. 69-70)

This exegesis is a story that traces a specific trajectory through the research. As Murphy (2012a, p. 21) asserts, this narrative of practice is one story out of the many that could have been told. The story has been constrained by my specific context and practice problems. Yet, I contend that the findings reported through the two original plays and this narrative of practice can assist practitioners working in the field of biographical theatre. Like the playwright Henry, in Stoppard's play *The Real Thing*, *Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* has been "put together in a certain way" so as to make ideas regarding biographical theatre and the representation of historical figures "travel".

## CHAPTER TWO: Plotting biographical tragedy or biographical accomplishment?

### *Introduction*

#### **Chorus**

O for a Muse of fire that would ascend  
The brightest heaven of invention!  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!  
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,  
(Leash'd in like hounds), should famine, sword and fire  
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,  
The flat unraised spirits that hath dar'd  
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
O, pardon! Since a crooked figure may  
Attest in little place a million,  
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
On your imaginary forces work.  
Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
Whose high, upreared, and abutting fronts  
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:  
Into a thousand parts divide one man,  
And make imaginary puissance;  
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth;  
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,  
Turning the accomplishment of many years  
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,  
Admit me Chorus to this history;  
Who, prologue-like your humble patience pray,  
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.  
(Shakespeare, 1974a, p. 935)

When the Chorus addresses the audience with the Prologue to *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, he does so with an air of humbleness. He admits that a play is incapable of sufficiently depicting the full story of King Henry on a bare stage over a period of just a few short hours. He begs the audience to forgive the small company of actors for even trying to tell the king's great story in such an unworthy space. Respectfully,

he requests the audience use their imagination to compensate for the actors' and the theatre's inadequacies. Finally, the Chorus asserts that he will be their guide through Henry's story and asks them to judge the play kindly considering all the shortcomings he has mentioned. What the Chorus fails to admit is that he will be guiding the audience through a particular version of Henry's story: a version whereby Henry is unquestionably the hero. He does not beg forgiveness for constructing Henry's character, deeds and historical significance in this particular manner. He does not ask the audience to use their imagination to consider Henry's story from another point of view. The audience is not given permission to judge the validity of the plotting pattern the Chorus uses to tell Henry's story.

This chapter confirms that, like the character of the Chorus, biographers do not present the 'facts' of their chosen subject's life. Rather, they present a 'version' of their chosen subject's life. This is not to say the biographies produced are lacking in quality - who can argue with the work of the Bard? Yet, issues such as identity distortion or misrepresentation can arise through the use of particular plotting patterns. I humbly commend the quality of the biographical theatre works that feature Judy Garland as a character. I do however question the works' reliance on the tragedy narrative to frame the Garland story. This chapter thereby tells the story of how a deepening knowledge of biography and biographical theatre prompted my decision to create, embody and perform two new biographical theatre works that disrupt the version of Garland repeatedly told through the tragedy narrative. An accomplishment plotting pattern emerges as an alternative to the tragic mode of Garland storytelling.

## ***Biography***

### ***Life Writing: from the modern to the postmodern***

Parke (2002, pp. 1, 135) provides a simple definition of biography that recognizes the ancient Greek origins of the word *bios*, life, and *graphein*, to write. In other words, biography is life writing. It dates back as far as ancient Egypt. Biography was used to describe the creative genius of the "great man", whether he was a poet, philosopher, politician, scientist or artist. After World War Two, academic historians shifted the plot line of the past away from accounts of the 'great men' in public life,

to accounts of the external forces affecting the actions and choices of groups of people, including class groups, occupational groups and religious minorities. By the 1960s however, Margadant (2000, pp. 2-5) contends that the use of such categories for examining the past came into question: for the first time historians started to query how they themselves may be implicated in their constructions of the past.

Consequently, it is acknowledged today that those who write accounts of peoples' lives play a conscious role as the creator of the history they write. This self-consciousness, or subjectivity, on the part of the biographer has led to an understanding that it is impossible to write a 'definitive' biography. The biographer can no longer make claims to objectivity. Moreover, the biographer no longer need employ a narrative strategy that attempts to project an individual as a unified persona:

The subject of biography is no longer the coherent self but rather a self that has been performed to create an impression of coherence or an individual with multiple selves whose different manifestations reflect the passage of time, the demands and options of different settings, or the varieties of ways that others seek to represent that person. (Margadant, 2000, p. 7)

We therefore find ourselves in an age where biography is not limited to accounts of the lives of great men written by objective biographers. With "no secure external vantage point from which one can 'realize' the subject" (Garber, 1996, p. 175) the biographer can now use historical figures as tools to examine the performance of self and cultural forces. Evans (1999, p.141) posits the biographical works created have less to do with truth and more to do with prevailing moral discourse and perceptions.

In my reading of Canton (2011), the historical movement from the 'definitive' to the 'self-conscious' demonstrates the shift from modernism to postmodernism in biography. Put simply, a 'modernist biography' connotes objectivity. A 'postmodernist biography' connotes subjectivity. A biography impacted by modernist thought will make truth claims. A biography impacted by postmodernist thought can create multiple versions of a person's life. These versions can be used as a vehicle for investigating the biographer's concerns and shed light on contemporary issues.

As a new, or neophyte biographer, this freedom to use an historical figure's life for my own purposes prompts the question: if it is now recognized that biographers are subjectively positioned within their own social and historical context, how can I make two different Garland biographical theatre works? That is, how can I make an objective, modernist play and a subjective, postmodernist play, when we know there is no objectivity, only subjectivity? To help answer this question, I turn to a reflective practitioner who aspires to assist students of biography.

***Life Writing Strategies: advice for the neophyte***

Smith's (1994, pp. 289-293) approach to biography appeals to me. Rather than sounding like a foreign method of inquiry, he allows me to draw parallels between his view of life writing and my embodied practice as an actor and theatre-maker. Borrowing from Schon's (1983) notions of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, Smith explains that the craft of biography is "messy", and not "well formed". The decisions biographers make derive from ambiguity, complexity, uncertainty, value conflict, and uniqueness. Smith (1994, p. 289) asserts this messiness "is part of the excitement and the agony of doing biography".

As a theatre practitioner, I have always reveled in the messy dichotomy of excitement and agony involved in character development and theatre-making. This is because I believe I can rely upon Stanislavski's research into the craft of acting to guide my work. Smith's research into the craft of biography acts as another guide to my work. Methods such as super-objectives, given circumstances, and physical actions are the fruits of over forty years of research by Stanislavski, that Moore (1984, p. 89) argues "pointed the way for endless experiment and further discoveries" in acting and directing. Similarly, Smith's research into "doing biography" is designed to "move along" a biographical inquiry. He posits:

For scholars with even a bit of an innovative or experimentalist set of values, current biographical forms and formats should be seen as only tentative guidelines toward their own creative inquiry endeavors. (Smith, 1994, p. 302)

Smith's biographical guidelines, noted below, therefore inform my approach to the task of disrupting the tragedy narrative associated with Garland. These guidelines give me permission to discover innovative ways to explore notions of objectivity and subjectivity in the creation, embodiment and performance of two new biographical

theatre works.

***Doing Biography: Smith's (1994, pp. 289-293) guidelines***

To begin, it is obvious the biographer must select a person to write about. The hero or heroine may, or may not, be a recognized historical figure. This selection process will be dependent on the biographer's personality and needs. It is unwise then to criticize the biographer's subject selection: conscious and unconscious personal issues may be involved.

Biography is an exercise that feeds on data, thus, once a subject is selected, the biographer must create and / or use an archive. A biographer may access someone else's archive; however relying on one source is unwise. "Pools of data" emerge by collecting and archiving artifacts such as letters, documents, published and unpublished manuscripts, photographs, and books. The archive created represents an overview of the subject's life.

At this point the biographer must find and develop the theme. This process can be difficult because the theme will guide the development of 'the version of the life' to be written. To make a decision about the theme, the biographer must consider the target audience of the biography and who would want to publish it. The decision regarding the theme will affect the plotting of the biography. Issues such as conflict, suspense, humour, and humanity will inevitably emerge from the theme.

Determining the theme will ultimately help the biographer recognize the plotting pattern that a target audience and a publisher will understand and accept. This theme must always be kept in mind when the biographer finally begins to write.

Even more difficult than deciding upon the theme, is gaining insight into the biographical subject. The biographer must draw on his/her own personality and life experience so as to create a view of the historical figure. This process allows the biographer to discover "the figure under the carpet". Smith (1994, p. 291) argues:

The figure under the carpet is not so much found as constructed. The "mask of life" – the appearance, the façade, the overt behaviour one sees – (or finds in letters, diaries, and other documents) – and the underlying "life myth" – the major inferences into the character and personality of the person being



written about – are like a tapestry, which shows images on its front side and displays the underlying construction on the back.

For the neophyte biographer this means that a pattern of a life can be constructed that fits the biographical data collected.

It is at this point that choices regarding objectivity and subjectivity come into focus: the biographer must decide what form the biography will take. Can it be objective or purely subjective? A biographical “taxonomy of types” exists, ranging from the seemingly objective to the overtly subjective biography. As noted above, an objective biography is impossible in an absolute sense. However, those that make claims to objectivity rely on the collation of chronological facts, with minimal interpretation by the biographer. The “scholarly-historical” biography, popular amongst academics, emphasizes facts and chronology. Yet these objective biographers are guilty of intruding upon the pools of data. They actively construct a form with context by using historical background to develop the underlying character of the historical figure.

“Artistic-scholarly” biographers may also use the research methods espoused by the scholarly-historical biographers. However, the artist-scholar takes on the role of the imaginative artist to present the historical subject in an entertaining manner. This form of creative artistry, or authorial intrusion, becomes even more prevalent in the “narrative” biography. The narrative biographer uses archival letters and documents to create scenes and conversations that make the biography simultaneously factual and imaginative. At the opposite end of the continuum from the objective biography is the “fictional” biography. In this form of biography, authorial intrusion dominates the life writing. That is, the biographer pays little attention to original research or primary resources.

For the neophyte biographer, it is helpful then to understand that the degree of ‘objectivity’ to ‘subjectivity’ in a biography is understood as “the degree of intrusion of the author into the manuscript” (Smith, 1994, p. 292).

The final concern for the biographer is the subject's context. The biographer's subject does not exist in isolation. The biographer does not exist in isolation either. They are both informed by context. Thus, decisions regarding the "opening scene" and the "end scene" significantly affect how the life will be plotted and how the subject will be understood. Some biographers do not introduce the biographical subject into the story until they have established a socio-political backdrop. Some challenge the reader to understand other characters or traditions prior to the introduction of the biographical subject. Furthermore, while some biographers may end the life story with the subject's death, other biographers may choose to end the story at a key moment before or after the subject's passing.

Smith's guidelines illustrate how the biographer's messy decisions will determine the emplotment of the narrative so that the subject's life is endowed with meaning for an audience. The guidelines also clarify how one can make a distinction between creating a biography impacted by modernist thought and creating a biography impacted by postmodernist thought. That is, it is the biographer's job to consciously decide how much to intrude upon the pools of data collected when writing the manuscript. To create a modernist biography it is wise for me to adhere to chronological fact. In this way, the construction of the narrative gives the impression of minimal intrusion by the biographer. To create a postmodernist biography it is wise to position myself in the construction of the narrative.

Smith's advice does not however articulate how life writing translates to the theatrical context. Thus, an examination of biography in the theatre is necessary. In this way, the biographical strategies needed to create two new versions of the Garland life story suitable for live performance can become more evident.

## ***Biography in the Theatre***

### ***History in action: translating fact into fiction***

Carr (1962, as cited in Canton, 2011, p. 23) correlates good biography with bad history. Yet White (1978) contends that the very act of creating a story out of a set of historical events means that historians are guilty of translating facts into fiction.

Acknowledging that historians may not like to think of their work as fiction, as bad history, he argues:

By suggesting alternative emplotments of a given sequence of historical events, historians provide historical events with all the possible meanings with which the literary art of their culture is capable of endowing them...History writing thrives on the discovery of all possible plot structures that might be invoked to endow sets of events with different meanings.  
(White, 1978, p. 92)

Theatre, in comparison, is an art that unashamedly translates facts into fiction. From the time of the Greeks, theatre has embraced the portrayal of historical events and historical figures through the use of plot structures such as tragedy and comedy. Stern (2012, p. 289) reminds us that one of the earliest extant plays depicts the historical defeat of the Persians at Salamis.

Stern (2012, p. 289) explains that the playwright Aeschylus invented characters, meetings and conversations to theatrically enact the historical events. Aeschylus' tragic play *The Persians* was performed well before the so-called "father of history" Herodotus wrote about the epoch. One can posit then that live theatrical representations of historical events and figures predate historiography. Moreover, this long tradition of representing history in action has made playwrights skilled at using events and figures "as a springboard for creative thinking" because "Entertaining, convincing or politicizing an audience remains the imperative for most, rather than writing something that can be fact-checked and verified" (Lyall-Watson, 2013, p. 12).

Lyall-Watson (2013) and Canton (2011) agree that history plays, verbatim theatre, documentary theatre and community theatre use biographical material as sources. They also confirm that biographical theatre is a hybrid form, straddling both fact and fiction. Yet, Lyall-Watson (2013, p. 19) posits that most Australian biographical plays are not verbatim, documentary or community theatre. Rather, they are based on historical figures but they are not restricted by the facts of the subject's life. She claims that in Australia the biographical play, as a genre of its own, has not gained traction. She suggests this is because the plays stray from the "facts" or the "truth" of the subject's life. Moreover, Lyall-Watson (2013, p. 5) speculates that labelling the

plays as biographical would limit the playwrights' creative artistry and leave them vulnerable to litigation.

Canton (2011) however observes that in Britain biographical theatre is enjoying a high level of interest. She explains that the performances “speculate about short, decisive moments” in an historical character’s life, “offer a chronological view of longer periods” or take the form of “seemingly autobiographical retrospectives, where the historical characters themselves lead the audiences through the events of the past” (Canton, 2011, p. 1). Canton provides a useful way of perceiving biographical theatre as a genre: she posits that a defining feature of biographical theatre is “the presence of either a recognisable subject of biography or the portrayal of the search for such a life story” (Canton, 2011, p. 23).

Both Canton and Lyall-Watson have assisted in forming my own definition of biographical theatre to suit my aim of theatrically disrupting the tragedy narrative associated with Garland’s life story. I contend that if a theatrical work uses biographical material it can be deemed biographical theatre. This broadens the scope of the genre from plays to the Tribute Act, Jukebox Musicals and the Narrative Concert. When the genre is inclusive of such diverse theatrical works, it is possible to argue that, like Britain, Australia has a vibrant biographical theatre scene. Concerns regarding facts and chronology within the genre are dependent upon how much the playwright chooses to intrude upon the biographical material collected. Thus, ‘truth’ is negotiated within the genre in accordance with whether the theatrical work is impacted by modernist or postmodernist thought.

What follows clarifies the strategies Canton (2011) identifies to distinguish biographical theatre impacted by modernist thought from biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought. I use key examples from the biographical theatre available to me in South East Queensland to assist in recognising the subtle yet discernable differences. Firstly, modernist biographical theatre works are highlighted. In turn, postmodernist works are discussed. Finally, examples of the Tribute Act, the Jukebox Musical and the Narrative Concert are described to illuminate their position in the biographical theatre genre. The strategies I could use for creating, embodying and performing a modernist and a postmodernist

biographical theatre work about Judy Garland will become more evident by observing how 'truth' is negotiated in these live productions.

***Modernist Biographical Theatre: using Canton's strategies in South East Queensland***

Canton's (2011) research highlights the historical shift from a modernist approach to a postmodernist approach in biography. She argues that the former presents history as a factual science while the latter is dependent upon the perspective of the biographer. Like Smith (1994), Canton recognises that the biographers impacted by modernist thought cannot truly claim to be objective conveyors of facts. She acknowledges that these biographers hide their authorial voice by using a Realist mode of writing (Canton, 2011, p. 34). This mode aims to present an illusion of unfiltered reality. In this way, the reader remains unaware of the biographer's intrusion on the manuscript. Bakscheider (1999, as cited in Canton, 2011, p. 34) asserts that the more invisible the biographer's interpretation and judgement, the better the book will read. Significantly, Bakscheider stresses that the more the author's intrusion on the manuscript is hidden, the more subversive the biography becomes.

Canton contends that biographical theatre necessitates an infusion of fiction with fact in a manner that the modernist life writers aim to avoid. She states:

theatre deals with the specific, not the abstract... While a biographer can choose abstract terms for the description of a historical figure and his or her surroundings, theatrical presentation requires a greater amount of detail. Where the generalising effect of purely linguistic expression is abandoned, it is no longer possible to avoid unknown elements; in other words, a historical character on stage cannot be played without a head because the hair colour of the person in question has not been established beyond reasonable doubt. (Canton, 2011, p. 29)

Paradoxically, Canton's research into biographical theatre does distinguish between plays that make truth claims and those that make the audience aware of the authorial voice. Thus, Canton identifies a set of strategies used by biographical theatre-makers to create biographical theatre impacted by either modernist or postmodernist thought.

Like the life writers, theatre-makers who create biographical theatre impacted by modernist thought, may be perceived as subversive because they use theatrical

strategies to hide their authorial voice. From my reading of Canton, it is possible to discern the strategies of the modernist biographical theatre-makers. The modernists aim to present chronologically oriented actions, psychologically motivated characters, recognisable social settings, Realist design elements such as costumes, and a style of acting that “diminishes the gap between actor and character...to convey the impression that the historical character is ‘resurrected’ rather than represented on stage” (Canton, 2011, p. 34). A physical resemblance between the actor and the historical figure is recommended. The vocal qualities of the historical figure such as accent, diction, and tone of voice, should be imitated by the actor to add to the illusion of unfiltered reality.

A contextual review of the biographical theatre available to me during this study in South East Queensland pointed to only two productions that can be classified as modernist in approach: the 2013 Queensland Theatre Company production *Red* (Logan, 2009) and their 2014 production of Shakespeare’s (1974c) *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. As an audience member I believed I was watching unfiltered reality.

***Red and Macbeth: examples of modernist biographical theatre***

*Red* (Logan, 2009) focuses on the life and work of American artist Mark Rothko. As I watched Rothko stretch canvases, paint, eat, drink and talk about art with his young assistant, I was not conscious of the playwright’s voice. Indeed, I left the theatre feeling like I had an opportunity to meet one of my favourite visual artists and learn more about his approach to making art. It is true the actors did not resemble the historical figures but I was able to overcome this factual aberration because the action was chronological, the characters were psychologically motivated, the costume and set design seemed to mirror the historical period, the actors used American accents, and the acting was grounded in Realism. The employment of these strategies by the playwright, scenographers and actors convincingly hid any trace of the authorial voice. I considered this production of *Red* as a biographical theatre work impacted by modernism, in accordance with the strategies Canton identifies.

The director’s lavish staging of *Macbeth* made me very aware that I was watching a play rather than experiencing a resurrection of the King of Scotland. However,

Shakespeare's authorial, or subjective voice still remained hidden in the text. Thus, even though the fantasy world of television series *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) dominated the scenography I had no grounds for questioning the playwright's interpretation of history. Shakespeare made me believe that Macbeth became a murderous dictator during his reign because nowhere in the text does he offer an alternative point of view or provide any evidence of his own personal, social and historical context within Jacobean England.

Without having studied Shakespeare and *Macbeth*, I would have had no comprehension of the degree of playwright intrusion upon the biographical material being performed. The action was chronological, the characters were psychologically motivated, and the actors spoke the verse in a manner grounded in Realism. Regardless of the non-realist elements employed by the director and scenographers, this production of *Macbeth* can still be classified as modernist in accordance with Canton. For this production of *Macbeth* to be reclassified as postmodernist in approach, I contend that the director, scenographers and actors would need to make Shakespeare visible, as the biographer and as an active character in the narrative he constructed. Productions that make the biographer visible are discussed below.

### ***Postmodernist Biographical Theatre: using Canton's strategies in South East Queensland***

The shift from empiricist to self-reflexive life writing practices means that biography depends on the personality of the biographer as well as the life of the historical figure. A postmodernist framework frees the biographer to explore narratives that make the biographer visible. The biographer becomes the "perceiving subject" (Canton, 2011, p. 37), equally important as the biographical subject. Postmodernist thought encourages the biographer to challenge "master discourses". In this way, biographers are free to re-discover, re-interpret and re-tell the lives of forgotten or ignored historical figures. Moreover, the postmodernist rejection of the coherent, or unified self allows for diverse practices. "Meta-biography" thereby takes centre stage. That is,

narratives that interrogate the process of representing past lives through the presence of biographer figures or structural devices that direct the audience's attention to the way in which the past is evoked. (Canton, 2011, p. 10)

Biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought uses theatrical strategies to make the audience aware of the author's intrusion on the biographical data. From my reading of Canton, these strategies include: using a biographer-character to examine our concept of the past; contrasting language and non-linguistic visual and audible presentations; and the performance of clashing 'truthful' perspectives. Devices including multiple actors playing the same historical figure, the play-within-the-play, Brecht's alienation technique, and direct address to the audience can be used. The scenographic choices and the acting style can also aim to disrupt the impression of a modernist historical reconstruction.

A contextual review of the biographical theatre available to me during this study in South East Queensland pointed to several productions that can be described as impacted by postmodernist thought. The 2014 production of *The Mountaintop* (Hall, 2011), *Oscar Wilde's De Profundis* (Fenton & Lucas, 2015) and *Caligula* (The Danger Ensemble, 2014) demonstrate the diversity of this form of biographical theatre. Through the historical figures, the biographical theatre-makers prompted me to consider particular contemporary issues. As an audience member, I was made cognisant of the perceiving subjects' intrusion upon the biographical data available to them.

***The Mountaintop: a simple example of postmodernist biographical theatre***

Hall's exploration of the life of American civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in *The Mountaintop* initially appeared modernist in approach: the costuming and the hotel room setting were realistic, and the actors playing King and the hotel maid Camae responded to each other and their surroundings in a psychologically motivated manner. Yet as Camae took King on a trip into his past, I realised the playwright was asking me to become aware of her construction of the man. She was in control of the historical events and their relationship to my contemporary social and historical context. Camae, a maid come angel, appearing to King on the evening before his assassination, was the postmodernist biographer-character. The playwright used Camae to interrogate our contemporary comprehension of the man and his legacy. The audio-visual elements used to support the playwright's text successfully alienated me, provoking me to consider my understanding and relationship to civil rights today.



With only a basic knowledge of the historical figure as a ‘hero’, the play shocked me with revelations of King’s marital infidelities, his smoking addiction, and his diminutive physical stature. Rather than dismissing the play because it did not match with my limited “life world knowledge” of King, the playwright dared me to meet her version of the ‘man’; no different from any other human being. In this way, the play challenged the master discourse of King as the great man. The play thereby met with a postmodernist biographical theatre tenet. That is, *The Mountaintop* successfully re-discovered an ignored version of King’s life. Hall confirmed my live experience of the play, stating:

This isn’t the “I Have a Dream” King. This is a more radical King. This is King, the man; not the myth. I want people to see that this extraordinary man – who is actually quite ordinary – achieved something so great that he actually created a fundamental shift in how we, as a people, interact with each other. That’s a beautiful thing. And I want people in the audience to be like, “If this man – who is so much a human being – can achieve such great things, then I, as this complicated human being can create great things too”. (QTC, 2014, p. 8)

Cleverly blending modernist acting methods with meta-biographical playwriting and scenographic devices, *The Mountaintop* provided me with a simple example of biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought in accordance with Canton (2011).

***Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis: a rigorous example of postmodernist biographical theatre***

The Fenton and Lucas (2015) collaboration *Oscar Wilde’s De Profundis* constructed a version of Oscar Wilde’s life I never could have imagined. This production did not present the iconic figure of Wilde, wearing his infamous velvet suits and sprouting his biting epigrams. The actor, Lucas, made no attempt to look like the iconic Wilde. Rather, he appeared naked, thin, dirty and marked with scars. The script was verbatim, sourced from the letter Wilde wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas during his incarceration. Yet, Lucas did not imitate Wilde’s vocality. Instead he spoke with a crisp Australian accent that revealed the anguish of the man’s situation. Using direct address to the audience, Lucas demanded my full attention: I could not look away from his nakedness, his eye contact, or the acts of fellatio and defecation he performed as he spoke. Lucas’ approach to the direct address could have fooled me

into believing I was watching unfiltered reality. However, the non-realist set design and the words and images projected onto the set reminded me I was experiencing the perceiving subjects' perspective of Wilde. Often repeating the words the actor uttered, the projections demanded I consider Wilde's letter as far more than just a great literary work. Fenton and Lucas prompted me to hear the words of an artist being persecuted for his sexuality. The program notes confirmed the subjective yet 'truthful' approach taken by the biographers to evoke the past. Fenton (2015, p. 1) states:

As gay men 'of a certain age' we have brought the best of our personalisation, politics and pedantry to the work. Our understanding of Wilde's seminal influence in forging (and unintentionally thwarting) Queer identity, rights and visibility is central to our artistic endeavours. It is a privilege and a demanding one to represent what could be called the most 'authentic' voice of Wilde – one beyond plays, poetry, critiques and quips – a voice that is borne out of suffering – a personal voice beyond the performance of his public persona.

Simultaneously calling for my empathy and alienating me, *Oscar Wilde's De Profundis* was a re-telling of a forgotten Wilde. The biographical theatre-makers used meta-biographical devices that made me question my relationship to the man, his art and his influence upon my social and political context. This biographical theatre work disrupted the master discourse of Wilde. It provided me with a rigorous example of biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought, in accordance with Canton (2011).

### ***Caligula: a radical example of postmodernist biographical theatre***

*Caligula* was devised and performed by The Danger Ensemble in 2014. As an audience member, I did not come to know the historical figure Caligula through the performance of the master discourse. That is, as the sexually depraved tyrant. Nor did I come to know an ignored or forgotten construction of the man. The Danger Ensemble's non-realist experiments with text, character, movement, song, and audio-visual effects instead provided me with a visceral experience of beauty, decadence, discordance and even boredom. This live experience emphasized the perceiving subjects' response to Caligula. The biographical subject became almost insignificant.

As I engaged with the performers I began to sense that Caligula was a springboard for the creative expression of the ensemble's aesthetic. The director Mitchell-Wright confirmed my feeling, explaining:

When starting the process for *Caligula* – we didn't set out to create a contemporary performance work – we set about to explore the man. A man of whom we actually know very little about. Accounts of his life were written significantly after his reign as Emperor... Taking into consideration this time passing and giving way to speculation and rumour, the rise of Christianity and Judaism in what was a Pagan Rome, shifting beliefs and values and the fact that the documentation of history can be seen at times as a political act of currency we concluded that we could, in fact, conclude nothing. So rather than making a theatre work about him – that which by nature can encourage singular readings – a contemporary performance work emerged which in the form reflects our relationship to *Caligula* and history. (Mitchell-Wright, 2014, p. 2)

The ensemble's complete rejection of a modernist approach to biography radically challenged my understanding of how a biographical figure can be constructed and how the past can be evoked through performance. This production confronted the Caligula master discourse. Simultaneously it performed the destruction of the very notion of master discourses. *Caligula* taught me that the makers of biographical theatre can intrude upon biographical material to provide an audience with an 'aesthetic experience' of the biographical subject and the perceiving subjects in real time. By unequivocally embracing meta-biographical devices *Caligula* was a biographical theatre work impacted by postmodernist thought, in accordance with Canton (2011).

Whether it is deemed 'biographer intrusion' or 'creative licence', it is clear that the "postmodern turn" (Best & Kellner, 1997) offers theatre-makers freedom to investigate and perform historical figures in myriad ways. In keeping with my broad definition of biographical theatre as any theatrical work that uses biographical material, I posit that the Tribute Act sits within the biographical theatre genre. Like the theatrical works discussed above, this theatrical and musical form is postmodern in character (Bennet, 2006, p. 20), aiming to re-present historical figures and eras through live performance.

***Broadening the Scope of the Biographical Theatre Genre: the Tribute Act, the Jukebox Musical and the Narrative Concert***

Homan (2006, pp. 32-38) argues that the Tribute form evolved from the British seaside theatre traditions of pantomime and variety shows. Unlike standard cabaret covers acts and club/casino impersonators, the Tribute Act is an imitation form usually found in the rock and pop circuits. It emerged in the 1980s when media organisations began using strategies to grow audience demand for nostalgia. The form probably rose in popularity because the original acts were unavailable in particular parts of the world (Bennet, 2006, p. 23).

This form can attain a unique intimacy with an audience because the Tribute is more accessible than the original artist. That is, the original artist performs in large venues while the Tribute Act performs in smaller, more affordable venues. This shift from the stadium to the pub or club circuit effectively brings the music “home” for the audience. The Tribute gives fans a chance to experience “authentic simulations” in a live context. Interestingly, rather than perceiving the Tribute Acts as “stand-ins” for their favourite artists, they often become an audience’s primary referent (Bennet, 2006, pp. 23, 26). Homan (2006, p. 5) attempts to define the obligations of those who work in the Tribute form. He states that they:

exclusively perform the recordings of one band or artist, and may even concentrate on a specific period of the artist/group...tribute acts are expected to display a sophisticated technical mastery of key guitar/keyboard riffs, drum patterns and vocal delivery. Some may also go to great lengths to recapture the stage appearance and design of the original act...For those tribute acts with an established ‘history’, the ability to exactly replicate clothes, hairstyles and instruments is mandatory.

It may seem then, that the Tribute form is limited to exact replicas of an original artist or group. However, Holman (2006, pp. 7, 36) clarifies that stylistic differences between the original and the tribute are important to note. Thus, the intentions of a tribute can range from the sincere to the satirical and the form can range from rock to musical theatre.

The musical theatre productions tend to exploit one band or artist, using their songs to drive the narrative. Hoch (2014, p. 91) defines this form of Tribute Act as the “Jukebox Musical”. An audience hears the original artist’s legacy through the recorded singles that are plotted into the narrative. This theatrical construction allows

an audience to experience their favourite songs as if they were listening to them on a jukebox. Enright's *The Boy From Oz* is a key example: the life story of Australian entertainer Peter Allen is told through the songs he recorded, interspersed with chronologically plotted dramatic scenes from his life.

Room 8 Pty Ltd, an Australian entertainment company, takes a slightly different approach to the fusion of music, theatre and biography. Their form of Tribute combines the original artist's hit songs with the telling of chronologically emplotted stories from the artist's life. The company calls this the "Narrative Concert" (Room 8 Pty Ltd, 2013a, p. 13).

A contextual review of the theatre available to me during this study in South East Queensland pointed to several productions that can be classified as belonging to the Tribute form. In turn, as these productions made use of biographical material, they can be included as biographical theatre. *Rumour Has It: sixty minutes inside Adele* (Brunes & Price, 2013) was a Tribute Act. *Jersey Boys: the story of Frank Valli and The Four Seasons* (Brickman & Elice, 2005) was a Jukebox Musical. *At Last: the Etta James Story* (Room 8 Pty Ltd, 2013b) was a Narrative Concert. The productions I experienced demonstrated how the Tribute form can be classified as biographical theatre impacted by postmodern thought in accordance with the strategies Canton (2011) expounds.

It is important to note that these four productions were of the utmost importance in the three cycles of my practice-led project. The historical figure I selected to focus upon in this study was a recording artist, with many fans and jukebox hits. It seemed logical then that the new Garland biographical theatre works would include the performance of her songs. My experiences of these biographical theatre works provided inspiration and guidance in my construction of the modernist and the postmodernist Garland biographical theatre works. I paid particular attention to *Rumour Has It: sixty minutes inside Adele*. This production was created, embodied and performed by Brisbane actor Naomi Price, in collaboration with Adam Brunes. Thus, Price had the dual role of biographer and biographical performer of pop singer Adele. As I was about to become the biographer and biographical performer of Judy

Garland, Price's approach to the tasks of creating, embodying and performing was instrumental in stimulating my own approach to the tasks.

***Rumour Has It: sixty minutes inside Adele: the tribute act***

*Rumour Has It: sixty minutes inside Adele* (Brunes & Price, 2013) was a Tribute Act that focused on the life and music of British pop singer Adele. The production brought Adele 'home' to an Australian audience in a more intimate venue than the stadiums Adele tours. In fact, Australian audiences did not have the opportunity to experience the 'real' Adele until 2017. I had no desire to spend over \$300.00 to experience Adele in a stadium, so the Brunes and Price version of Adele continues to be my primary referent.

*Rumour Has It: sixty minutes inside Adele* was not a club/casino impersonation with a smattering of stand-up comedy. The 2013 production used a blend of modernist and postmodernist devices to present the Brunes and Price version of Adele. At the start of the show a band member introduced Price as Adele. She then realistically spoke, sang, gestured and dressed like Adele throughout. However, after singing two Adele hits, Price revealed herself as the biographer using direct address to the audience. Price did not abandon her embodiment of the biographical subject but she made jokes about being "inside Adele", "inside Brisbane", and how we were all "inside the Judith Wright Centre". These "inside" jokes provided the first clue that Price was not aiming for a performance of unfiltered reality. Price's jokes gave me permission to relax into experiencing her construction of the artist. The third song performed was a medley. It contained both Spice Girls and Adele hit songs. This new interpretation of the music confirmed for me that the biographer-biographical performer was intent on re-telling the life of Adele and that of popular culture with an individual voice.

The stories Price told about Adele's life followed the modernist rule of chronological order, covering her humble origins, her relationships, her approach to her craft and success. These stories followed a familiar narrative construction. That is, the rags to riches story. One could call this an 'accomplishment narrative'. Peppared with moments of satire, Price drew my attention to the fact that I did not know if the biographical material in her monologues was 'truthful' or pure biographer intrusion.

However, Price's sincerity toward the biographical subject was evident in her selection of musical material. Each song from the Adele repertoire supported each biographical story. Thus, rather than maintaining a purely modernist chronological approach to Adele's discography, Price used the songs to convey the emotional tone of each biographical story.

More than just an Adele song, the title of the show, *Rumour Has It*, was the perfect choice to make an audience aware that the production would utilise a postmodernist framework to investigate biography. That is, the biographers, Brunes and Price, pointed to the fact that they embraced rumour rather than observable fact. In the 'here and now' of the live performance, Price simultaneously performed the roles of the biographer and the biographical performer. Price also performed her version of Adele doing impressions of other singers including Celine Dion, Amy Winehouse and Taylor Swift. Consequently, this production highlighted how the biographical theatre genre can disrupt any notion of a unified or coherent biographical subject. Significantly, the production demonstrated how I could construct an 'accomplishment narrative' for the life of Judy Garland. In this way, I could disrupt the tragedy narrative inherent in extant plays featuring Garland as a character.

***Jersey Boys: the story of Frank Valli and The Four Seasons: the jukebox musical***

*Jersey Boys: the story of Frank Valli and The Four Seasons* (Brickman & Elice, 2005) remained committed to an illusion of observable fact and chronology. This Jukebox Musical told the story of the original act, from their humble beginnings to their ongoing legacy, through direct address, scenes and songs. The acting diminished the gap between actor and character, making me believe I was meeting these musicians from Jersey City. Audio-visual design, set design and choreographic choices all aimed to recreate the social settings of the time.

What firmly positioned this work as postmodern in approach, was the clashing 'truths' presented throughout: each member of the band narrated a particular period of their collective life. In doing so, each man was able to voice his perception of that period of time, often presenting contradictory views. Thus, their songs gave a chronological unity to the production but the biographical stories allowed for narrative fragmentation. This approach also allowed the production to explore the

band's criminal past, infidelities and drug use without transforming it from a tribute to a tragedy.

Like most biographical theatre, the actors were obliged to perform the life stories in accordance with the playwrights' intention. During their preparation, each actor may have found pools of biographical data about the historical figures they played. This data may not have fit with the version of the story that Brickman and Elice wanted to tell. As noted in Chapter One, this fact may be troubling for an actor. However, the multiple layers of 'truth' negotiated in this Jukebox Musical subtly told me that the playwrights wanted me to be aware of their own theatrical limitations. Echoing the voice of the Chorus, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the playwrights did their best to guide us through the band's life story within a limited time frame on a stage. By presenting clashing 'truthful' perspectives they managed to disrupt the familiar rags to riches narrative without resorting to the tragedy narrative. This production made me wonder how I could perform clashing perspectives to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative.

***At Last: the Etta James Story: the narrative concert***

*At Last: the Etta James Story* is one of many Room 8 Pty Ltd Narrative Concerts that tour throughout Australia. Vika Bull<sup>2</sup>, an original artist in her own right, gave voice to the songs of Etta James in this production. The set and costume choices were contemporary, preparing the audience for a live Vika Bull concert rather than a live Etta James concert. Both Bull and her band members used direct address to the audience to give a chronological overview of James' life. The scripted text bridged the gaps between the performances of her hit songs. At times the performers would do impersonations of the voices of other characters in James' life. However for the most part, they used their own voices to story the biographical subject and her songs.

The Narrative Concert is a significant way to marry an audience's nostalgia for a past artist while enjoying the skills of a group of present artists. It is postmodernist in approach because the direct address device made me acutely aware that the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Vika Bull see:  
<http://www.vikaandlindabull.com/index.php>



performers were telling a particular version of the Etta James' life story. Yet the script for this production lacked the nuance and subtlety of the Tribute Act and the Jukebox Musical. It felt like a cut and paste from Wikipedia. Thus, an exploration of Smith's "figure under the carpet" was minimal, appearing more like a child's lengthy story of 'and then...and then...and then...'. Most troubling to me was the version of the life story this production chose to tell. I contend it used the master discourse that biographical theatre usually associates with Judy Garland. That is, this biographical theatre work portrayed Etta James through the tragedy narrative. The theatre program notes (Room 8 Pty Ltd, 2013a, p. 3) confirmed the perceiving subjects' preference for the emplotment of tragedy, stating "Sadly, her frantic recording and touring schedule coincided with her ever-growing addiction problems and over time Etta not only sang the blues...*she lived the blues*. With respect, this is her story".

In Clement's (1997) study of female representation in opera, she argues that the females with voices that can express a diverse range of emotions will suffer and die. These female characters are recognised as tragic. Their tragic life stories have come to be accepted and glorified in the realm of opera. *At Last: the Etta James Story* made me wonder whether there is a nomological-deductive argument that has become accepted and glorified in the realm of biographical theatre. That is, that the life stories of female singers with formidable voices must be emplotted through the lens of tragedy. Consequently, the events of their lives are plotted to demonstrate causal relationships between their divine gift of talent and their supposed reversal of fortune. In other words, their accomplishments are consistently overshadowed by their transgressions.

It is true that Etta James and Judy Garland were drug addicts. However, as noted above, the Jersey Boys were drug addicts too. *Jersey Boys: the story of Frank Valli and The Four Seasons* did not plot the events of the band members' lives to fit the tragedy narrative. Therefore, it is not logical to represent the lives of historical figures through the emplotment of tragedy simply because they had addiction issues. To do so could distort or misrepresent their lives. As White (1978) and Dortins (2009) argue, to rely on the tragedy narrative to tell their life stories could render their lives as meaningless and unworthy of our consideration.

The Narrative Concert *At Last: the Etta James Story* was significant for my study because it made me consider how to intrude upon pools of Garland biographical data in a manner that avoided the construction of tragedy. This biographical theatre work made me ask a subversive question: what if I avoided mention of drug addiction in my emplotment of Garland's life story?

The biographical theatre works described in this section illustrate the varied strategies that can be used for creating, embodying and performing biographical theatre. The modernist presentations of Mark Rothko and King Macbeth, and the postmodernist re-presentations of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Wilde and Caligula provided me with clues as to how to produce two new biographical theatre works about Judy Garland. In accordance with the strategies Canton (2011) identifies, the modernist version of the Garland life story must use theatrical strategies to appear as observable fact to an audience while the postmodernist version must use strategies that draw audience attention to my personal reconstruction of her life. The productions that represented the lives of Adele, Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, and Etta James provided me with further clues to re-constructing Garland. I can: simultaneously embody the biographer and the biographical figure; emplot an accomplishment narrative; sing Garland songs to convey mood as well as chronology; perform clashing perspectives; and omit drug addiction from my narrative.

As a neophyte biographer and an intruder upon biographical pools of data I must clarify why it is important to make new theatre works capable of disrupting dominant narratives. Rather than policing control over a historical figure's life story I want an audience to risk imagining alternative life stories.

## ***Dominant Narratives***

### ***Drawing a Subject By Hand: the risk associated with disrupting a narrative***

In a case study of Elvis Presley impersonators, or Elvii as they are collectively known, Oakes (2006, p. 166) states:

Like an image that's been Xeroxed too many times and starts to lose its clarity, the constant readings and re-enactments of Presley has caused some of his contours to *fade*, and thus they must be drawn back in by hand. In other words, the more that's known about Presley the less anyone seems to be sure of, and the more necessarily it becomes to construct *one's own meaning* out of the unbelievable overabundance of musical and discursive relics.

The creators of biographical theatre must also construct meaning out of the myriad relics of a biographical subject's life. The process of arranging or "rearranging the pieces" (Oakes 2006, p. 174) of a subject's life to fit with familiar plotting patterns makes the meaning of the life story clear for an audience. White (1978, p. 86) believes that once a "reader", or in this case, an audience, come to realise that the story is a romance, a tragedy, a comedy, or a satire they will follow and understand the story. He suggests that:

The original strangeness, mystery or exoticism of the events is dispelled, and they take on a familiar aspect, not in their details, but in their functions as elements of a familiar kind of configuration. (White, 1978, p. 86)

Moreover, White (1978, p. 86) stresses that an audience not only experiences a familiarity because they have more information about the historical events but because they have been "shown how the data conform to an *icon* of a comprehensible finished process". That is, they are presented with a plot structure they are familiar with as part of their cultural endowment. However, Heddon's (2008, pp. 33-37) discussion of lesbian autobiographical performance draws attention to a problem that emerges from encoding life stories in manner that an audience experiences as familiar.

Heddon (2008, pp. 33-37) argues that the performance of lesbian autobiographical stories has the potential to fracture hetero-normative stories of identity and self. Yet she posits that a dominant homo-normative narrative of what it means to be a lesbian has developed. These performances of lesbian autobiography use a plot structure whereby the "unauthentic self" moves through a linear progression of suffering,

epiphany and transformation to become the “authentic self”. Viewed from a positive perspective, these “coming out” narratives, gather people around them, strengthening the idea of a lesbian community. However, these generic narratives can actually limit the stories that can be told or performed about “being” lesbian. Heddon (2008, p. 37) worries:

Each time the ‘homo-normative’ narrative of what it is to be lesbian is recited, the more difficult it becomes to imagine, propose, recite or live other lives. Moreover, since stories and communities are so intertwined, communities established on the grounds of an assumed sameness will discourage deviations from the dominant narrative. To perform otherwise is to risk isolation.

Thus, while an audience may identify and find community through the performance of a life story, the repetitive use of a particular plot pattern “polices control” (Heddon, 2008, p. 37) over the life story, and in turn, those who view it.

In my reading of White and Heddon, it would seem that social cohesion is maintained if auto/biographical narratives reinforce what is familiar to us as part of our cultural endowment. There is then, a danger in imagining and performing a life story through an unfamiliar lens. The audience may reject the storytellers if they deviate too far from the familiar narrative. Moreover, individual audience members may risk isolation from their community if they are tempted to imagine and perform their own lives through an unfamiliar lens.

The risk of rejection and isolation may be why extant biographical theatre works featuring Judy Garland have reinforced the familiar tragedy plotting pattern. However, Garland is not the only historical figure trapped in a narrative that controls and limits the life story. The historical figure Annie Oakley remains trapped in the romance narrative. Like Garland, Woollarawarre Bennelong is consistently framed through the tragedy narrative. Learning about how the biographies of Oakley and Bennelong are constructed provides me with insight into how difficult it can be to stray from the master discourse as a biographical theatre-maker and performer.

### ***Annie Oakley: the ongoing performance of romance***

Annie Oakley (1860 – 1926) was an American sharpshooter who rose to fame through her performances in William F. Cody’s Wild West. She has been written

about extensively. Davis (1992, p. 299-300) contends these biographical accounts are habitually structured as romance narratives. She argues that what the biographers choose to include, and more importantly, what they choose to exclude, results in an incompatibility between the ideology that defines romance and the details of Oakley's life.

For example, Irving Berlin transformed Oakley's life into the romantic musical comedy *Annie Get Your Gun* (Berlin et al, 1946). This Broadway, post-World War Two, musical performed a version of the biographical subject that distorted the shooting contest between Oakley and her future husband Butler. A factual account of this event would tell us that Oakley won the contest. However, in the biographical theatre work Oakley loses the contest. Instead of winning the contest she wins a husband. Davis (1992, p. 300) suggests that this performance of a woman losing in her first competition with a man was a "timely lesson for wives of returning veterans". During the 1970s *Ms.* magazine posited that *Annie Get Your Gun* was responsible for burying Oakley in history. Davis (1992, p. 300) explains that the magazine criticised the biographical theatre work as a character assassination. In this way, Oakley's life was relegated to romance, when her biographical data was well suited to a female accomplishment narrative.

With the rise of feminism, one would assume that the contours of this version of Oakley would fade, and another version redrawn for a new theatre going community. However, the last production of *Annie Get Your Gun* on Broadway in 1999 did not stray too far from the original. The representation of Indigenous Americans was deemed unsatisfactory for contemporary audiences and was thereby altered ("*Annie Get Your Gun*", 2018) but Oakley was not re-presented to win the shooting contest. Rather, the musical revival saw her draw a tie with Butler. I posit the producers of this biographical theatre work did not wish to deviate too far from the romance narrative for fear of rejection by the musical theatre audience. The proof of my position is evidenced by the fact that Bernadette Peters won the 1999 Tony Award for Best Leading Actress in a Musical. It would seem that we have become culturally familiar with female equality and will even award actors who perform this construction of a life. However, we are not yet familiar enough with female

accomplishment to understand it as a narrative form, or plot structure, in its own right.

Davis (1992, p. 304) contends there is “room for considering how a figure such as Annie Oakley reflects culture, intervenes with culture, generates with culture, and opposes culture”. Written biographies have taken heed of Davis but for now, there seems no room in biographical theatre for re-considering Annie. The life story of Indigenous Australian Woollarawarre Bennelong (1764 – 1813) on the other hand, has long been used to investigate culture. However, it has proved difficult to re-contextualise the data despite changes in Australia’s history. Life writers and biographical theatre-makers have not yet managed to free him from the tragic mode.

### ***Woollarawarre Bennelong: the tragedy of the first drunken Aborigine***

In her investigation of the “lives of stories”, Dortins (personal communication, October 14, 2014, p. 78<sup>3</sup>) states:

If contemporary Australians know a little about Australian history, it is likely they know Bennelong, not as a wooden ‘figure’ from the past, but as an ‘old friend’ who has communicated to them something of the encounter between the invading Europeans and the Australian Aborigines, and something of the truth of its outcomes. Bennelong’s was by no means the only Eora face that the colonists recognised, yet he continues to be singled out in public memory as an Aboriginal intermediary between the present and the colonial past.

Indeed, the life of this this “old friend” has featured in scholarly articles, monographs, novels, children’s books, political and promotional material, user generated content of the internet and theatre. Thus, over the past seventy years both historians and laypeople have singled him out for their “storywork” (Dortins, 2009, p. 53). One would assume the growth of this form of social, rather than purely scholarly, knowledge would stem from the dramatic potential Bennelong’s life offers the storyteller. Dortins (personal communication, October 14, 2014, p. 79) explains:

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<sup>3</sup> Dortins emailed me a copy of revised sections of her PhD thesis in 2014. She is in the process of transforming her 2012 thesis into a book. The page numbers noted in this study match our personal communication on October 14, 2014. The citation for the 2012 PhD thesis is included in the References. Copies of Dortins’ communication with me are available upon request. For further information about her upcoming book see: <https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/aboriginal-history-monographs/lives-stories>

his kidnap by Phillip, his escape, his convincing display of gentlemanly manners, his up-to-the-neck involvement in Aboriginal and European politics, his journey to England and back, and his death in relative obscurity... Bennelong was a go-between, a trader, a diplomat, and a builder and crosser of bridges – his life is rich in possible interpretations.

However, despite the potential for storytellers, Dortins' (2009, p. 53) review of the profuse interpretations available, found they remain loyal to Bennelong's tragedy: dying "broken and rejected as a result of his exhilarating but corrupting involvement with the colonists".

Dortins (2009, p. 59) contends biographers continue to emplot Bennelong's life as a tragedy because it meets with the need to configure historical data for the sake of coherence. She (2009, p. 62) argues the attraction to tragedy makes Bennelong's life cohere into a compelling story, whereby a reversal of fortune leads to his death. Langton (1993, as cited in Dortins, 2009, pp. 67-68) proposes that Bennelong has come to represent the first "drunken Aborigine". Sadly, this story of the Aborigine that is transformed into a "degenerate native" by the alcohol the colonists press upon him continues to have traction with audiences (Mulvaney, 1985, as cited in Dortins, 2009, p. 67). Like Garland's association with drugs, Bennelong's association with alcohol has sustained the longevity of the tragedy narrative into the twenty-first century.

From my reading of Dortins, she hoped a new theatrical version of Bennelong's life would challenge an audience to engage with a disruption of the culturally endowed tragedy. Enoch & Heiss (2012) developed this new version for the Sydney Festival. She states that *I Am Eora* "charts a rejection and reacceptance of Bennelong the 'interpreter'" (E. Dortins, personal communication, October 14, 2014, p. 95). This new biographical theatre work had the potential to shift perception of the tragic Bennelong. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend a performance of *I Am Eora*. I am thereby unable to personally reflect upon this new biographical theatre work. Yet, as the production enacted a re-imagining of a tragic icon it is nonetheless relevant to the scope of this study<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Another reimagining of Bennelong was created and performed by Bangarra Dance Theatre in 2017. In a newspaper article by Verghis (2017), Artistic Director Stephen

To gain some understanding of how *I Am Eora* was told and received by the theatre community I have investigated press releases and reviews. It would seem that those who mention the re-presentation of Bennelong are reluctant to shift from the accepted version. My sweep of the literature illuminates just how difficult it may be for me to shift audience perception of the tragic Garland through the creation, embodiment and performance of biographical theatre.

***Bennelong the Interpreter: the reviewers cling to what they know***

D’Silva (2012) reports that the title of the play means “people from here”. He believes that *I Am Eora* makes “you question where you fit in the landscape”. McKone (2012) states that the production “pioneers new ways of making Indigenous theatre [and] hopes to redefine Indigenous theatre”. In the article *Sydney Festival Seek Funding for I Am Eora* (2011) it is explained that the production aims to tell the stories of Sydney’s Aboriginal cultural continuity, “celebrating its heroes and embracing the sacred heart of our city”. This article clearly identifies Bennelong as “the interpreter and the spirit of reconciliation”. However, this is where the potential shift from tragedy to an alternative narrative ends.

*REVIEW: I Am Eora (Sydney Festival) CarriageWorks* (2012) congratulates the actor Jack Charles on the “Shakespearean proportions of his acting ability” but goes on to state that Charles “almost literally becomes the tragic hero”. Corowa (2012) reinforces the tragic mode, praising Charles for embodying “the tormented spirit of Bennelong”. Highlighting the fact that he already knew of Bennelong prior to the performance, Jackson (2012) argues that the writing and dramaturgy were “less than ordinary”. Jackson commends Charles’ performance but he too emphasises the tragedy inherent in the story of Bennelong. He describes the section of the play that

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Page stated that he hoped to “bring the man out from under accreted layers of myth and stereotypes” in his production *Bennelong*. The production won seven awards at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Helpmann Awards, including Best New Australian Work. I have chosen not to discuss this work for one key reason. In Page’s award acceptance speech on July 16, 2018, he referred to Bennelong as a tragic figure. This speech act informed me that an audience is still expected to understand Bennelong’s life story through the tragic mode. For further information regarding the implications of naming a life as tragic see p. 47 of this chapter).



features Bennelong as a “long spoken melancholic and grief stricken dirge, delivered in the vocally rich and life-worn tones of Jack Charles”. *I Am Eora* may have been “an all out explosion of dance and music, an invitation, to all people to celebrate Indigenous people, to celebrate their reliance, power, culture” (“Latest Reviews: I Am Eora”, 2012). However, the reviewers maintained their understanding of Bennelong through the familiar lens of tragedy.

The risk in telling a story that deviates from the dominant narrative seems apparent in the opinions of those who mentioned Bennelong in their reviews. These critics potentially perceived this biographical theatre work as a “rock concert” (*Latest Reviews: I Am Eora*, 2012) rather than a carefully curated event to illuminate the heroes of Aboriginal culture. Not having seen the production myself I can only hypothesise that the re-presentation of Bennelong as the Interpreter, instead of the eternal victim in the history of Aboriginal-settler relations, is not yet familiar enough to audiences to be understood. In this way, while actors may be complimented for their craft, the biographical theatre work is discredited, and an historical figure remains a prisoner of a plotting pattern.

To my chagrin, Canton’s (2011) view that biographical theatre cannot shift perception of an historical figure seems accurate in this case. Oakley and Bennelong remain trapped in narratives that distort the biographical data of their lives: audiences maintain their previous “life world knowledge” of the subjects regardless of their exposure to biographical theatre. To have any chance of creating, embodying and performing two new biographical theatre works that disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative, it is necessary to examine how the extant Garland plays reinforce the tragic mode. What follows is an overview of the plays and / or performances available to me that feature Garland. The employment of tragedy in each of the plays highlights biographical theatre’s insistence on depicting Garland in a controlling and limiting manner.

## *The Tragedy Known as Judy Garland*

### *Garland: the playwrights' tragedy*

Like Bennelong, there has been much written and performed about the actress Judy Garland (1922 – 1969) over almost half a century. Again, like Bennelong, she holds great potential for storytellers as an actor, singer, dancer, mother, fundraiser, war propagandist, Democratic campaigner, mentor, and talent manager. Yet, theatre-makers tend to construct her life in one way. Garland is persistently performed as a tragic figure: “poor Judy” dies alone from a drug overdose because of her exhilarating but corrupting involvement with the entertainment industry.

The first three biographical theatre works to be discussed can be categorised as the ‘Last Chapter’ plays. *The Boy From Oz* (Enright, 1998), *End of the Rainbow* (Quilter, 2005) and *The Judy Monologues* (Stewart-Jones, 2010) focus upon the final years of Garland’s life. All three biographical works begin in Frye’s (1973, pp. 220-221) fourth phase of tragedy. Therefore, the works expect the audience to have a pre-existing knowledge of Garland: a knowledge of her rise to almost divine status in the entertainment industry and her personal struggles with addiction. With this “social knowledge” (Dortins, 2009, p. 53) or “life world knowledge” (Canton, 2011, p. 174) of Garland’s journey from innocence to experience, the audience is asked to witness Garland’s reversal of fortune. The first biographical theatre work is a jukebox musical, the second is a narrative biography, and the third is documentary theatre.

The theatrical work of Bernadette Robinson in the play *Songs for Nobodies* (Murray-Smith, 2010) will then be discussed. Her live concert presentation of Judy Garland material is also relevant to the policing of control over Garland’s life story. The play hints at Garland’s identity as tragic rather than heroic. In concert, Robinson simply informs her audience that Garland must be perceived through the lens of tragedy.

Finally, the YouTube advertisement for the Brisbane Festival production of *The Wizard of Oz* (Mellor & The Danger Ensemble, 2013) will be analysed. This thirty second trailer highlights how familiar theatre audiences are expected to be with the Garland tragedy narrative.

### ***The Boy From Oz: foreshadowing the fall***

*The Boy From Oz* (Enright, 1998) is a jukebox musical. It is a biography of Australian performer Peter Allen. In telling that life story, the musical also spans the final five years of Garland's life. As a form of biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought, it also cheekily depicts Garland in the afterlife. The show introduces Garland drunk and argumentative in Hong Kong following a poorly received concert in Australia. She speaks of losing her ability to sing, and then sings of losing her dream. For two scenes she appears self-confident and proud. In her fourth scene Garland reveals herself to be stricken with stage fright, vindictive, and jealous of her daughter. The next time the audience sees her she is dead. She is a ghost, lamenting her sins and isolation through song. She appears only once more in the play. As a ghost, she resumes her confident and proud demeanour to act again as mentor to the hero of the story, Allen. The scene is underscored with an embittered song that speaks of the scars on her body from "the experts" (Enright, 1998, pp. 36-38), presumably meaning members of the entertainment industry.

An exchange with Allen, before the play hurries ahead to her death, is a key example of how the tragedy of Garland is performed. I contend that Enright (1998, pp. 26-27) attempts to illuminate Garland's craft as an entertainer throughout the musical but he cannot seem to do it without foreshadowing her fateful downfall:

Peter: (*He's dragging her out of the dressing room*) You must have one song left in you. One little song.

Judy: Let go of me. Who the hell do you think you are anyway, Mr Nice Guy from Down Under?

Peter: At least I turn up, I do the job.

Judy: The job, you do the job. But you never show yourself, you never show what's here. (*She indicates her heart*). You're a great opener. But at the end of the night people want to see a human being.

Peter: These people want blood.

Judy: And that's what I give them. When I go out there, I show them where I've been, what's become of me, who I am. They get the whole story. Now clear the runway... (*But Liza hits the stage, alone and scared. Liza begins to sing. Judy realises it's too late, defeated, a lost soul, steps into the shadows...*)

From this excerpt Garland can be perceived as a female artist who has a specific approach to performance. It is also clear that she is aware of her own success with audiences. She is the 'master' in the exchange with Allen, and he is the 'apprentice'.

However, by arranging the pieces of Garland's life so that her acting lesson to Allen is followed by her death, it is difficult to discern an accomplishment narrative, or any other narrative possibility. Rather, the audience bears witness to her hybris, and her ultimate isolation in the shadows. The contiguity of these events thereby compels an audience to experience the familiar mode of tragedy.

It would seem that the tragic mode of Garland storytelling is so familiar, that an audience compelled Quilter to write *End of the Rainbow* (Quilter, 2005).

***End of the Rainbow: omitting biographical material***

Quilter (QTC, 2012, p. 7) states:

...I began to create a fictional play about a self-destructive singer. At some point in the process, I made the singer female, gave her a son and a gay admirer, and called her Martha Lewis. The show had successful productions on the London fringe and at Festivals, and I was happy with it, but I noticed that people kept saying "it's very Judy Garland, isn't it..."...Once I'd heard this comment for the fifth time (or possibly the hundredth) I decided to go back to the beginning and see if I could create a new script that was a biographical play about Judy Garland in the final months of her life.

The new script about Garland's last days premiered in Sydney in 2005 and continues to play in theatres across the globe. Quilter's intrusion upon the biographical material is performed through a series of scenes in a London hotel room and at the Talk of the Town nightclub where Garland performed in early 1969. These scenes are modernist in approach. They blend verbatim data and creative licence in a manner that can fool audiences into believing they are watching unfiltered reality. Throughout the journey of the performance I attended, O'Leary's Garland ranged from charming to bestial in accordance with her circumstances. When O'Leary sang she did not sound like an imitation of a Garland recording. Instead, she gave an impulsive and psychologically motivated rendering of each song, believably demonstrating Garland at rest and Garland under extreme stress. As an audience member I sympathised with this version of Garland and could feel the tension of cause and effect from one scene to another: I became completely engaged in the logical causality of the tragedy.

Yet it is the play's masterful skill to engage that concerns me. If I was not investigating the life stories of Garland I would have believed the play was a factual

account. This play made me believe that the torturous five-week stint of live performances at London's Talk of the Town in January directly led to her drug overdose and death. When in fact, her final concerts were in Copenhagen in March and she did not die until June. By selecting certain Garland biographical material Quilter presents an audience with her egotism, her addiction, and her lack of self-knowledge. Thus, I was compelled to feel pity for her and understood she was bound to die. By omitting other biographical material Quilter fits Garland's life into the familiar narrative and the tragic Garland is reinforced.

From the international success of *End of the Rainbow*, it would seem audiences want their Garland to be the icon of tragedy. Another biographical theatre work that provides an audience with the icon of tragedy is the documentary theatre work *The Judy Monologues* (Stewart-Jones, 2010).

***The Judy Monologues: limiting identity and community***

Reinelt (2006, p. 81) believes that documentary theatre is an aesthetic form that searches for knowledge and understanding. Reliant upon documents such as interviews, transcripts, news reports, and devices including the projection of photographs and film footage, this approach to biographical theatre can make claims for the authority of its performance. It presents an original aesthetic way of understanding the world. Like other forms of social discourse, documentary theatre can actively "make" culture. Reinelt (2006, p. 81) argues that audiences are aware the "facts" are mediated, however she suggests that when we are:

Living in a world of simulation where everything is understood to be only a copy of a copy and nothing is for sure, public rehearsal of the "facts" becomes one way of holding on to the very notion of facts and of building a meaningful narrative around them.

I contend that the maker and performers of *The Judy Monologues* (2010) attempted to present an audience with the 'facts' of Garland in a world full of copies. That is, a world full of Garland biographies, biopics, television specials and drag acts. The script consists of transcripts of recordings Garland made herself in the 1960s "for an autobiography that would never be written" (Stewart- Jones, 2010, p. 1). As part of my biographical research, I listened to the actual Garland recordings prior to viewing *The Judy Monologues*.

Rather than conforming to the one-person show format, the transcripts are shared between three actors: Judy 1, Judy 2 and Judy 3. A fourth actor plays Miss Judy Garland. This Garland appears in vignettes applying makeup, drinking a martini in an agitated state, and writing a letter. The live vignettes, and the projections of sections from the Garland film *Till the Clouds Roll By* (Freed & Whorf, 1946) serve to link each section of the text, indicating a change of subject and mood. At the start of the play a small section of the actual Garland recording is played. For the rest of this biographical theatre work, three male actors give voice to Garland's words, and a female gives physical form to the vignettes. In viewing rehearsal footage from the original production (Baby Gumm Prod, 2011), it is clear that Judy 1, 2 and 3 do not attempt to impersonate Garland. Instead, they perform their own personal interpretations of the transcripts, toning down the intoxicated anger evident in the original recordings and selecting tones of reason and hurt. Clearly, this approach to the biographical material challenges an audience to learn more about Garland and gain an alternative understanding of the woman behind the legend.

However well-meaning this presentation of actual biographical data may be, by selecting these transcripts as the only source, the audience is asked to believe that this Garland is the 'real' version. Whereas, I contend that this choice of data reveals only a snapshot of Garland at a particular point in her life: a very low point, where she was living abroad and fighting for custody of her three children (Clarke, 2000). Thus, this documentary theatre piece does not present a unique understanding of Garland. Rather, it reinforces the tragic understanding of Garland.

The transcripts confirm that she is isolated, exposed, filled with pride, and beaten down by her choice to pursue a career in the entertainment industry. The juxtaposition of the textual denial of being a drunk or a drug addict with the vignette demonstrating her drinking and agitated state highlight her lack of self-knowledge. Additionally, the juxtaposition of the glamorous film footage of Garland when she was twenty-four with a text that speaks of her failed marriages, the attacks by the media and fans, and her struggles as a working mother, illuminate her shift from innocence to experience. This biographical theatre work makes it clear that happiness has eluded Garland, and thereby evokes a sense of pity and fear in an audience. By

the close of the play, Garland is determined to write her autobiography so as to set the record straight, take revenge on her enemies, and heal the wounds that have been inflicted upon her and her family. At this moment, an audience with a “life world knowledge” of Garland can simultaneously envision what her life could be and what it will be. That is, an audience can see that the process of writing the autobiography could have great therapeutic value for her but we also know that she did not write the autobiography and died of a drug overdose within a few years.

*The Judy Monologues* was created as “a tribute to Garland’s influence on the gay community”. It aimed to reveal the misunderstood Garland “that the audiences never truly knew” (Judy Monologues, 2011). Yet, I posit that by selecting to perform these autobiographical transcripts in contiguity with the vignettes and film footage, the plotting pattern feels very familiar to audiences: they know this Garland. Stewart-Jones’ snapshot of Garland’s tragic fall can indeed claim authority because of its use of factual material. However, this means that a community are gathering around one set of facts, communicated by an intoxicated person on a bad night. My experience of this biographical theatre work reminds me of Heddon’s concern. Stewart-Jones’ work, like that of Enright and Quilter, uses the tragic mode to present the ‘facts’ of Garland’s life. Thus, a community is encouraged to build and reinforce identity through a set of very limited biographical materials.

Bernadette Robinson and The Danger Ensemble also want to hold onto the tragic version of Garland.

***My Name is Judy: you know the rest***

The actor and singer Bernadette Robinson played myriad characters, including Garland, in *Songs For Nobodies* (Murray-Smith, 2010). She also appeared live in concert, singing the songs of Garland. I saw Robinson in both the play and the concert in 2011 and 2013 respectively. In the former Robinson embodied Garland and in the latter, she sang Garland songs in her own voice. Each performance was a subtle yet persuasive performance of Garland’s tragedy.

In *Songs for Nobodies*, an audience meets Garland in the powder room of a New York hotel just after her acclaimed concert at Carnegie Hall on April 23, 1961. This

is Garland on the top of the wheel of fortune, a ‘somebody’ who is a conductor of power. Beatrice, the ‘nobody’, describes Garland as “light and funny and alive like nothing I’d ever seen” (Murray-Smith, 2010, p. 3). Yet, when Beatrice raises the subject of happiness the audience senses Garland’s impending fall. By agreeing with Beatrice that happiness is no more than the “absence of something bad” (Murray-Smith, 2010, p. 4), it is clear that Garland has crossed the boundary line from innocence to experience and has no way to go but down. Like the ‘nobody’, the play suggests that happiness only exists for Garland as a distant memory. Moreover, her flawed view of happiness, at odds with Aristotle’s view, identifies Garland as a tragic hero not as an ideal character. Thus, this version of Garland reveals a woman who possesses no ability to maintain an inward happiness. She is at the mercy of impulses that will lead to a pitiful fate. At the performance of *Songs for Nobodies* I attended, I could not help but feel the onset of Garland’s reversal of fortune as she sang *Come Rain or Come Shine* (Arlen & Mercer, 1946).

At the performance of *Bernadette Robinson in Concert* I maintain that I was forced to feel the pity and fear associated with tragedy. Prior to singing a series of Garland songs in concert, Robinson gave an overview of Garland’s life. I had hoped Robinson would provide some deeper insight into Garland’s life, considering she had played her. However the biographical material she called upon was an assimilation of other Garland biographical storytellers. Thus, she used the adjective “tragic” to describe Garland’s life.

Dortins (2009, p. 63) and Frye (1973, p. 162) suggest that when readers, or audiences in this case, are told that a story is “tragic”, they expect the story to adhere to a certain structure and mood. Audiences use the adjective as a signal for how they should feel. Robinson’s use of the word “tragic” told us what to feel about Garland’s life and how to interpret the songs’ tragic undertones. Consequently, Robinson reinforced the nomological-deductive argument that the great female artist must be sacrificed. The Danger Ensemble did not use the adjective but through the use of specific physical actions and text, the trailer for their re-imagining of *The Wizard of Oz* (Mellor & The Danger Ensemble, 2013) evokes the tragic mode.



Produced by Optical Bloc (2013), the advertisement taps into the public memory of both Garland and the classic children's story. The visual shots show an older woman dressing in glittering garments and jewellery appropriate for a cabaret singer or an aging movie star. She swigs vodka from a large bottle and lets the alcohol drip from the bottle back onto her face. As she applies makeup, the wrinkles on her face appear deep and dry. At times her eyes do not focus and at others, she seems to be looking toward something foreboding. In the final shots, she smokes and drinks and cries. It would not be possible to directly link Garland with these visuals but the audio identifies her:

I am a star. My name is Judy. You know the rest. Burning as fierce as a fireball. Higher than the chimney tops. Roaring over the yellow brick. Sands outside the hourglass. Timeless. I have to be ready for it. I have to be brilliant. Lift me up.

Together, I posit that the audio and the visuals present a vivid image of the consequences of Garland's hubris. We do indeed know the rest. We know that she will not be lifted up: the innocent times of Dorothy and *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939) have passed. The peripeteia has occurred and she will fall.

The trailer for The Danger Ensemble's production of *The Wizard of Oz* reinforces the tragic Garland. To date, the advertisement has been viewed on YouTube 2,560 times. This means that more people are consuming the tragic version of Garland depicted in the trailer than attended the play. It would seem then that Garland's life will continue to be viewed through the lens of tragedy if biographical theatre-makers fail to take steps to offer alternative lenses.

### ***The Property Known As Garland: a step in an alternative direction***

Van Zandt's (2007) *The Property Known As Garland* does take a step toward a new lens. Like *The Boy From Oz*, *End of the Rainbow* and *The Judy Monologues* it is a 'Last Chapter' biographical theatre work. Similar to *End of the Rainbow*, it is a fictional account of what might have occurred prior to Garland's death. However, this production reminds an audience that she performed in Copenhagen before she died. It is set in Garland's dressing room just before her final performance. Blending verbatim material with creative licence, this two-hander references the elements of

tragedy in Garland's life but it also includes biographical material usually omitted by playwrights. Garland's accomplishments are included.

The audience meets a "bombed, slurring and out of control" (Van Zandt, 2007, p. 7) Garland at the very start of the play but she quickly reveals to the Assistant Stage Manager that she is completely sober: it has all been an act. She declares: "Gotcha! You should have seen your face! Well, I didn't want to disappoint you, pussycat. Hello, I'm Judy Garland. Liza Minnelli's mother". Van Zandt's Garland seems to recognise that her past failings have become the stuff of legend. She appears comfortable with her daughter replacing her as a star. This self-knowledge is not the stuff of tragedy.

Having successfully tricked her Assistant Stage Manager, Garland delays going on stage. She requests that he bring her some mashed potatoes. Garland then settles in to share stories from her life with the audience. Her reminiscences are supported by voiceovers of characters from her life such as the Studio Boss, fans, and her mother. In this way, the play is a series of scenes with the Assistant Stage Manager, scenes with the voices from her past, and direct address monologues. Unlike a tragedy, the play is so full of interaction that it does not indicate her isolation.

As she speaks about her ups and downs in the entertainment industry the audience watch her drink, smoke, swallow pills, change into her costume and apply makeup. It is clear that some of these behaviours are questionable. However, this is not typical behaviour for a figure of tragedy, in free fall due to her internal weakness. This is a woman preparing to go to work. She is not preparing for sacrifice.

A key moment in the play, highlighting a move away from the tragedy narrative, occurs in an exchange with the Studio Boss, Louis B. Mayer:

Judy: Good riddance to those hospitals, too. Mr Mayer came to visit in the last one and told me not to worry – the studio would pay the bills for all the sanitariums they'd "forced" me into all those years. And right then and there he called his bosses in New York to get approval and...I'll never forget it. He hung up the phone – his face as white as a sheet.

Studio Boss: (*Voiceover*) The New York office suggests you go to a charity hospital. They said...we're not in the money-lending business.

Judy: “There’s no business like show business” all right. Mr Mayer? Are you all right?

Studio Boss: (*Voiceover*) Don’t you see, Judy? If they’ll do this to you, they’ll do this to me, too.

Judy: He was right. A year later M-G-M fired the great Louis B. Mayer. And they haven’t made a decent picture since. Sons of bitches. (Van Zandt, 2007, pp. 41-42)

Thus, rather than positioning Garland as the divine innocent corrupted by the studio system, the audience is presented with a conundrum: if Louis B. Mayer was also at the mercy of the studio, can Garland’s life be so singularly tragic? Like the title of the play suggests, Garland is nothing more than “property” of the entertainment industry but clearly, so is Mayer. One of Garland’s biographers explains that Mayer, a co-founder of MGM, left the studio a “wounded old lion [who] had nothing left but his roar” (Clarke, 2000, p. 278). Van Zandt’s play however reveals that Garland goes on to achieve further recognition as a concert performer, Grammy award winner, Academy Award nominee, television host, and producer. By emplotting the events of Garland’s life in such a manner, this biographical work tries to shift the narrative from tragedy toward an accomplishment narrative.

There is only one element in the telling of this version of the Garland story that points directly to tragedy. Unlike the other three ‘Last Chapter’ biographical theatre works, this play does not require the actor playing Garland to use her own voice to sing. Instead, recordings of Garland are used as the soundtrack for particular remembrances. Very early in the play, the playwright clarifies that the audience will not experience the divine gift that made Garland an icon of stage and screen. When the Assistant Stage Manager asks her if she needs to warm up prior to the performance, she exclaims:

JUDY. Warm up what? My voice? (*Laughs*) Oh, no, darling. Those days are over. The voice is gone. I just crack my way through for an hour, wave my arms around in that (*Posing dramatically, arms up-stretched*) “Garland way” and hope nobody hits me with an ashtray. (Van Zandt, 2007, p. 12)

I believe that the absence of a live Garland singing voice on stage erases a significant component of Garland’s identity, and thereby invites the tragic mode into the storytelling. With her voice “gone”, and dodging an onslaught of ashtrays, she is no longer a conductor of power. Garland without her singing voice is like Oedipus

without his sight: both are piteous due to their obvious reversal of fortune. The erasure of her voice implies the downward movement of the wheel towards her ultimate destruction.

***Risking Isolation: rejection of Van Zandt's alternative version of Garland***

In *Variety Magazine*, Blankenship (2006) criticised the original production of *The Property Known As Garland*. Blankenship believed that the humour in the play was “corny” and “lame” and the actress playing Garland had “awkward timing and repetitive, sing song delivery”. Moreover, he argued the play was lacking “a point of view”. That is, because this version of Garland was “Not quite campy shrew, not quite suffering victim, not quite girl next door” she was a “muddle”. Blankenship concluded that “this may be the only version of Judy Garland that fails to make an impression”. Yet from my research of Garland, I contend that much of the comic material was verbatim Garland and the actor’s delivery was a studied embodiment of the manner in which Garland conversed. Furthermore, each story that was conveyed in the play related to a particular period of time in Garland’s life. Thus, rather than being re-presented as a unified identity, Garland was re-presented as a fractured identity, inhabiting the shrew, the victim, and the girl next door in accordance with each memory.

I assert the reason why the reviewer perceived this version of Garland as a muddle is because it did not cohere to the dominant narrative of tragedy. For him, this mode of Garland storytelling was not logical. It did not provide a familiar sense of causality: he could not understand the story because it emplotted alternative events than the ones an audience has become accustomed. Van Zandt’s version of Garland, and the actor’s performance, placed the story outside the critic’s cultural endowment. *The Property Known As Garland* attempted to take up Dortins’ (2009, p. 60) plea to storytellers to reflect upon the plotting patterns they inherit rather than simply assimilating them into their own storytelling. However, this review makes clear how difficult it can be for biographical theatre-makers to break with tradition, and offer audiences new perspectives on an historical figure.

It would seem that biographical theatre-makers and performers truly risk isolation from their community when they offer alternative probable or possible versions of

Garland. To gain insight into how I might shift the tragedy narrative associated with Garland without risk of isolation, the work of three fictional biographers is investigated.

***Fictional biography: Boyt, Meyer and Heisenfelt provide assistance***

Boyt (2009), Meyer (2011) and Heisenfelt (1948) have written original Garland stories that recover her from the tragedy narrative by changing the context of her story. Boyt's *My Judy Garland Life* uses snippets of the Garland story to write her own autobiography: Garland is the background to the life story of a fan so smitten that she uses lines from Garland films as self-help. Meyer's *Operation Ruby Slippers* imagines Garland involved in a covert spy operation during World War Two. Heisenfelt's *Judy Garland and the Hoodoo Costume*, is one of a series of novels for girls that feature Hollywood actors in stories similar to those of the Trixie Beldon and Nancy Drew mystery series.

As playful and self-deprecating as Boyt's memoir appears, it defines the significant distinction between Garland's "Good Fans" and her "Bad Fans" (Boyt, 2009, pp. 187-241). She identifies the Bad Fans as those who are more interested in collecting personal items like Garland's toe-tag from the morgue and her empty pill bottles than valuing her creative work. Thus, Boyt points the finger at those who crave the tragedy narrative and subtly shames them for enabling its historical longevity. While there is no evidence to suggest that Garland was involved in saving the world from a Nazi nuclear threat, Meyer's empowered version of Garland is a possible one: unlike the biographical theatre-makers mentioned in this Literature Review, Meyer had first-hand experience of Garland. He uses the spy fiction genre to depict how, in his experience, Garland responded to life's challenges. He argues that she was fully aware that her talent gave her power to navigate obstacles, and thereby dismisses the notion that her talent could signal tragedy. What sets Heisenfelt's (1945) Garland story apart from those featuring movie stars like Betty Grable, Ginger Rogers, Shirley Temple, is that Garland must use her acting abilities to save the day: it is Garland's talent, not her tragedy, that is the driving force of the narrative.

The two new biographical theatre works *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* can borrow from Boyt, Meyer and Heisenfelt to help gain audience acceptance

of my alternative construction of Garland. The new works can find moments to point the finger at those audience members who expect a performance of Garland tragedy. They can explore the determination and sense of humour that is in keeping with what Meyer reports. To avoid falling into the tragedy trap, the notion of Garland's talent can drive the narrative forward toward an ending that does not so easily equate with a horrible death. In doing so, an audience may still recognise a 'truthful' performance of Garland and subsequently accept the anti-tragedy message. By emplotting a series of Garland work-related struggles and triumphs, rather than a series of personal struggles and failures, an audience may experience the probability and the possibility of a Garland accomplishment narrative.

***The Probable and the Possible: female artists must be sacrificed***

In discussing the poet, or in this case the biographical theatre-maker, Aristotle states:

...if he should come to take a subject from actual history, he is none the less a poet for that; since some historic occurrences may very well be in the probable and possible order of things; and it is in that aspect of them that he is their poet. (Aristotle, 1960, p. 137)

Like Boyt, Meyer and Heisenfelt, the biographical playwrights mentioned above, have approached the historical figure Garland with the possible and the probable in mind. They are her "poet". I admit that it is indeed possible to perceive Garland's life through the emplotment of tragedy. The journey from small town girl innocence as depicted in her portrayal of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, through to her recognition as a talented artist and star, to the hamartia of drug addiction, provides the theatre-maker with fertile soil for a dramatic denouement whereby Garland can be framed as a tragic child star, her original glory still remembered by her fans.

An audience can feel pity for her misfortune, and feel fear that, if this turning of the wheel can destroy one talented girl from a small town, it could happen to another girl with similar talents. Audiences have applauded this tragic tale and no doubt taken heed of its message. Thus, through the enactment of the universal law of causal relationships in these tragic biographical works, we learn that if a talented female wishes to pursue her artistry she will be sacrificed. I contend that, like the lesbian homo-normative narratives Heddon criticises, existing Garland biographical theatre works limit the potential for alternative biographical experiences of Garland.

Consequently, these plays limit how one can imagine, propose, recite, or live, as a female artist in society. Clement (1997) may agree with my reasoning.

***Singing Rainbows: transgression or accomplishment***

In Clement's (1997) examination of how the leading female characters in opera are constructed to reveal the nature of feminine identity, she argues that women who transgress will die. That is, if females depart from their traditional roles of daughter, wife and mother, they will be punished. Garland is constructed in a manner reminiscent of opera's tragic heroines in extant biographical theatre. She joins the ranks of these fictional "massacred women" (Clement, 1997, p. 21). Like them, Garland is associated with transgression. She transgresses her social, political and sexual function as daughter, wife and mother, to pursue life as an artist. The biographical plays suggest that for her transgression, she will be abandoned and die.

Drawing a comparison between opera's tragic heroines and rainbows, Clement (1997, p. 56) argues that both are chromatic beings: "that is to say, ambivalent intermediaries between the order of nature and that of culture". She explains that chromatic musical composition is always associated with affliction, suffering and death. That is why the tragic heroines of opera sing chromatic compositions. The songs are perfect for expressing pain. Clement posits that the intensified sounds rise and fall to affect an audience emotionally. The chromatic genre can make an audience hear real moans. It is interesting to me then that Garland is associated with both rainbows and chromatic compositions. In extant biographical plays she talks about rainbows and sings about rainbows. Moreover, her repertoire is made up of Harold Arlen songs, a composer famous for his chromatic songs (Jeness & Velsey, 2005, p. 67). Thus, by singing iconic chromatic songs such as *Over the Rainbow* (Arlen & Harburg, 1939) or *The Man That Got Away* (Arlen & Gershwin, 1953), Garland's identity as a tragic heroine is reinforced: an audience senses Garland's impending doom simply through the sound of her voice, rising and falling.

It would seem that in writing about the tragic heroines of opera, Clement (1997, pp. 21-22) hopes to teach a younger generation to recognise common constructions of female identity. She wishes to rebuild society to reject the association between empowered women and punishment. By reconstructing the associations between

Garland, transgression and chromatism I maintain that audiences could rebuild their understanding of the relationship between the female artist and suffering. Alternative versions must still be possible and probable, whereby the events of her life are arranged to make meaning for an audience. However, the alternative versions, could emplot events to achieve an accomplishment narrative rather than a tragedy narrative.

***Safeguarding Against Isolation: the futility of recovering a forgotten Garland?***

Canton's (2011) study of biographical theatre predicts that my attempts to create, embody and perform an alternative version of Garland will fail. That is, while the theatre is a place in which I should be able to challenge an audience's "life world knowledge", I will not be successful in shifting audience perception if I present a version of Garland that directly counters their previous ideas about her. From the above review of extant biographical plays featuring Garland, it is possible to surmise that biographical theatre-makers have remained faithful to a form of knowledge that has been culturally endowed. The storywork around Garland has sustained the tragedy narrative from the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, thus forgetting the dramatic potential of other Garland life stories. Fictional biographers like Boyt, Meyer and Heisenfelt may be able to re-construct Garland because they alter the context of her life in a manner that makes it clear to the reader that the work is a piece of self-help or pure fiction. However, biographical theatre-makers may not be permitted to reveal the difference between 'fact' and creative licence when they tell their Garland stories. When Van Zandt (2007) and the biographical performer Adrienne Barbeau attempted to veer from the cohesive tragic story they were criticised. If their attempts to present an alternative version of Garland have failed, how can I safeguard against isolation from the communities that have gathered around the dominant narrative of Garland? I call on the advice of Stanislavski and Margadant to recover Garland from tragedy.

***Stanislavski: focus on the artistry***

Gorchakov (1968) kept detailed notes of his time working under the supervision of Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre. His transcriptions of Stanislavski's approach to the development of a biographical theatre work, about the French satirical playwright and actor Moliere, have been useful for this project.



When presented with a draft of the play, Stanislavski convinces Gorchakov that many of the scenes depicted Moliere's tragic life but there was nothing to show his creative genius and no scenes showing his influence on the French society at the time. Perceiving this emphasis on the circumstances of Moliere's death as a flaw in the dramatic construction of the play, Stanislavski argues:

I did not see Moliere as a great man of talent...it is not his death that is important, but his struggle for life, for his work, for his ideas. I must feel the spirit of the genius, and this I didn't get at all. I saw a sick man pushed to the wall...You are showing me a life, but not an artistic life. (Gorchakov, 1954, p. 359-360)

Stanislavski goes on to actively disagree with the playwright about the representation of Moliere. He argues that there is too much focus on Moliere's private life and not enough on his ideas, as expressed through his work as a playwright and actor. In addressing the ensemble involved in the creative development, Stanislavski asks:

Did all of you, including the author, ask yourselves what Moliere lived for? According to your interpretation, it was only to love Armanda. According to mine, it was to expose without mercy the vices and hypocrisy of his time. (Gorchakov, 1954, pp. 361-362)

Like Stanislavski, I believe that Garland biographical theatre works have placed too much emphasis on her death, on the sick woman pushed to the wall, at the expense of depicting her artistic life. I also believe that biographical theatre's focus on Garland's private life has hindered a deeper understanding of her work methods, thereby sidelining her creativity and her influence on the entertainment industry. In agreement with Stanislavski, I reject the sentimentalist notion of the artist living only for love. By giving emphasis to her creative process, her creative output, and her innate drive to perform, my version of the artist Garland may shift audience perception.

### ***Margadant: the new biography***

This study challenges Canton's view that biographical theatre is unable to shift perception. To do so, I have borrowed from the champions of what Margadant (2000) calls the "new biography". Like them I have aimed to use biography as a tool for disrupting expectations of the Garland master discourse. I want to tell the untold life stories. Rather than adhering to the tragic tales I want to illustrate the

kaleidoscopic selves Garland invented and performed throughout her forty-seven years.

As a new biographer, I have not erased Garland's identity as a tragic heroine. Rather, I have presented the omitted, or forgotten, life stories that highlight alternative identities of Garland. Like the new biographies in Maragdan's (2000) collection, the two new Garland biographical theatre works portray an ambitious talented woman, navigating patriarchy and domesticity in accordance with the independence her life choices demanded. The works aim to reveal how Garland had more power over her circumstances than previously appreciated, thereby illustrating her 'not-so-tragic' self. In this way, the audience are not confronted with a woman with whom they have no "life world knowledge": she was a working woman, juggling work, familial and personal commitments. By constructing this more familiar female identity, my version of Garland may be accepted by an audience.

### ***Conclusion***

No matter whether the biography is modernist or postmodernist, scholarly or fictional, written or performed, a plotting pattern is used by the biographer to ensure that the audience can follow and understand the life story. A plotting pattern may make a life story seem more familiar to an audience but it also runs the risk of policing control over the life story, the storyteller and the audience. The details of a biographical subject's life may be selected for, or omitted from, the story to fit within the boundaries of romance, tragedy, comedy or satire. Consequently, the subject can be misrepresented for the sake of familiarity. Biographical playwrights and biographical performers may be criticized if they veer from what is perceived as the most probable and possible version of the biographical subject toward a new version of the subject. This can pressure the storyteller to assimilate inherited plotting patterns and thereby reinforce culturally endowed distortions of the subject. Thus, stories of subservient wives, alcoholic Aborigines and self-destructive female artists can continue to gain traction. Failure to disrupt these culturally endowed plotting patterns prevents audiences from contemplating alternative versions of the biographical subject. In turn, this failure can prevent a community from imagining alternative ways of living their lives.

My literature and contextual review of biography and biographical theatre provides clues to how I may deviate from the community of biographical playwrights who have used the tragedy narrative to tell Garland's life story. The review teaches me to intrude upon Garland biographical data in an alternative way. Rather than selecting biographical material that matches the inherited tragedy plotting pattern, the material selected aims to unpack a nest of notions regarding the identity of the female artist and accomplishment.

This chapter has argued for the retelling of the Judy Garland life story through the creation, embodiment and performance of new biographical theatre works. The following chapter describes the practice-led methodology used to disrupt the tragedy narrative and thereby shift perception of Garland as a tragic figure.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Allowing the practice to lead the enquiry**

### ***Introduction***

Even Mombi was not without a curious interest in the man her magic had brought to life; for, after staring at him intently, she presently asked: “What do you know?” “Well, that is hard to tell,” replied Jack. “For although I feel that I know a tremendous lot, I am not yet aware how much there is in the world to find out about. It will take me a little time to discover whether I am very wise or very foolish”. (Baum, n.d., p. 156)

As a practitioner with twenty-five years’ experience in acting and theatre-making I felt I knew a “tremendous lot” about creation, embodiment and performance at the commencement of this project. However, like Jack Pumpkinhead in Baum’s classic *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, I realized there was more I needed to “find out” in order to use biographical theatre to shift perception of an historical figure. Borrowing from Action Research, Grounded Theory, and Critical Response Process, I posit that a practice-led methodology is a “wise” choice to use in a project that tests and reports the research through “the material forms of practice” (Haseman 2006, p. 4). That is, through the creation, embodiment and performance of two new original biographical theatre works.

### ***Practice-Led Research***

#### ***Problem Solving: using embodied knowledge to generate new knowledge***

Gray (1996, p. 3) defines practice-led research as:

research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and informed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us practitioners.

To carry out the research then it has been necessary to use the knowledge I possess as a practitioner. My pre-existing practice in singing, dancing, collaborative theatre-making, and the Stanislavski System of acting informed my approach. Haseman (2007, p. 151) posits this practice-led approach is:

a radical and bold innovation, for it not only affirms the primacy of practice in the research process, but it proclaims that the techniques and tools used by the practitioner can stand as research methods in their own right.

The problems I perceive in my practice and the tools I use to solve these problems are thereby acknowledged as valid in the generation of new knowledge about biographical theatre-making and biographical performing.

## ***Action Research***

### ***Thinking on my Feet: self-reflective cycles for improving practice***

My pre-existing practice, what Stock (2007, p. 1) calls the researcher's "embodied practice", is guided by a principle taught to me by actor and trainer Lindy Davies<sup>5</sup>. She advises "one has to work from a state of not knowing, and be in a state of receptivity, rather than making decisions about how you're going to play..." (L. Davies, personal communication, September 26, 2001). To give structure to my state of "not knowing" I borrowed from Action Research. Koshy et al (2011, p. 2) states:

Action Research is a method used for improving practice. It involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection and – based on the evidence gathered – changes in practice are then implemented.

In this way my "state of not knowing" about how to shift perception through biographical theatre has grown to a state of knowing.

Action Research asks the researcher to commit to a series of self-reflective cycles. Put simply, the researcher becomes engaged in: planning a change; acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; replanning, acting and observing again; reflecting again, and so on (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007, p. 276). Schon (1983, p. 61) contends that through this cyclical form of reflection, practitioners:

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<sup>5</sup> Lindy Davies is an Australian actor, director, and actor trainer. She was a foundation member of the Australian Performance Group. Davies developed an approach to actor training called *The Autonomous Actor*. I trained under Davies in 1994 and 1995. When she was Head of Acting at the Victorian College of the Arts I interviewed her for my Masters of Arts (Research) *Languaging the Actor: an examination of the terminology used in actor training* (Pryde, 2002). For more information see <http://www.lindydavies.com>.

can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience.

Thus, in order to discover how to use biographical theatre to shift perception of a historical figure, Action Research allowed me to think on my feet (Schon, 1983, p. 54). That is, to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in the situations I found uncertain or unique. I had permission to reflect on the biographical theatre-making problems before me and reflect on the prior understandings implicit in my own practice. Moreover, I had the opportunity to carry out experiments that served to generate new understandings (Schon, 1983, p. 68) of biographical theatre and thereby challenge Canton's (2011) view that the genre cannot shift audience perception.

Action Research is rejected by positivists as context-bound. They posit it is unable to generate knowledge applicable in a generalized environment (Greenwood & Levin, 2008, p. 73). However, my research questions emerged from a very specific context. Due to my embodied practice as a biographical performer I identified problems inherent in the biographical theatre genre. Thus, the cycles of action and reflection were suited to my specific context so as to generate new biographical theatre works that shift perception of Garland as a tragic figure. To refute the positivists, a general set of principles have emerged from this context-bound study to assist biographical theatre-makers who wish to shift perception of historical figures through their work.

### ***Borrowing from O'Leary: observing, reflecting, planning and acting***

O'Leary (2004 p. 139) states that Action Research "relies heavily on both the production of knowledge to produce change and the enacting of change to produce knowledge". It can be "seen as an experiential learning approach to change. The goal is to continually refine methods, data, and interpretation in the light of the understanding developed in earlier cycles" (O'Leary, 2004, p. 140).

In this study, I borrowed from O'Leary's model (Figure 1) to articulate the cycles of action and reflection that took place between 2011 and 2018. Three cycles of Observing, Reflecting, Planning and Acting were enacted to create, embody and

perform two biographical theatre works capable of shifting perception. At times the cycles overlapped. However, Koshy et al (2011, p. 6) argue that the fluid, open and responsive nature of the cycles is beneficial because they provide the researcher with “an opportunity to visit phenomenon at a higher level each time and so to progress towards a greater understanding”

### ***Observing***

In this study the “Observing” included building an archive of biographical data regarding Garland, the historical period in which she lived, and how she can be perceived. This archive grew to include: existing Garland biographies, biographical plays, documentaries and television dramas; audio-visual material such as interviews and album recordings; and Garland’s films and television program. “Observing” also included reviewing literature regarding tragedy, the history of biographical writing and biographical theatre, and the strategies used by life writers, biographical playwrights and cabaret artists. Another component of “Observing” involved attending performances of biographical theatre and cabaret in South East Queensland, reading biographical plays and listening to audio recordings of biographical plays.

Audience questionnaires were distributed and collected during “Observing”. Formal creative team interviews also took place. The interviews were conducted with each team member separately. The individuals were emailed a copy of the questions in advance. The interviews were audio-recorded. The company Pacific Transcription then transcribed these recordings.

### ***Reflecting***

“Reflecting” included analyzing the data collected from the audience questionnaires and the formal creative team interviews. I wrote a journal to reflect upon my discoveries, analyzing how and why the data collected could assist in the production of biographical plays capable of shifting perception. My reflections were also presented at Symposia and Conferences in Toowoomba and Melbourne<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> I presented papers at the: Post-Graduate & Early Career Researchers Symposia at USQ in 2013, 2015 & 2016; School of Arts & Communications Seminar Series at USQ in 2014 & 2015; Artistry, Performance & Scholarly Inquiry Symposium at

### ***Planning***

“Planning” included gaining Ethics approval for the project (Appendix 1), writing my PhD Confirmation document, and drafting the exegesis.

Throughout “Planning” I had to confirm the professional practitioners to collaborate as my creative team for the duration of the project. Through emails and informal meetings we agreed upon our respective roles in the theatre-making and performance processes and drafted a schedule that respected any professional commitments. The creative team included: Lewis Jones (director), Morgan Chalmers (musical director, composer, accompanist), Alison Vallette (choreographer), Trish Miller (production manager) and Patrick Dwyer (performer).

“Planning” also required me to confirm the producers, venues and the dates for the performances of the two biographical theatre works. USQ Artsworx became the producer of *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. They agreed to provide the USQ Arts Theatre as the venue, and staff to assist with technical production and marketing. They also determined the date of the performance as September 4, 2013, as part of their annual Twilight Series. The Empire Theatre (Toowoomba) and the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts (Brisbane) became the producers of *Judy Strikes Back*. Both organizations agreed to provide staff to assist with technical production and marketing. The Empire Theatre determined August 6, 2015 as the performance date and confirmed the Empire Theatre Studio as the venue. The production was marketed as part of their annual Homegrown Independents Program. The Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts offered a three-day season from August 13 to 15, 2015 in their venue the Performance Space. This organization marketed the play as part of their cabaret programming. It was decided that *Judy Strikes Back* would be performed at these two commercial venues to reach a wider audience than that of the university based USQ Artsworx. In this way, the audience questionnaire data collected could offer more diverse responses regarding biographical theatre’s potential to shift perception of an historical figure.

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University of Melbourne in 2014; Australian Association for Theatre, Drama & Performance Studies Conference at USQ in 2016; and Forgotten Lives/Biographies at USQ in 2016.



During “Planning” I attended singing classes with Dale Cox<sup>7</sup>, song-writing classes with Mark Scholtez<sup>8</sup>, and a Personal Narrative session with Margi Brown Ash<sup>9</sup>. These classes informed my private skills preparation sessions. In my private sessions I developed and practiced the vocal and gestural habits required to embody Judy Garland in performance.

### ***Acting***

For the purposes of this study, “Acting” included drafting the plays, coordinating the scenography and assisting with marketing the plays in consultation with the producers. Rehearsals for singing, choreography, monologue work and scene work were part of “Acting”. Work-in-progress showings<sup>10</sup> and a creative team forum occurred during “Acting”. Of course, *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* were performed during “Acting”. Sections from both plays were performed and discussed at the Scriptwriting as Research Symposiums at USQ in 2016 and 2017. Two research papers emerged from “Acting” that have been published<sup>11 12</sup>.

O’Leary’s cycles of Action Research gave structure to my “not knowing” and ensured my understanding of how to use biographical theatre for my purposes grew incrementally. Through each cycle of Observing, Reflecting, Planning and Acting I was able to develop new knowledge about biographical theatre to challenge Canton’s (2011) research. In this way, the cycles produced two new biographical theatre works capable of shifting audience perception. What follows below identifies each cycle of

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://dalecoxsinging.com/>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.marksholtez.com/>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.4change.com.au/quick-look-margi-brown-ash-biography/>

<sup>10</sup> One of the work-in-progress showings occurred at the Work-in-Progress Conference at the University of Queensland in 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Meenach, B. (2016). Practice-led Research: creating, embodying and shifting my understanding of research’. In D. Rossi., F. Gacenga., & P. A. Danaher. (Eds.), *Navigating the Education Maze: contextual, conceptual, methodological and transformational challenges and opportunities for researchers* (pp. 101-114). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>12</sup> Meenach, B. (2017). Remembering Garland: performing a forgotten biography. In D. J. Baker., D. L. Brien., & N. Sulway (Eds.), *Recovering History Through Fact and Fiction: forgotten lives* (pp. 110-122). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Observing, Reflecting, Planning and Acting. The key questions that shaped the three cycles are also identified.

### ***Cycle One: Ms. Garland at Twilight***

Cycle One began in February 2011 and concluded in October 2013 (Figure 2). The research questions Cycle One explored were:

- How can I use biographical theatre to shift perception of an historical figure?
- How can I disrupt the tragedy narrative associated with the life story of Judy Garland?
- How can I shift perception of Garland through the creation, embodiment and performance of a biographical theatre work impacted by a modernist approach to biography? That is, from the position of the objective biographer.

### ***Cycle Two: Judy Strikes Back***

This cycle began in November 2013 and concluded in September 2015 (Figure 3).

The research questions Cycle Two explored were:

- What did the creation, embodiment and performance of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* reveal about biographical theatre's potential to shift perception of an historical figure?
- How can I use these findings to create a draft script of a new biographical theatre work that disrupts the tragedy narrative associated with the life story of Judy Garland?
- How can I use the draft script of *Judy Strikes Back* as a springboard for the creation, embodiment and performance of a biographical theatre work capable of shifting perception of an historical figure?
- How can I shift perception of Garland through the creation, embodiment and performance of a biographical theatre work impacted by a postmodernist approach to biography? That is, from the position of the subjective biographer.

### ***Cycle Three: ensuring the transferability of practice-led research***

Murphy (2012b, p. 166) argues:

There are significant similarities between how Scriptures and artworks have historically been configured as being in need of interpretation. In the case of

Scripture, an exegetical text serves to expose, explain and interpret the meaning contained in the scriptural text. The intellectual activity of exegesis aims to lay bare that which would otherwise remain ‘hidden’ in the original text.

The “original-to-text model” inherent in the exegesis may, as Murphy notes, suggest an artwork’s meaning remains incomprehensible until it has been transformed into the symbolic form of language. However, I embraced the writing of an exegesis, using Hasemen’s alternate understanding of the exegesis as a document that can lead or guide the reader out of the complexity of the practice (Haseman, 2007, p. 156). This exegesis does not aim to interpret *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back*. It serves as a guide to how a practitioner may use biographical theatre to shift perception of historical figures. In this way, the exegesis acts as a companion document to the biographical theatre works. It communicates my context-bound practice to enrich and inform the work of other practice-led researchers and biographical theatre-makers in fresh contexts.

Cycle Three commenced in October 2015 and concluded with the final drafting of the exegesis (Figure 4). The questions explored in this cycle were:

- What did the creation, embodiment and performance of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* reveal about biographical theatre’s potential to shift perception of a historical figure?
- How can I use the findings from *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* to enrich and inform the work of other practice-led researchers and biographical theatre-makers in fresh contexts?
- What principles can I identify that biographical theatre-makers can use to shift perception of historical figures?

### ***Grounded Theory***

#### ***Designed to Fit: adapting strategies to generate biographical theatre and principles***

During each cycle, strategies borrowed from the Grounded Theory method were employed. Strauss & Corbin (1994, p. 273) explain:

Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves

during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.

In 2001, I adapted the strategies originally developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) for use in my Masters of Arts (Research) (Pryde, 2002). This method, wherein the researcher does not start with a hypothesis but enters the field with general research questions, suited an enquiry that aimed to generate theory regarding the languaging habits of Australian actor trainers. For this research project I adapted two key strategies from the Grounded Theory method to fit my needs as a biographical theatre-maker and performer. The strategies were “comparative analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32) and “integrating the literature” (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1163). They were used to generate original biographical theatre works that reframe the life of Garland. In turn, the works were used to generate principles for shifting perception of historical figures through the medium of biographical theatre.

***Comparative Analysis: simultaneous data collection and analysis to make theatre***

The first Grounded Theory strategy adapted for this project was that of comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32). During each cycle I simultaneously collected and analysed data to shape the material for inclusion in *Ms. Garland and Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back*. Biographical data regarding Garland was compared with my personal experiences embodying Garland in rehearsal and performance. For example, biographical data pointing to Garland’s work ethic was compared with my experiences of performing a drug addled Garland. As I sifted through this Garland related data I identified emergent themes and compared them with those found in published biographical plays and the live biographical theatre I viewed in South East Queensland. Themes such as tragedy, addiction, work, accomplishment, truth and aesthetic experience were identified.

Coding these themes inspired more specific questions as to how *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* could be shaped. Coding also clarified why specific material or theatrical devices could be used in performance. In turn, this process allowed me to analyse how these creative choices could affect audience perception of Garland. The constant comparisons were articulated in my reflective journal. The comparisons were also articulated through the monologues, scenes, songs and

dramatic action created, embodied and performed in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back*.

### ***Integrating the Literature: using the shiny bits of other people's thinking***

In keeping with comparative analysis, the literature review developed throughout the project rather than being completed prior to embarking upon the practice. Often regarded as a weakness of the Grounded Theory method, Charmaz (1990, p. 1163) contends that reading and integrating the literature during the project:

is a strategy to prompt exploring various ways of analysing the data... Delaying the literature review decreases the likelihood that the researcher will already be hooked into preconceived conceptual blinders upon entering the field and in interpreting the data.

Thus, as problems emerged in my practice in the field of biographical theatre I sought out relevant literature to assist in solving my problems. In this way, the literature reviewed could not 'lead' the practice but informed each cycle of "not knowing".

This Grounded Theory strategy fits well with a practice-led approach. Murphy (2012a & b, pp. 27, 170) argues that different discourses should be examined in accordance with the intuitive practices of the practice-led researcher to prevent delimiting studio practice. Cameron (2012, p. 54) concurs, encouraging practice-led researchers to "get what they need" by developing a "'magpie bibliography' using shiny bits of other people's thinking for direction and instruction". Throughout each cycle of the research I subsequently allowed the weight of my intuition (Murphy, 2012a, p. 27) to lead me toward diverse literature that could assist in shifting audience perception of the tragic Garland.

## ***The Research Tools***

### ***Assisting My Understanding: interviews, questionnaires, journals***

Borrowing from the cycles of Action Research and two key strategies of Grounded Theory, I was able to coordinate what Haseman (2006, p. 4) describes as a "messy form of research". Haseman (2007, p. 148) suggests that adaptations of Action Research, Grounded Theory and Reflective Practice generally inform all practice-led research. This project maintained this tradition. Three specific tools were selected to

provide a triangulated view of how biographical theatre could be used to shift audience perception of an historical figure. The use of creative team interviews, a creative team forum, audience questionnaires and a reflective journal ensured the validity of the multi-method approach. The utilisation of each tool was informed by Critical Response Process (Lerman & Borstel, 2003). Critical Response Process, or CRP, was selected to ensure the primacy of biographical theatre practice in the execution, the analysis and the reporting of the research.

***Critical Response Process (CRP): four steps to forwarding the practice***

The choreographer Liz Lerman created CRP in response to what she perceived as the unsatisfactory methods employed by practitioners to collect feedback on their work. She doubted whether the feedback was useful in helping practitioners find their individual voices. Lerman & Borstel (2003, p. 11) argue that CRP “enables a group of people to uncover their various aesthetic and performance values, and by being patient, apply them to creative work-in-progress in a way that pushes the artist’s thinking forward”. In a four-day workshop with Lerman in June 2013 I learnt the four core steps used to help practitioners absorb the views of others (“the responders”) in a way that encourages innovative creative development. These four steps were considered in my approach to reflective journal entries. The interviews and forum conducted with my creative team members followed the four steps. Each step is included in the questionnaires completed by audience members after viewing *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and / or *Judy Strikes Back*. Below, the four steps and how I used them throughout the project are explained.

Lerman calls Step One of CRP “Statements of Meaning”. This step allows the practitioner to gather information regarding what others find meaningful in the work presented. This can help gauge the aesthetic values of the responders (Lerman & Borstel, 2003, p. 19). From my workshop experience with Lerman I learnt that using words such as “stimulating”, “evocative”, “memorable”, “touching”, “challenging”, “compelling”, “delightful”, “different” and “unique” helped stimulate a broad range of answers to what respondents found meaningful. As I collected Garland biographical data for my archive I noted what might be meaningful for disrupting the tragedy narrative. In my journal I reflected upon data such as Garland’s training, work experience and contributions to innovation in radio, film and television. These

reflections were compared with the responses I received from my creative team. They provided their views on what was meaningful to them about Garland and the creating, embodying and performance phases of the project. Issues such as classifications of tragedy, organic collaboration, and personal artistic growth were considered. The responses of audience members who completed the questionnaires at either *Ms. Garland at Twilight* or *Judy Strikes Back* were also reflected upon.

The combined Statements of Meaning became essential to understanding the dramatic content suitable for the biographical theatre works. These Statements assisted in developing strategies for collaboration that met the needs of the research project and the expectations of a creative team sourced from the professional entertainment industry. Most significantly, the Statements provided valuable information about how an audience was affected by the new constructions of Garland. My reflections upon the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* Statements of Meaning assisted in the creation, embodiment, performance and perception of *Judy Strikes Back*.

Step Two is called “Artist as Questioner”, or in this case, ‘Practice-led Researcher as Questioner’. This step is used to move beyond the usual questions heard in feedback sessions. Generalised questions like ‘what did you think?’ are abandoned for specific questions such as ‘how did you experience my transition from one character to another?’. Thus, dialogue about the work deepens. This assists the practitioner in gaining information about particular creative issues that have emerged in the studio (Lerman & Borstel, 2003, p. 19). As I collected more pools of data for my Garland biographical archive I posed questions that would progress the creation, embodiment, performance and perception of biographical theatre. Questions arose from my ongoing sweep of literature regarding biography, auto/biographical theatre, tragedy and the entertainment industry. Further questions arose from the biographical plays I read or experienced live. Other questions emerged on the studio floor, as I rehearsed privately or with members of my creative team. Thus, my reflective journal became full of questions for myself, for my team, and for the audience (Appendix 2).

I compared data from my archive and my literature / contextual review to imagine content for monologues, scenes or songs that could disrupt the tragedy narrative. My

creative team's responses to my questions and ideas deepened our practical experiments on the studio floor. Questions Number One to Number Seven on the audience questionnaires were designed as the "Artist as Questioner" core research step. These questions aimed to provide me with an understanding of what audiences already knew about Garland and biographical theatre. In this way, I hoped to ascertain how they perceived the historical figure and whether perception could be shifted using the medium of biographical theatre.

The process of questioning myself and my team took place both informally and formally. Every occasion I wrote in my reflective journal questions arose that I then worked towards answering through further data collection. As professional practitioners, my team understood that each meeting or rehearsal was a site for finding answers to my questions regarding Garland, biography, tragedy and shifting perception. I used Step Two of CRP formally three times with the team. On the first occasion, I met with each team member separately after the public performance of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* on September 4, 2013. We then met for a forum after the first full rehearsal run of *Judy Strikes Back* on July 26, 2015. Finally, I met with each team member again privately after the August 6 – August 15, 2015 performance season of *Judy Strikes Back*. (Appendix 3.1 – 3.11).

After each performance of the new biographical plays, audience members were invited to complete the audience questionnaires. Front-of-house staff at the USQ Arts Theatre, the Empire Theatre, and the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts approached audience members in the theatre foyers with the questionnaires, the participant information sheets and the consent forms. Consenting audience members completed the questionnaires and deposited them in a box in the foyer, supervised by the front-of-house staff. (Appendix 4.1 – 4.3). After each performance I browsed their answers to Step Two to polish or adjust the live performance material to meet my aim of shifting perception.

Step Three is titled "Neutral Questions From Responders". This step prompts the responders to ask the practitioner questions. These questions must remain neutral in tone to avoid forcing one's own agenda on the development of the work. For example, 'why was it so dark?' can be rephrased as 'what governed your choices in



lighting the piece?'. In this way, the practitioner can avoid growing defensive about their choices and be encouraged to reflect on them (Lerman & Borstel, 2003, p. 20 - 21). The creative team invited to participate in the project had worked with me on live productions in the past. A number of team members had also collaborated on productions independent of my involvement. We had developed positive working relationships prior to this research project. Thus, using neutral questions rather than only stating opinions had already become a feature of our embodied practice. The team's questions assisted in developing the humour, tone and dramatic arc of the new plays. In studio sessions, in meetings, or via email, their questions challenged me to gain further clarity in the creation and embodiment of the songs, monologues and scenes. Rather than forcing their own personal or aesthetic agendas on the biographical theatre works, their neutral questions helped me continue to find solutions to my research questions in a way that could meet the objectives of the project and also be entertaining for an audience.

For example, in a private interview with the musical director, Chalmers could have simply stated his opinion on the role of collaboration within theatre-making. Instead, he asked the neutral questions: "Do you think having done that project, that it's important that the musical director is actually involved in the performance? Do you think that that level of collaboration in the creation stage is reflected in the performance stage by having that person there for the performance?" (M. Chalmers, personal communication, May 2, 2015). These questions are perceived as neutral because they did not tell me what to think. Rather, they helped me to articulate my own developing views regarding the nature of collaboration in the creating, embodying and performing stages of biographical theatre-making. Their questions led me closer to recognising theatre-making principles that could induce 'khorobiognosis'; that is, biographical theatre capable of shifting perception of an historical figure.

Audience members found it more difficult to pose neutral questions. However, their value-laden questions or opinions were still valuable to generating principles for making biographical theatre capable of shifting perception. For example, an audience response to Number Eight on the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* questionnaire stated: "I loved the unfamiliar songs and audience engagement and sing along" (audience

questionnaires, Male 31 – 50, September 4, 2013). To be viewed as a neutral question, the opinion could be rephrased as: why did you decide to include unfamiliar songs, audience participation and a sing along? This opinion gave me useful data about whether the theatrical devices performed in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* were engaging for an audience. However, in my journal reflections I rephrased the opinion as a neutral question so that I could further develop my understanding of why I would or would not use such theatrical devices in *Judy Strikes Back*.

During the workshop with Lerman, she made it very clear that participation in Step Four of CRP was dependent upon active involvement in the process thus far. That is, if the responders have engaged in the first three steps they can participate in the final step. This fourth step is called “Permissioned Opinions”. It encourages responders to offer opinions in a way that respects the immediate needs of the practitioner. To do this, the responder firstly names the topic of the opinion and then asks permission to state it. For example, ‘I have an opinion about costumes, do you want to hear it?’. If the practitioner wants to hear the opinion they can say “yes”. Alternatively, if the practitioner sees this topic as irrelevant at this point in the development of the work they can say “no” (Lerman & Borstel, 2003, p. 22). In my reflective journal I tended to note information that was meaningful to the project, then ask questions about how and why it could be used to shift perception. Only then did I come to stating opinions about my own data collection and analysis. Often, my opinions were not recorded in my reflective journal but were transformed into theatrical material such as monologues, scenes, song selections and song lyrics. These opinions were then tested on the studio floor with my creative team.

In turn, they would provide opinions to ensure the dramatic integrity of the material. For example, one day prior to the first public performance of *Judy Strikes Back*, the production manager and director were of the opinion that the final musical number needed to be cut from the play. This meant that a new ending to the play had to be investigated on the studio floor immediately. As a creative team, we were able to cope with cutting approximately seven-minutes of material including text, an original musical composition and a choreographed dance sequence without argument. I posit that the first three steps of CRP made it simple for us to accept the consequences of

Step Four's Permitted Opinions: we trusted the process in which we had been engaged.

The opinions provided by audience members after viewing *Ms. Garland at Twilight* were all considered so as to make *Judy Strikes Back*. However, not all opinions were accepted as relevant to the objectives of the research. Opinions about including stories of her failed marriages and drug addiction were perceived as reinforcing the Garland tragedy narrative and were thereby rejected. Indeed, audience desire to experience the performance of drug addiction and failed marriages further confirmed the dominance of the Garland tragedy narrative in the collective consciousness. Opinions about depicting her death were also rejected. There would be no point of difference from the extant Garland biographical plays if her death was performed in my new biographical theatre works. Comparing the opinions of the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* audience with those of the *Judy Strikes Back* audience assisted in identifying conceptual categories I named Super-Objective, Shiny Bits and Live. These categories became key to developing a set of principles that biographical theatre-makers can use to shift audience perception of an historical figure. Moreover, these categories lead me closer to coining the neologism 'khorobiognosis' when referring to biographical theatre capable of shifting perception.

***CRP Creative Team Interviews: new knowledge from embodied knowledges***

Interviewing the creative team using the four key steps of Creative Response Process was selected as an effective tool for this study because multiple perceptions of the biographical theatre-making process could be collected and analysed. Due to the open questions used in CRP, the interviews were perceived as semi-structured. In this way, I could “interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret meaning of the described phenomena” (Brinkman, 2013, p. 21). The one-on-one interview allowed for the individual team member to focus on describing their experiences of the project, highlighting how their embodied knowledge as a practitioner effected the creation, embodiment and performance of the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back*. The one-on-one interviews also allowed me to focus the conversation on issues that I deemed relevant in accordance with the individual's role within the project. The group interview, or forum, was used due to its more flexible nature as compared to the one-

on-one interview (Brinkman, 2013, p. 26). In this group setting, I was able to use the group dynamic to investigate the different perspectives of creative team members. Thus, the team became involved in discussions about the emerging biographical theatre work that required them to justify their individual opinions and attitudes (Brinkman, 2013, p. 26-27). Both the one-on-one interviews and the forum forwarded the theatre-making process. The data collected allowed me to gain polyphonic understandings of how to solve specific creative problems during the project. Overall, their collective embodied knowledges, as expressed in the interviews and the forum, allowed for the production of new knowledge about biographical theatre-making and shifting perception. The creative teams' participation in the interviews and the forum can be perceived as an integral component to achieving 'khorobiognosis'. That is, the ongoing, shared lived experiences of the team through the use of the interview tool prepared the biographer and biographical performers for shifting perception 'in-the-moment' with an audience.

#### ***CRP Questionnaires: new narratives of history***

The audience questionnaire was selected as an effective tool for this project. It consisted of the four key steps of Creative Response Process so as to ascertain an audience's perception of the biographical theatre works. Like Canton (2011), I borrowed from Sauter's (2000, 2002) work into the manner in which audiences may perceive performance. Sauter's conception of the mutual relationship between performers and audience appealed to me as a theatre practitioner. Moreover, his views on how experiencing a live event can result in new narratives of history seemed pertinent to a study aimed at disrupting old narratives.

Sauter (2002, p. 128) suggests that every performance that is watched by spectators is a theatrical event. He does not discern between whether the event is on a stage or in the street, or whether it is contemporary or historical. Rather, he believes there is an underlying "event-ness" in all the encounters between performers and spectators (Sauter, 2000, pp. 184-185). Using the German philosopher Gadamer's view that the basic experience of all art is playing, Sauter explains that "the player and the observer participate in the playing, both knowing the rules" (Sauter, 2002, p. 128). He posits that in the realm of the performing arts, the creation and the experience of

art are simultaneous processes that take place in the form of an event. That is, “The processes of creating and experiencing theatre are united through the act of playing, through the mutual contact between performer and spectator within the theatrical event” (Sauter, 2002, p. 128). According to Sauter (2000, p. 252), this shared, real time, event can then become memory for those who participated. In turn, in the “moment of writing” down their memories of the event, the experience becomes “a narrative of history” (Sauter, 2000, p. 253). When audience members tell their narratives to others they create a “collective awareness” for those who hear of their experiences (Sauter, 2000, p. 252). Thus, in completing the questionnaire after experiencing *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and / or *Judy Strikes Back*, the audience were engaged in three activities helpful for this study. Firstly, they wrote personal narratives of their experiences of the biographical subject rather than simply repeating culturally endowed narratives to explain their perceptions of Garland. This provided me with valuable information about whether perception of an historical figure could be shifted in the theatre. Secondly, sharing their Garland narratives through the questionnaire, assisted in ascertaining what biographical methods or theatrical devices could be used to shift perception of an historical figure in the theatre. Finally, it is hoped that in the future the audience members share with others their personal narratives of Garland in the theatrical event. In this way, the tragedy narrative associated with Garland may continue to be disrupted, creating new collective awareness of Garland in the wider community.

### ***Reflective Journaling: coming to own new knowledge***

Boud (2001, p. 1) contends that journaling is a way of making sense of the world and how we operate within it. I did not use the four steps of CRP as a pro forma for every journal entry because I believed it might inhibit the stream of consciousness style that has come to be part of my embodied practice. Rather, I kept the four steps in mind as I wrote so that I could freely delve into what I found meaningful, what I questioned, what knowledge I needed from other sources, and what opinions I possessed. Thus, the seven A4 books of cartridge paper I used for journaling documented my experiences of biographical theatre-making so as to understand how I could use the form to shift perception of historical figures.

Reflective journaling was the essential tool needed for finding patterns in what I was discovering in each Cycle of the study. It allowed me to learn what my assumptions were and how to make meaningful connections with new ideas. In this way, through journaling, I was “making the resulting knowledge one’s own, a part of one’s normal way of operating” (Boud, 2001, p. 5). The journals are littered with pencil scribbles of diagrams, poems, uncertainty, perplexing events and explorations of ideas without knowing where they would lead me. However, as an artefact of the research, the journals demonstrate the modes of reflection that Boud (2001, pp. 3-5) advises are crucial for learning. Firstly, there are entries in which I anticipate what I want from any activity or idea by consistently asking ‘what if’ questions. Secondly, there are entries in which I simply recount what has happened during an activity. Thirdly, there are entries in which I re-evaluate past journal entries so as to make sense of where I had been and where I needed to go next. Finally, throughout my reflections, I attended to my feelings to ensure that I was enhancing rather than blocking my developing understanding of Garland, tragedy, and biographical theatre-making.

### ***Conclusion***

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 22) state “all research is interpretive: it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be studied”. Questions regarding biographical theatre and the representation of historical figures have been initiated in my practice. The methodology and methods designed for use in this enquiry are thereby informed by my practice and reported through practice. In my role as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) I borrowed strategies from Action Research, Grounded Theory and Critical Response Process to understand how to: create a modernist and a postmodernist biographical theatre work; embody biographical content; perform the modernist and postmodernist biographical theatre works; and shift perception of an historical figure. Chapter Four reports on the creation, embodiment, performance and perception of *Ms. Garland at Twilight*.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: *Ms. Garland at Twilight*: biographical performance in the authorial voice**

### ***Introduction***

Bernice: Because things accumulate around your name. You have a name, and one thing after another happens to you, and things have accumulated around a name.

Frankie: But what has accumulated around my own name? Nothing see, my name doesn't mean anything. Nothing has ever happened to me.

Bernice: But it will. Things will happen.

Frankie: What?

Bernice: Well you pin me down like that and I can't tell you truthfully. If I could I wouldn't be sitting here in this kitchen right now but making a fine living on Wall Street as a wizard. All I can say is that things will happen. Just what, I don't know.

(McCullers, 2009, minutes 00:06:56 – 00:06:22)

Unlike the twelve-year-old Frankie Adams in Carson McCullers' play *The Member of the Wedding*, many "things" have accumulated around the name Judy Garland from the time she was a young girl, and they continue to accumulate almost fifty years after her death. My experience of playing the role of Garland in the 2011 Empire Theatre production of *The Boy From Oz* provided me with my first insight into the "things" that have accumulated around her name. The play demonstrated how biographical theatre can misrepresent, distort, limit or control our understanding of an historical figure. In Cycle One of this project I set out to disrupt the tragedy narrative associated with the Judy Garland life story. To challenge Canton's (2011) findings regarding the ineffectual nature of biographical theatre I used biographical theatre-making strategies she recognizes as modernist in approach. Consequently, during Cycle One I went in search of the things that have accumulated around the name Garland that are rarely remembered or performed. I sought to create an original biographical theatre work that could shift audience perception. Purposefully I masked the intrusion of the biographer on the biographical data. In this way, the new biographical theatre work would appear to be from the stance of the objective biographer. That is, my authorial voice would be hidden from the audience.

This chapter draws on my reflective journals, creative team interviews, script drafts and audience questionnaires. It articulates how I created the biographical play *Ms.*

*Garland at Twilight*, how I embodied the role of Garland, and how the performance of the play shifted audience perception of the historical figure. Part One of the chapter discusses the creating and embodying processes. Part Two of the chapter confirms the audience shift in perception.

### ***Part One: Creating and embodying modernist biographical theatre***

#### ***Taking My Cue from the Modernist Life Writers: the story of the great woman***

To take my first step toward the creation of a biographical play that could shift perception of the tragic Garland I took my cue from modernist life writers. I would tell the story of a great woman's accomplishments by highlighting Garland's creative process, unpacking her talent, and focusing on her work in a manner that appeared objective. In doing so, I could redirect attention away from biographical material relating to Garland's alleged hybris and hamartia toward material about her training, her mentors, her artistic collaborators and the advice she may have for those working in the entertainment industry today. Following the guidance of Stanislavski, I built a biographical archive that demonstrated the artist's creative genius and influence on the entertainment industry and society. Any data that related to Garland's artistic ability or skill became key to constructing a seemingly objective life story of Garland suitable for shifting perception in live performance.

#### ***Shifting Perception: the biographer's subjective motivations revealed***

Smith (1994, p. 289) would suggest that the selection of Garland as a biographical subject must be related to my own subjective motivations. During Cycle One I took time to consider why I wished to re-construct this biographical subject. As I poured over my ever-increasing pools of data I asked the question: why do I want to disrupt the dominant perception of Garland as a victim of the Hollywood studio model? When I watched the Garland filmography I wondered if there could be something positive to learn from the Hollywood studio model that is overlooked in the push to paint the tragic Garland. In my reflective journal and in discussion with my creative team I pondered whether my perspective, my bias, as an actor in today's entertainment industry could be key to constructing a version of Garland's life story that could shift perception.



Sustainable employment in the entertainment industry today is extremely competitive and unemployment rates are high. In Australia, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance reports actors currently suffer from higher levels of stress, anxiety and drug abuse than other professionals, with up to 41% of actors earning less than \$10,000 a year (Act and React, 2015). One can posit then that today's actors face limited employment with very few opportunities to practice or hone their craft. Whereas, data from Garland's time tells a very different story about the plight of actors.

I discovered Lillian Burns Sidney, the acting coach who worked for MGM Hollywood studio from the 1930s through to the 1960s. In her 1996 interview with Carole Langer (2011) she argues that the Hollywood of Garland's era was dedicated to developing talent by providing actors with the opportunity for ongoing work. She explains:

A musician needs an instrument but an actor, he is the instrument that produces another living, breathing, human being. But what he needs are words from somebody else, a story, a poem, whatever it is, he needs to be given that vehicle. He then needs, usually a costume, he needs a place to show it and most importantly he needs an audience because if you don't hear him - you know Grandma Moses didn't need anybody, she just painted. That is why there was a Hollywood, that is why today, yes there is talent, unquestionably, but you cannot become a star that is lasting, a figure that is lasting, by doing a film every three years. You've heard that saying "an actor needs to work", they need to work, they need to be helped, they need to be developed. They are not doing that today...  
(Langer, 2011, minutes 00:18:49:21 – 00:20:23:17)

Sidney's perspective made conscious my unconscious conflicts and yearnings regarding the plight of actors today. This clarified my subjective choice of Garland as a biographical subject. It would seem I dreamed of an actor training and employment model that acknowledged and respected an actor's need for craft development through ongoing work opportunities. The Sidney interview confirmed for me that the Garland tragedy narrative omitted positive details regarding the old studio system. This self-reflection sharpened my biographical data gathering. I realized I wanted to shift perception of Garland by constructing a life story that highlighted the unique opportunities she had to develop as an actress and singer, that unfortunately, actors do not have access to in today's industry.

***An Embodied Biographical Archive: dramaturgical research, character research and skills preparation lead the way to a new play***

In preparation for performing the role of Judy Garland in the 2011 Empire Theatre production of *The Boy From Oz* I engaged in what I call Dramaturgical Research, Character Research and Skills Preparation. These three areas of investigation are essential to my embodied practice as an actor. They build my understanding of the play, the role, and guide me in how I will embody this understanding in performance. To play an historical figure these three areas of investigation are crucial to constructing a performance an audience will accept as historically ‘truthful’.

Dramaturgical Research involves gathering and analysing historical sources that may be useful in developing an understanding of the time in which the play is set: the events, the people, their actions and their motivations. Character Research draws on this historical information, specifically focusing on the character I am to play: how they dressed, what they sounded like, the way they walked, their personality, how they were perceived. Skills Preparation is the logical extension of the Dramaturgical and the Character Research. Equipped with a self-awareness of my current performance skills and personal qualities I determine what skills or qualities need to be developed in order to successfully embody the historical character in performance. For example, an accent may need to be acquired, weight may need to be lost or gained, a particular emotional intensity may need to be achieved, stage combat or acrobatic skills may need to be mastered.

As I approached the task of constructing a modernist biographical theatre work that disrupted the Garland tragedy narrative, I revisited my *The Boy From Oz* research. The Garland biographies, documentaries, interviews, letters, films, television shows and audio recordings, provided a wealth of empirical data to draw upon. Moreover, my physical embodiment of this research in 2011 provided me with a unique insight into Garland. That is, I had already experienced walking, talking, thinking, and feeling like a version of her. This subjective perspective was key to uncovering what Smith (1994, p. 291) deems “the figure under the carpet”. The unique biographical figure I had uncovered through my *The Boy From Oz* research was an ambitious, tenacious, work-driven artist. It was this figure I aimed to present through

performance and thereby shift the story of her life from one of tragedy to artistic accomplishment.

***Embodied Practices meet Life Writing Guidelines: the subject, the form and the context take shape***

My embodied practices of Dramaturgical Research, Character Research and Skills Preparation led me to selecting a biographical subject, creating a biographical archive, developing a theme, and uncovering the figure under the carpet, in keeping with Smith's guidelines. In accordance with the Research Design, the form of the new biographical theatre had to appear modernist in approach. That is, like an unbiased collection of facts. However, it was only when I considered where the play would be performed and for whom, that the form and the context of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* really began to take shape.

Upon approaching USQ Artsworx to produce the work as part of their annual performance season I was met with enthusiasm. My pitch to the producers focused on three key performative ideas: Judy Garland unplugged and in her own words; telling stories from her career as she did on her 1960s' television show; reconstructing her as an accomplished artist instead of the proverbial train wreck. USQ Artsworx wished to schedule and market the yet unwritten work as part of their monthly *Twilight* concert series. This meant the play needed to meet a particular criteria: one hour in duration, marketable to their subscriber audience, and resemble the form of the concert.

Rather than constraining the choices I could make regarding the form and the context of the biographical work, the criteria gave Cycle One of the study a clear direction. The seemingly objective biography would adopt the form of a live Garland concert including singing, dancing and storytelling. Contextually, the producer's criteria allowed a question to emerge: what if Garland had recovered from her well publicized addictions and went on a concert tour to commemorate her fiftieth birthday? In this way, the form could follow a chronological through line. Contextually, Garland could appear on stage telling her life story 'as if' she was alive in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* (Appendix 5).

***Garland on Garland: allowing the biographical subject to write the biography***

My ‘what if’ question assisted in writing *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. Through this question I also began to appreciate the significance of allowing the biographical subject to tell me what sort of biography should be written. As noted in Chapter Two, Van Zandt’s biographical theatre work *The Property Known As Garland* uses Garland verbatim data in order to construct a version of Garland that communicates her intelligence, humour and accomplishments. However, Garland’s singing voice is erased in his construction. This extant Garland play made me question whether a live audience may accept my version of Garland if they experienced my version of her repertoire. Garland explained that the story of her life was in her songs. I used this as a clue. I endeavoured to view and listen to hours of concert and interview footage to find out from her, how to tell her life story live in concert.

I took note of the anecdotes Garland liked to tell, the songs and dance routines in her repertoire, the dramatic structure of her performances from the nature of the overture to the final song and costume choices. I also noted her use of comedic stage business or ‘bits’, and her interaction with orchestra members, guest artists, and the audience. I reflected on the material that had potential for inclusion in my reframing of her biography. Privately and in consultation with my creative team I brainstormed how each anecdote, song and dance could be structured to give the impression of an objective biography. I then tested my ideas against two recent professional concert recordings related to Garland. Firstly, I examined how Garland’s daughter Liza Minnelli structures her concerts, peppering the evening with stories of her training, mentors and work experiences. Secondly, I considered how the singer songwriter Rufus Wainwright<sup>13</sup> re-presented Garland’s Carnegie Hall concert repertoire, retelling Garland stories and establishing his personal relationship to those stories.

Through this immersion in Garland I discovered my concert-come-biographical-play was starting to take shape as an “autobiographical retrospective” (Canton, 2011, p. 1). That is, an audience would experience a live Garland concert whereby the woman herself would sing, dance and share anecdotes that highlight her artistic accomplishments. Just like Minnelli does today. In keeping with the need to maintain

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<sup>13</sup> For more information see <http://rufuswainwright.com/about/>

the impression of the objective biographer, Wainwright's more subjective approach was dismissed during Cycle One. However, his desire to pay tribute to Garland led to a fresh discovery regarding the notion of form and shifting perception.

***Not another Tribute Act!: the disruptive potential of a popular form***

As previously established in Chapter Two, the form recognised as the Tribute Act is very popular. Audiences enjoy experiencing performers simulate their favourite entertainers, or like Wainwright, honour an entertainer by performing their repertoire. Several Garland Tribute Acts regularly tour Australia so there was no reason for an audience to assume that *Ms. Garland at Twilight* would be any different in form. At first this was deemed a problem.

From the inception of the study my director had stipulated the work must aim to be “a bigger story than Judy, more than just another tribute show” (reflective journal, September 7, 2012). Firstly, I argued my focus on artistic accomplishment would assist in making the work more than the typical tribute show. Secondly, I engaged with literature regarding memorialising through auto / biographical performance (Heddon, 2008). I then compared this literature with my research into the subversive nature of objective biography (Canton, 2011). This allowed me to recognize the disruptive potential in a form that's sole purpose is to create a sense of nostalgia in its audience. Heddon (2008, p. 77) states:

It's precisely the ephemeral nature of performance that proposes it to be an appropriate and alternate mode of memorialising since to be realised it requires the active agent, or embodied agency of both performer and spectator. Equally, the impermanence of performance – its distinction, say, from a built and concrete monument – allows it to be rewritten, or performed differently, always open then to shift the narrative, to the possibility of other voices telling other stories.

In consultation with my creative team I embraced the Tribute Act form to simultaneously honour Garland, and subversively shift the narrative from tragedy to accomplishment. By embodying Garland I could use her voice to tell the other stories, the stories usually left untold. Thus, in performance, *Ms. Garland at Twilight* could stimulate an experience of nostalgia in the audience. In turn, it could use that experience to disrupt the dominant Garland narrative.

***Embodying Garland: how studio practice begins to shape the play***

As noted in Chapter Two, an audience requires a degree of physical and vocal similarity between the performer and the biographical subject to assist them in accepting the biographical performance. My *The Boy From Oz* Dramaturgical Research, Character Research and Skills Preparation had assisted in building similarities between myself and Garland prior to Cycle One of this project. I knew I still had Garland ‘in my body’ from the Skills Preparation I had done for Enright’s biographical theatre work.

When Cycle One began, my Skills Preparation resumed. By observing more film and television footage, listening to more vocal recordings and radio broadcasts, and studying more photographic images of Garland I began to fine tune the physical and vocal behaviours I wanted to re-create and re-present for an audience. This was to ensure their acceptance of me as Garland in the new biographical work.

In the studio I would practice these behaviours: checking in the full length studio mirror for physical accuracy; and singing and speaking along with Garland recordings for accuracy in vocal tone, pitch and phrasing. To maintain my vocal health and strengthen my singing technique I attended private classes where I worked on Garland classics I was considering for inclusion in *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. Outside of my studio and class time I often wore high heels and skirts similar to those she wore in her early forties to practice inhabiting Garland outside the constraints of a song or a script.

The more I read, watched or heard Garland, or about Garland, the more time I dedicated to creative imagination work. I meditated on times, places and people that involved Garland. I asked myself how would I behave in those situations, and how I would feel. In turn, I used my own experiences, my emotion memory, to relate to Garland in those situations. This creative imagination work became the blueprint for how I would bridge the gap between Bernadette and Garland in the delivery of songs and anecdotes in performance. This embodied Stanislavski based practice also began to dictate which songs and anecdotes I believed could disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. I began to feel a strong relationship to some material and with this came a developing need to speak (or sing) the material in Garland’s voice. My exhaustive

Skills Preparation was being blocked, however, by my challenge to maintain the role of objective biographer in Cycle One of the project.

***The Fragmented Self and the Objective Biographer: Stanislavski to the rescue***

It was difficult to collate biographical data to present Garland as a unified coherent self, like an objective biographer. I was finding different Garland selves depending on what times and situations I focused upon. I remained dedicated to revealing the historical figure I had found under the carpet. Yet, the more I got to know Garland the more elusive she became:

I have been worried over the last couple of weeks that I don't really "know" Judy Garland, I have fragmented bits of knowledge, understanding and experience of her but I feel I'm not getting any closer to knowing her. All I have is a collection of anecdotes, songs and theories about her that I've started telling people about, and started envisioning being part of the show. (reflective journal, February 26, 2013)

How was I to commit to the modernist presentation of a unified self in order to shift perception of Garland when I continued to discover a fragmented self?

It was Smith (1993, p. 56) who guided me toward a new understanding of how my creative imagination work could solve this impasse. She posits: "There is no 'true' self at the core that can be unmasked because the 'self' is a hypothetical place or space of storytelling". I reasoned "I was using a place and space for storytelling about the selves of Judy Garland and me" (reflective journal, March 25, 2012). That is, I was using 'myself' to tell a collection of stories about the Garland 'selves' that articulate ambition, a drive to work, and artistic accomplishment. There was the Bernadette 'self' committed to embodying a collection of Garland anecdotes and songs in a way that would convince an audience that I was Garland. More significantly, the 'self' I needed to use to write the play was a self that could justify hiding my authorial voice. In effect, I made the decision to treat the objective biographer role as an acting role: I would use Stanislavski's "magic if" (Merlin, 2007, pp. 127-130) to commit to writing the play 'as if' I was a biographer who believed in truth claims, rather than constructions. Thus, inside this role, the Garland selves that emerged as meaningful through my Skills Preparation could be perceived as revelations of Garland's 'true self' (Figure 5). Committing to the use of a

chronological trajectory for this play however still remained a problem for Bernadette's practitioner 'self'.

***Taking the Audience With You: using Garland's artistic choices as objective biographical truth***

Abandoning the views of Smith (1994) and Canton (2011) for a short period, I gravitated toward cabaret as a way to solve my ongoing contextual issues. Intuitively I knew like drama, a cabaret show must be artfully constructed to maintain audience interest in the songs and the singer. I believed the practitioner's manual *The Cabaret Artist's Handbook* (Harrington, 2000) would provide me with the relevant "shiny bits" of advice I needed to transform a concert into a seemingly objective biographical theatre work capable of shifting audience perception.

With regards to song selection Harrington (2000, p. 77) suggests veering away from the "standards", the songs everybody sings, toward more unusual, neglected or original material. This can set you apart from other cabaret artists. In reference to an artist's interpretation of a song, he advises finding the original context of the song, when it was written and why (Harrington, 2000, p. 93). He recommends considering why you are attracted to particular songs. That is, what the songs may be saying that you would like to say. Harrington (2000, p. 96) insists: "Those passages that come closest to your own thoughts, ideas, feelings, and / or memories are those you will want to highlight in your rendition".

Harrington (2000, p. 102) confirms that an audience needs some degree of familiarity with the material to feel comfortable. He warns that audience attention will drift if you introduce unfamiliar songs. To ensure audience attention Harrington (2000, p. 103) proposes a formula for the ordering of the material: the first song should be up-tempo; the second can be a novelty song; the third must "hit them between the eyes and set the tone of the act as a whole"; and medleys are suitable mid-act. According to this formula, the most important "spots" are song number three, the closing number and the encore because the audience is most attentive at these times. Finally Harrington (2000, p. 106) explains:

For an act to succeed, you must connect with your audience and that only happens when you connect with a song. To be entertained, to be drawn into an intimate cabaret act, audiences must feel that they are learning something



about you, that something is being revealed...Choose songs because they speak to your heart and for your heart, and your material will work for you instead of against you.

Garland's daughter Liza Minnelli (as cited in Harrington, 2000, pp. 43-44) supports these views. She explains that she selects material based on what moves her and what she can reveal as an actor through these songs. Moreover, she agrees that planning is key to be sure you can "take the audience with you" via the material.

Heeding Harrington's and Minnelli's advice I sifted through Garland's repertoire to identify the standards and her more unusual or neglected songs. I also used social media to discover my friends' top five Garland numbers. In turn, I cross-referenced this information with Garland biographical data to ascertain when each of the songs was written and when they came into her repertoire. The reasons why she may have selected this material was considered. I observed how she communicated her connection to these songs in performance, and how her interpretation of this material changed over the years. Songs such as *Over the Rainbow* (Arlen & Harburg, 1939), *Born in a Trunk* (Gershie, 1953), *The Man That Got Away* (Arlen & Gershwin, 1953) and *The Trolley Song* (Martin & Blane, 1944) emerged as standards. Rather than avoiding Garland standards, I knew an audience would expect to hear these songs to accept the play as biographically accurate. *Maybe I'll Come Back* (Jeffrey & Cook, n.d), *I'd Like to Hate Myself in the Morning* (Meyer, 1968 as cited in Gallagher, P, 2016) and *That Old Black Magic* (Arlen & Mercer, 1942) emerged as unusual. Numbers such as *Judy* (Carmichael & Lerner, 1934) and *Drums In My Heart* (Heyman & Youmans, 1932) emerged as neglected. The vision of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* as an autobiographical retrospective dictated that I embody Garland's interpretation of the material in performance, rather than singing my own renditions. However, I did consider why I was attracted to particular material.

I recognized some lyrical content had the potential to support the biographical data I was beginning to shape into monologues. It could set up the story to be told, forward the story, or give emotional weight to the story. For example, as *Born in a Trunk* begins "I was born in a trunk in the Princess Theatre" it seemed logical to consider it for the opening number, setting up a life story that was to be told chronologically. I also recognized which material moved me emotionally and thereby enjoyed singing.

For example, *That Old Black Magic* had the potential to set up a biographical story about Garland's work with composers Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen. Yet, personally, the song does not move me and I do not enjoy singing it. Consequently, I discarded this song from inclusion in the play.

Most significantly, I recognized which material had the potential to shift perception by reframing Garland as an ambitious, work-driven, accomplished artist. For example, *The Man That Got Away* could be associated biographically with her personal life, her poor relationships with men and four divorces. But I wondered whether I could associate it with her working life. I found three separate pieces of verbatim data for the task. One verbatim document explains her loving relationship with her father. Another mentions how thankful she was to her father for enabling her film career. The final verbatim material describes the night she worked on radio with Al Jolson when her father died in hospital. By crafting this verbatim data into a monologue I aimed to argue that a positive relationship with a man had led to her ability to behave as a professional artist, even in times of grief. A skill all good practitioners are expected to possess. *The Man That Got Away* could then follow the monologue. The song could support the monologue by shifting the perception of "the man" in the lyrics from a lost lover to her father. In this way, the song could be interpreted with great feeling and have the capacity to move an audience. Yet, simultaneously, it could disrupt the dominant association between the chromatic song and its tragic singer. (Audio / Visual Material 1).

My embodied practice combined with Harrington's (2000) formula for the order of songs helped map out a dramatic arc for the work. This combination of embodied and new knowledge dictated how I could take the audience with me. I would build the dramatic tension from an expository up-tempo opening number through to potential songs for the catharsis and denouement. Ideas regarding the appropriate placement of unusual or neglected songs were growing. Links between the song choices and the biographical stories I deemed meaningful to shift perception were emerging. What was becoming evident however was that a purely chronological telling of Garland's life story seemed impossible.

Rather than admitting defeat in my role as the objective biographer, I reconsidered what biographical meanings could be derived from the inclusion of Garland's daughter's advice in Harrington's cabaret handbook. This set me on a path of imaginative 'what ifs'. I began to create a relationship between my embodied knowledge of what makes for a theatrically satisfying dramatic arc, my Garland biographical data, and the role of the biographer as a presenter of 'truth'. Over a two-month period I mulled over these questions:

1. If Minnelli learned much of her craft from her mother, could the advice she gives in Harrington's handbook be Garland's advice?
2. If it is Garland's advice, could it have biographical significance?
3. What if the biographical significance is that Garland would choose to tell her own story, her autobiographical retrospective, according to material that would "take her audience with her"?
4. If Garland would dismiss chronology in favour of taking an audience with her, would the biographer be presenting biographical truth if she ignores Garland's artistic advice?
5. What if the performance of biography must include performing the way the biographical subject would perform. That is, not only performing her vocal and physical behaviours but also performing her artistic choices?
6. If the biographer performs according to the way the biographical subject performs her own artistic choices, wouldn't she then be telling the truth?

In response to these questions, I was obliged to dismiss the modernist chronological context in order to perform the 'truth' of this particular biographical subject. The context could finally be settled upon: *Ms. Garland at Twilight* could now logically begin with a song from the middle of her career and then flow freely back and forth in time. Both songs and stories would be unified by their placement in the dramatic arc of the whole. The audience would experience her presence live onstage and experience how she could craft a dramatic arc in her work. In this way, I could take an audience with me and they could learn the 'truth' about Garland. My Garland accomplishment narrative could be accepted as probable and possible.

At last my practitioner ‘self’ and my objective biographer ‘self’ were cooperating. It was time to take the play drafting process from the index card phase toward a draft that members of my creative team could examine.

***Putting It Together: index cards, interior landscaping and third person narrations***

In the process of doing my Dramaturgical Research, Character Research and Skills Preparation I noted material with potential for inclusion in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* on Index Cards. On each index card I wrote an idea for a monologue, a song, or stage business to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. Each card represented a piece of biographical information relating to key times and events in her professional life: her training, her mentors, her collaborators, and advice she may have for actors. These cards included information regarding where I sourced the idea. For example, whether the idea emerged from an episode of the Garland television show, a written biography, or a YouTube clip. As this collection of index cards grew I grouped them into three focused codes: ‘Text’, ‘Song’, ‘Bit’. The ‘Text’ cards included all the Garland verbatim quotes and the stories about Garland that could be crafted into monologues; ‘Song’ included the standards, unusual and neglected songs; and ‘Bit’ included the Garland stage business that made her unique as a performer. Business such as her habit of changing costume on stage, making her accompanist help with her shoes, and forgetting lyrics for dramatic effect. (Appendix 6.1).

By literally shuffling through the three groups of cards I imagined how relationships could form between a Text card, a Song card and a Bit card to create units of dramatic action. For example, I imagined how the first unit of action could be structured if I used ‘Song Card - *Born in a Trunk*’, ‘Text Card - keeping her trunk full of memories’, ‘Bit Card - pulling old costumes and props out of her trunk’, ‘Text Card - her first memory of performing’, and ‘Text Card - how she established her stage name’ (Appendix 6.2). The song came from her 1954 film *Star Is Born*, the bit was stage business observed on her television show. The first text card was verbatim data from an episode of her television show, the second text card was verbatim data from a written biography, and the third text card was data from two separate biographical sources relating to her name change from Gumm to Garland. Each unit of action was envisaged in accordance with this card shuffling approach.

As ideas for units of action grew I did not write them down, preferring instead to shape a possible running order of units in my imagination. This phase of the drafting process is what I call my ‘interior landscaping’ phase. I metaphorically plant seeds of ideas, watch them grow, and prune or manicure them until I can see a satisfying landscape. Once the landscape of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* was clear in my imagination I pinned the index cards to a noticeboard following the shape I had landscaped (Appendix 6.3). The disused cards were left in a pile for possible use in Cycle Two and Three of the project.

Using the visual aid of the noticeboard, I then drafted a version of the script as a third person narration. For example, the first unit reads as:

*Born in a Trunk* – only verses 2, 3 and 4 therefore ending with “But it’s all in the game and the way you play and you’ve got to play the game you know, when you’re born in a trunk at the Princess Theatre in Pocatello, Idaho”.

Judy Garland explains that that isn’t exactly how she came into show business but that this is her trunk that has traveled with her and has so many memories. Pulls something out of the trunk that’s Christmassy and moves into the story of her first performance of *Jingle Bells*. A joke about doing the Gumm/Glum Sisters act and into explaining that she got to choose her own name. (*Ms. Garland at Twilight* Draft #1, May 2013).

The third person narrative approach transformed the Text cards of disparate information into coherent short stories and became my guide as I moved toward crafting the stories into monologues. (Audio / Visual Material 2).

### ***The Garland Monologues: a relay between the studio and the study***

Some monologues were relatively easy to write as I simply linked pieces of Garland verbatim data together to form short stories about her work as an artist. To ensure the pieces flowed I spent time in the studio alone, in character as Garland, speaking the text and making decisions about blocking. Other monologues however required an approach that found me in a relay between studio work and study work. That is, moving between working in the studio and in my study. This relay approach was used when the monologues needed to unify a series of Text cards detailing stories sourced from myriad Garland biographies, newspaper articles and the like.

In my study I went through a process of reading the sources of information noted on the cards and reading the third person short story I had written in Draft # 1. This ensured I could remember all the events of the story. In the studio, I would try to tell the story in my own words, and then in character as Garland. Thus, bridging the gap between my sensory recall of the story and Garland's possible connection to the story. This process became key to finding Garland's personal experience of the story and how she would tell it in her own words. I returned to my study to write up each monologue once the sources of the story began to flow as one and I began to make choices about my embodiment of Garland.

### ***Disrupting the Tragedy by Omitting the Tragedy: feedback on Draft #2***

Each monologue, song, and bit was structured into units of action. These units of action flowed along a dramatic arc in order to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. Yet my major tactic for disruption only became evident once my director read Draft #2 of the script in May 2013. He made it clear I was attempting to disrupt the tragedy narrative by omitting the tragedy narrative. Each unit of action focused on positive experiences, relationships and achievements. Even when the units referenced moments of hardship or sadness, the action was still directed towards revealing Garland as the hero rather than the victim of her own story. Where was the dramatic conflict in the through-line of the action?

My embodied practice dictated that the answer to this question would emerge in the studio. I would plot the performance of the biographical material through studio rehearsals with my creative team rather than through written study work.

### ***Building the conflict: plotting actions through studio trial and error***

Throughout the drafting process I had commenced meeting with the musical director Morgan Chalmers and performer Patrick Dwyer. In our discussions it was agreed that Chalmers' role was to act 'as if' he was Garland's most celebrated musical director and accompanist Mort Lindsey. In this way, he was to arrange the songs for piano in a manner that mirrored Lindsey's orchestral style. He was also required to accompany my version of Garland during the performance of the play. Dwyer's role was to perform two song and dance numbers with my Garland, firstly 'as if' he was a drag queen fan of Garland's and secondly 'as if' he was a fan of the classic *We're a*

*Couple of Swells* routine from the Astaire and Garland film *Easter Parade* (Freed & Walters, 1948). By the time we started rehearsals for the play, using Draft #2, Chalmers had started arranging the numbers and working with me on how to sing them ‘as if’ I was Garland. In turn, Dwyer had started choreographic rehearsals with our choreographer Alison Vallette and I. Needless to say, a working relationship had been established with my co-performers by the time we entered the studio to plot the performance action of each unit with the director Lewis Jones.

Focusing on each unit at a time, Jones would encourage us to experiment or play with the script, exploring a range of physical actions and interaction choices. To assist in finding the conflict in each unit he would ask questions including: what is Garland’s objective here; what obstacles are in her way at this moment; what is the subtext in this situation? With each run of the unit we would adapt our acting choices, and musical underscoring choices, in an attempt to answer the myriad questions posed.

This playful examination of each moment resulted in the editing of some monologues, the addition of dialogue, and the inclusion of props or costumes that could highlight moments of conflict but disrupt the tragedy narrative. For example, the verbatim text “my sisters, they were old pros” evolved into “my sisters, they were old hands” due to Jones’ concern that a contemporary audience would relate the phrase “old pros” to prostitution rather than professional performers. This could lead them to misunderstand the influence Garland’s sisters had over her choice of career.

To build conflict we improvised a moment of disagreement between Garland and her accompanist. In this way, we could support the view of Garland as emotionally unpredictable and demanding without reinforcing the drug-addled version of her story. This moment aimed to make the biography perform more like ‘a warts and all’ retelling rather than a “Disneyfication” (Fallon as cited in Kehoe, 2001, p. 373) of the interaction between Garland and her colleagues. I did follow up our improvisations with a scripted version. However, to be sure we maintained the impulsivity in this moment of conflict we agreed never to learn the lines. Rather, we allowed the relationship Chalmers and I had developed throughout rehearsals to be

our guide in the playing of the moment. (Audio / Visual Material 3 and 4 to note the textual ‘fluidity’ of this unit of action).

Finally, to cite the well-known stories of her addictions but disrupt them in performance, we decided to litter the concert playing space with ‘temptations’. On the table we placed alcohol, a glass, cigarettes and an ashtray. Next to the piano we placed a doctor’s bag filled with pill bottles and hotel mini-bar bottles. We explored creating conflict by re-presenting Garland in relation to the items responsible for her demise. Instead of succumbing to them, in this version of her life story, Garland is able to acknowledge but ignore them because she is working.

The more we explored the biographical material I had shaped into a play, the easier it became to plot into our scripts and bodies, the acting choices our director believed would convey ‘truth’. That is, probable and possible characterizations, motivations, and conflict, to drive the through-line of the action and shift audience perception. As we rehearsed these plotted actions, building performance commitment to each psycho-physical action, it became clear to me a performed biography had the potential to communicate a biographer’s intent more powerfully than a written biography. By performing ‘as if’ I was Garland, by telling the stories ‘as if’ they came from my own life, I could make the biographer invisible but omnipotent.

***The Biographer’s Invisible Authorial Voice: hiding inside the biographical subject***

As noted in Chapter Two, an objective biographer uses carefully selected data from the biographical subject’s life to present a cohesive reading of the subject. Through extensive archiving this biographer becomes the expert. In writing the life story, this biographer becomes invisible: any intrusion on the biographical pools of data is hidden through the presentation of the ‘facts’. Like this type of biographer, my extensive archiving allowed me to become the expert on Garland’s life. This gave me the ability to select the material and shape the way in which the facts would be presented. The drafting and rehearsal process was collaborative by nature but as the expert, I had the ability to veto an idea if it failed to match the biographical data I had collated. Thus, in the creation of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* I posit I behaved in the modernist biographical tradition, establishing my authorial yet invisible voice over the life story of Garland.



In the performance of modernist biography I discovered the biographer's intrusion is not the only thing that can be hidden. To perform a seemingly factual account of the life story, the biographer's physical and vocal self can be hidden from the view of the audience, transformed by that of the subject. Chapter Two highlights how the biographer-biographical performer Naomi Price used the opening monologue in *Rumour Has It: 60 Minutes Inside Adele*, to tell her audience that she was "inside Adele". This allowed the audience to know the performance of Adele was not a 'truthful' biographical presentation of the artist Adele but Price's own construction. As the objective biographer I chose not to indicate my construction to the audience. Instead, through my acting preparation I was able to transform into the biographical subject and metaphorically hide inside Garland for the duration of the play. (Figure 6).

In the creative development showings of the play I found that hiding inside the vocal, physical and emotional choices of Garland, allowed the audience to forget about me as the biographer. The test audiences empathized with Garland and the stories she shared with them in real time. Feedback such as "I felt like you were talking to me" and "I was struck by how important the trunk was to her" (critical response process feedback, June 18, 2013) told me my performance of Garland was convincing enough for an audience to accept my construction as fact. Hiding inside Garland, consequently confirmed my expert status as the objective biographer.

Who could argue with my construction when an audience experienced it 'as if' it was Garland herself doing the story telling? I was confident then the goal to shift perception could be achieved through the performance of my version of Garland's life story.

## ***Part Two: Performing modernist biographical theatre and shifting perception***

### ***Mission Accomplished: shifts in audience perception***

Alison Vallette, the choreographer of both *The Boy From Oz* and *Ms. Garland at Twilight* states:

I think *The Boy From Oz* – I mean your role as Judy in *The Boy From Oz* was very scripted obviously and very specifically I guess direction has to be guided by the script. So your role as Judy in *The Boy From Oz* was completely different to your role in *Twilight*. I could see the development or the change in your perceptions of her...the change between the written Judy, in a written play, and the Judy that you had perceived and created for yourself (personal communication, June 18, 2015)

As a member of the creative team on both Garland related projects Vallette was privy to the development of my version of Garland. She was keenly aware of how my archival research and embodied practice allowed me to shift from the playwright Enright's tragic version of Garland to my Garland accomplishment narrative. The audience members who attended *Ms. Garland at Twilight* were obviously not cognizant of my intentional shift. They attended the production with their "life world knowledge" of Garland. However, an analysis of the data collected from the eighty-seven questionnaires completed directly after experiencing the play suggests that *Ms. Garland at Twilight* shifted perception of the historical figure.

Eighty-two percent of those who completed the questionnaire had a knowledge of Garland prior to attending the play. Thus, they came to the production with their own perceptions of the role tragedy played in Garland's life. After viewing the production, 75% of those surveyed believed their perception of Garland had shifted. Below, in monologue form, is the audience's explanation of this shift. The material that forms the monologue is verbatim audience data representing the responses of all age and gender groupings. The monologue confirms that performance can shift perception of a biographical subject:

I have watched a number of bios that focus on her troubled later years, this was refreshing – we could see her vast connection to a Hollywood that has now disappeared – her place in a history at a particular time. It was great to focus on her work ethic and how much she enjoyed her work. It explained how talented she really was – a brilliant Artist and a person.

A more holistic view of her. It highlighted her enormous talent, which the present generation may not be aware of because her death seems to have overshadowed her life. I had always assumed she was unhappy and had a tragic life. However she obviously had a very fulfilling life...she wasn't just a tragic child star or tragic figure. You have studied her life and showed her to be different to how the media and pop culture have lead us to believe. I was 'hung up' on the tragedy of her life – The book, movies, media portray her as this victim but I feel so differently as a result of this production.

It made her appear a happy rather than a tragic person interested in and loving life...she wasn't as passive to her situation as is sometimes conveyed. She chose her own destiny. A lady totally accomplished with all the fragility of life and its challenges. Not just an alcoholic. As was portrayed in a recent performance early this year at QPAC (*referring to the QTC production of End of the Rainbow with Christen O'Leary*).

Want to go home now and listen to her, rediscover her (audience questionnaires, September 4, 2013).

The 25% of the audience who did not register a shift in perception of Garland after viewing the production fell into two groups. Firstly, those who I categorize as the Preaching to the Converted group, they already recognized Garland's artistry by rating Talented Artist as number 1 on the questionnaire. The second group, categorized as the Status Quo group, prefers to support the dominant narrative:

I would like to believe Bernadette's final plea that she be remembered as a woman who was happy, contented and who loved her work. This is very difficult when considered beside the overwhelming representation of her as a tragic self-destructive "star" (audience questionnaires, Female 51 – 70, September 4, 2013).

The final plea referred to above is verbatim Garland data (Audio / Visual Material 5). Garland's words and my performance may not have convinced this small group to shift their perception. Nevertheless the live experience, whereby the audience was interacting with Garland 'as if' she was really in the space with them, affected most of the audience's understanding of the biographical subject. The visceral or lived experience of biographical performance disrupted the audience's view of Garland as a victim and transformed her into someone with whom they could empathise rather than pity.

### ***Characterization: biographical truth through visceral experience***

A picture of the audience's view of the biographical form emerged by comparing the questionnaire data collected after the performance of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* with my Literature Review of the form. The questionnaire data suggests that an audience expects a written biography to be an in-depth examination of the biographical subject that includes facts, figures, statistics and thick descriptions. Those who completed the questionnaire recognize that written biographies are only as accurate as the biographer's ability to research and make sense of "what happened" and "the point to it all" (White, 1973, p. 11). Subsequently, the audience acknowledges the biographer's intrusion on the biographical pools of data. A number of audience members do not enjoy reading biographies, finding the process of reading the life of an individual "boring" (audience questionnaires, Male 18 – 30, September 4, 2013).

Alternatively, according to the results of the questionnaire, performed biographies are expected to be entertaining. Again it is acknowledged that the biographer's script will be the result of a degree of intrusion on the biographical data. Interestingly, a pattern in the data suggests that due to the biographer's hidden agenda, it is the job of the actor to be 'truthful'. Thus, characterization, rather than facts and figures is key to the form. A collection of verbatim quotes from the audience clarifies the job of the actor in biographical theatre. In the performance of the biographical subject the actor must "step into the person's shoes" (audience questionnaires, Female 31 – 50, September 4, 2013), see "through their eyes" (audience questionnaires, Female 31 – 50, September 4, 2013) and "capture the essence of the person" (audience questionnaires, Female 51 – 70, September 4, 2013), so the audience will see "into their soul" (audience questionnaires, Male 18 – 30, September 4, 2013). It would seem that the actor must thereby make metaphorical actions such as stepping, seeing and capturing part of their embodiment and performance process. In this way, the audience will be able to believe the biography is a "true representation of how the person would want the world to see them" (audience questionnaires, Female 31 – 50, September 4, 2013).

Those surveyed believed my characterization. They were affected by my performance of the biographical subject. Their real time experience of Garland shifted their perception of the icon, transforming her into a "real person", separate

from the tragic characterization. Again in monologue form, I give voice to the audience to demonstrate their shift:

The extraordinary characterization – never fell and was amazingly true to Judy. Bern captured Judy beautifully – voice, physical habits, mannerisms. She WAS Judy Garland: authentic, believable.

It was touching. Completely compelling and moving. Made me laugh and cry. I felt throughout.

The production gave insight into the history and mind of Judy Garland and presented her as a personality independent of her stage persona. I came to know something of the inner person rather than public perception. She became more real. I feel like I understand her from her point of view, as a person – not just a “star”. Loved seeing her rawness. Not her as performer – but person. She came alive as a person.

I feel like the performance would have been exactly what the performer would have wanted to share about her life had she been able to come back and do so.

(audience questionnaires, September 4, 2013)

Using life writing strategies that resemble those of the objective biographer in association with strategies emerging from my embodied practice I believe it is possible to shift perception of an historical figure. The audience survey data presented above suggests the performance of the biography disrupted their “life world knowledge” of Garland. Thus, by performing the biographical subject I had discovered under the carpet, the new accomplishment narrative was deemed acceptable by the audience. *Ms. Garland at Twilight* viscerally affected the audience, stimulated their empathy and thereby challenged them to rediscover the biographical subject.

The audience did not accept the new narrative when I veered from the modernist form for one unit of action in *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. Audience empathy turned to confusion because I mistakenly used what is recognized in this study as a postmodernist biographical theatre device.

***Don't Mess With My Modernist Biographical Form: audience alienation is a drag***

Very early in the process of developing a biographical archive I discovered the Garland quote “always be a first rate version of yourself and not a second rate version of somebody else”. For some practitioners this quote may hold no

significance but it concerned me. I worried whether my intention to embody Garland for performance could be construed as becoming a second rate version of somebody else. With myriad Garland impersonators already flooding the market with Tribute Acts, I questioned how I could possibly be more than just another second rate version of Judy. My embodied practice told me if I suppressed these fears they would block my ability to create an authentic characterization of Garland. Instead, I knew I needed to name my fears and use them as stimulus for creation.

Viewing episodes of Garland's television show on DVD I discovered a segment whereby the performers Ethel Merman and Barbra Streisand accompanied Garland in singing *There's No Business Like Show Business* (*The Judy Garland Show*, 2001). I noted the segment on an Index Card because I saw theatrical potential in Merman's stage business. She was revealed sitting in the audience, interrupting Streisand and Garland with her booming singing voice, and then joined them onstage. On another Index Card I noted the verbatim Garland data that Van Zandt uses in his play *The Property Known as Garland*. This data tells the story of how Garland and her most celebrated male impersonator Jim Bailey played a trick on an audience. The audience thought they were watching Bailey impersonate Garland live in concert but in fact they were watching Garland. They did not recognize the difference. This story appealed to me due to its relationship to my "second rate version" fears. It also seemed to acknowledge that the 'self' known as Garland is fluid and open to interpretation. Shuffling the Index Cards I noticed a possible relationship between the Merman and Bailey cards. I asked myself, what if a male impersonator Garland interrupts the onstage Bernadette Garland. What if he attempts to claim ownership of the Garland identity by coming onto the stage and singing a song? Additionally I asked: what if the male impersonator Garland uses the first rate / second rate quote as part of his fight for ownership? These two questions allowed me a way to acknowledge my fears and, in turn, disrupt the notion of Garland having a tragic identity.

I sourced scripted dialogue from the Garland film *I Could Go On Singing* (Millar et al, 1963), in which her character is complaining about her troubled life as a singer, to use for the male impersonator's move from the audience to the stage. The bitter angst ridden song *By Myself* (Schwartz & Dietz, 1937) included in the film seemed to

support this troubled worldview and stood in opposition to the joyful standards *Come Rain or Shine* (Arlen & Mercer, 1946) and *The Trolley Song* (Martin & Blane, 1944). So in collaboration with the musical director Chalmers, a medley was arranged that allowed the male impersonator Garland to sing of his troubles in competition with the Bernadette Garland singing of her joy. Thus, I was able to shape a unit of action whereby the male impersonator Garland embodied the tragic identity in a duel with the Bernadette Garland artist identity. We called this unit the Dueling Divas and it aimed to enact the deconstruction and ultimate dismissal of the tragic identity.

I realized using the first rate / second rate quote as his parting, confrontational words may interrupt the audience's sustained belief in me 'as if' I was Garland. I would be drawing attention away from the biographical subject toward the biographer as the perceiving subject. Feedback from the June 2013 Creative Response Process highlighted this danger. Nevertheless, I believed I needed this moment as a playful wink to the audience. A comic moment of alienation at the half way point of the play to be sure the audience were not just being entertained but were engaged in a conversation with me about the tragedy narrative. Unfortunately the majority of audience members did not recognize this wink. (Audio / Visual Material 6).

Giving voice to the audience by means of the dialogue form, what follows articulates their collective response to the Dueling Divas unit of action:

A: I didn't really understand where the bloke in the dress fitted into the Garland story. Who was he? What was the significance of this? Is this to do with the Gay Icon?

B: I didn't understand the drag element – who / why? Not clear to me You gave some clues (I think) but I was too slow to pick up on them. Obviously don't know sufficient background.

C: Why the alter ego?

D: Didn't do justice to the performance. Could be refined – perhaps needed more of a set up.  
(audience questionnaires, September 4, 2013)

It is possible to conclude it is unwise to stray from the dramatic form that has been established in a biographical performance. Interrupting the relationship I had created with the audience in the first half of the play did not encourage the audience to

consider notions of identity, tragedy and perception. The aim of the moment of alienation failed. Clearly, a modernist approach to biographical performance cannot support the use of the alienation device. The alienation device draws attention from the biographical subject towards the perceiving subject. This device should, however, be supported by a postmodernist approach. The perceiving subject must be acknowledged in biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought. Thus, while the Dueling Divas unit of action did not fit with the aims and strategies of Cycle One of the project it provided a way into Cycle Two.

### ***Conclusion***

*Ms. Garland at Twilight* was created in an attempt to shift perception of Garland by disrupting the tragedy narrative evident in extant Garland biographical theatre works. Modernist biographical theatre-making devices were used. In role as the objective biographer, I borrowed from the modernist life writers and drew on my embodied practices to create a new biographical play that embodied a viscerally truthful version of Garland. In collaboration with my creative team the performance of the play was successful in shifting the perception of 75% of the audience questioned on September 4, 2013.

This chapter has described how and why I went in search of the “things” that had accumulated around the name Garland that are rarely remembered or performed. I sought to create an original biographical theatre work from the stance of the objective biographer and thereby shift audience perception. Chapter Five reports on Cycle Two of the project whereby the biographical play transforms from *Ms. Garland at Twilight*<sup>14</sup> to *Judy Strikes Back*. The chapter sees the neologism ‘khorobiognosis’ emerge from the data. Thus, the process of creating, embodying and performing *Judy Strikes Back* confirms that biographical theatre can shift audience perception of an historical figure.

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<sup>14</sup> For a virtual experience of the play, see: Plays 1a. and 1b; Audio / Visual Material 7 and 8; and Appendix 7.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: *Judy Strikes Back*: biographical performance in an authentic voice**

### ***Introduction***

Bohr: ...measurement is not an impersonal event that occurs with impartial universality. It's a human act, carried out from a specific point of view in time and space, from the one particular viewpoint of a possible observer...there is no precisely determinable objective universe...Only within the limits determined by our relationship with it. Only through the understanding lodged inside the human head. (Frayn, 2010, p. 73)

This shift in understanding of the role of the human point of view in science that Bohr refers to in the play *Copenhagen*, also affected the role of the biographer. The biographer could no longer appear as an impartial objective observer of the biographical subject. Rather, the biographer's relationship with the subject became central to understanding what life story could be told. Canton (2011) contends this shift in focus from the biographical subject to that of the perceiving subject has given rise to the use of meta-biographical devices in biographical theatre. Playing the role of both the objective biographer and the biographical subject in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* I demonstrated that an audience's perception of an historical figure could be shifted. The audience was provided with a visceral experience of Garland 'resurrected' rather than constructed. In Cycle Two I set out to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative evident in extant biographical plays by acknowledging the presence of the perceiving subject. Thus, *Ms. Garland at Twilight* was adapted so the subjective biographer's point of view was included, or performed, in the narrative. Additionally, theatrical devices were woven into *Ms. Garland at Twilight* to direct audience attention toward how the past was being evoked in performance. In this way, *Judy Strikes Back* emerged from what Bohr explains as "the understanding" of Garland "lodged inside" my "human head".

This chapter draws on my reflective journals, creative team interviews, creative writing exercises, script drafts and audience questionnaires. It articulates how I created the biographical play *Judy Strikes Back*, how I embodied the roles of Garland and the Subjective Biographer, and how the performance of the play shifted audience perception. Part One of the chapter discusses the creating and embodying processes.

Part Two of the chapter confirms the audience shift in perception. In this way, Chapter Five highlights how biographical theatre can become ‘khorobiognosis’.

### ***Part One: Creating and embodying postmodernist biographical theatre***

#### ***Reflection Challenges: seeking the bigger story, my voice and the tragedy***

Cycle Two of the study began in November 2013. This cycle allowed me to “perch” (Mercer, 2009, p. 44) for several months. Like a bird perched on a tree branch, I took time out to reflect on the findings from the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* project. This also compelled me to seek out more “shiny bits of other people’s thinking” (Cameron, 2012, p. 54) to help develop the postmodernist version of the Garland biographical theatre work.

The challenge from my director to find the story “bigger than Garland” still existed. Jones also challenged me to position my own autobiographical story in the midst of the Garland story:

I’m interested in getting performers on stage...as themselves, because that’s what’s interesting... We are not encouraged to be ourselves, and less and less are we encouraged to be ourselves. We are encouraged to create some version of ourselves, that’s perceived from the outside. Implied in that is you can be whatever you want to be because as you are, you are somehow fundamentally inadequate... Implied in that is perhaps that you need to be something better. ...kids want to be stars. They’re not actually going “I want to be an artist”... Many of them don’t have their own voice.  
(L. Jones, personal communication, October 29, 2015)

The challenges to uncover the bigger story and to reveal my own voice in *Judy Strikes Back* allowed for the positioning of the subjective biographer inside the biographical theatre work. In accordance with the Research Design, the director gave me a ‘way in’ to creating, embodying and performing a biographical theatre work impacted by postmodernist thought.

Two out of the eighty-seven *Ms. Garland at Twilight* audience questionnaire participants provided me with another challenge. Like my director during Cycle One of the study, they recognized that I had omitted the tragedy narrative from the life story. They wanted to know why I had done this. The views of three people may not be significant for some practitioners or studies. However, my use of the Grounded

Theory method of comparative analysis to recognize patterns in the data made this anomaly dramatically interesting to explore. Subsequently, a great deal of Cycle Two was spent reflecting upon my personal relationship with the role of tragedy in Garland's life story.

***Stream of Consciousness: acting, biographies, and what not to do discoveries***

To assist in this process I used stream of consciousness writing in my reflective journal. It became clear I had read biographies as a teenager to learn about acting. These biographies were my first introduction to the tragedy narrative in the telling of a female life story. The stream of consciousness writing highlighted my personal frustration with this narrative and its relationship to actresses:

Discovering the films *Gone with the Wind* and *Waterloo Bridge* and falling in the love with the idea of becoming a great actress, I read Anne Edward's biography of Vivien Leigh. It was logical, I decided, to advance to reading about Leigh's husband. I selected just one volume of Laurence Olivier's autobiography. From memory, Edward's biography provided me with a tragedy narrative while Olivier did provide some insight into the process of becoming an actor.

...During my undergraduate degree I came to own Anne Edward's biography of Judy Garland. Handed down to me by a classmate who exclaimed something along the lines of "every time you turn the page you wonder how much worse her life can get". I don't remember reading it for the tragedy but to know something of an actress who I appreciated...It became my jumping off point for understanding what a biography can do and how it can do it.

...As an actor trainer I advise students to read auto/biographies of the actors they admire to gain insight into how one can become and be an actor. I've even suggested to students that this reading could provide them with a draft plan for a career trajectory, i.e. look at how this actor got to where s/he is today to begin planning their own journey to "success" (whatever definition of success they select is the individual student's business). At times I have wished that somebody told me this when I was an undergrad. Then I remember that I did do this instinctively, it was just unfortunate that the Leigh and Garland biographies' tragedy plotting patterns warned me against acting for fear of madness, drug addiction and an early demise and provided me with very little insight into their training, teachers, processes and career management strategies. Okay, I admit these biographies could be perceived as valuable in the "what *not* to do" category but from anecdotal memory, there are so many actors' lives that could fit the tragedy narrative that surely there has got to be some "what *to* do" stories that can be salvaged from all the doom and gloom.

...I suppose I want to tell what *to* do life stories, to learn from the actors who have come before me and for the benefit of my acting students. My life

philosophy seems to be emerging as “shit happens to everyone, just because it happens to people in the spotlight doesn’t give an audience the right to define their whole life as a tragedy”. I hate the “s/he lived such as tragic life” line. To me it should read: “it’s a tragedy for me to miss out on experiencing more of his/her work”. (reflective journal, February 10, 2014)

My frustration with the tragedy narrative seemingly stemmed from biographies written by Edwards. Thus, I examined the work of three different biographers through their treatments of the actresses Agnes Moorehead (Tranberg: 2007), Elizabeth Montgomery (Pilato: 2012) and Marilyn Monroe (Steinem: 1986). The Moorehead and Montgomery biographies warned me of the danger of allowing biography to become hagiography. The biographers’ point of view as fans of the actresses was so present in the work that it was difficult to believe their constructions of the biographical subjects. The work of Tranburg and Pilato also told me that a lack of understanding of the career of the biographical subject can lead to suspect readings of the events and relationships in the subject’s life. For example, Pilato posited that Montgomery had a problematic relationship with her veteran actor father because he criticized her acting work. As a practitioner I see a difference between criticizing and offering constructive criticism: to me, the father was helping, not hindering, his daughter. I recognized that Tranburg and Pilato were not the models of biography I wished to emulate to disrupt perceptions of Garland. So I moved onto Steinem’s work on the iconic tragic figure Monroe. I hoped Steinem’s reframing of the icon through a feminist lens would assist in providing clues as to why the tragedy narrative ‘sticks’ to certain actresses and how I could include my female voice in the retelling of the Garland life story.

***Steinem and Monroe: fancy rescuing the neglected child or the oppressed woman?***

Steinem (1986, p. 120) posits “when the past dies, there is mourning, but when the future dies our imaginations are compelled to carry on”. Icons such as Monroe endure because their premature deaths make us wonder what could have happened to them and what they could have achieved, if they had lived to old age. She contends the icons “hook into our deepest emotions of hope or fear, dream or nightmare of what our own fates might be” (Steinem, 1986, p. 120). Therefore we develop rescue fantasies in which we imagine ourselves as rescuers who provide the icons with happier endings. In Monroe’s case, Steinem (1986, p. 156) believes:

the moment she was gone, Monroe's vulnerability was no longer just a turn-on for men and an embarrassment for many women. It was a tragedy. Whether that final overdose was suicide or not, both men and women were forced to recognize the insecurity and private terrors that had caused her to attempt suicide several times before...Men who had never known her wondered if their love and protection might have saved her. Women who had never known her wondered if their empathy and friendship might have done the same.

Drawing attention to herself as the biographer, Steinem reminisces about her personal feelings watching Monroe films, meeting her at the Actor's Studio, and the ramifications of publishing an article about Monroe in her magazine *Ms*. In this way, Steinem makes visible her relationship to the Monroe tragedy narrative. She borrows on the work of the psychiatrist Missildine (as cited in Steinem, 1986, pp. 657-694) to paint Monroe as a product of childhood neglect, drawn to acting to create a fantasy identity. To illustrate her perception she quotes Monroe herself: "When you're a nobody, the only way to be somebody is to be somebody else" (Steinem, 1986, p. 694). Suggesting Monroe could not be saved in her time, Steinem posits Monroe's story of tragedy endures to assist in saving oppressed women today. The subjective lens through which the biographer perceived Monroe began to emerge for me. It prompted a reexamination of the lens through which I have constructed Garland.

The notion of the rescue fantasy intrigued me. I wondered whether my exercise in shifting perception had purely been an unconscious enactment of my desire to save Garland from her fateful overdose. Steinem's inclusion of Monroe's "nobody / somebody" quote also interested me. It seemed to relate in some way to the Garland "first rate version / second rate version" quote I had used unsuccessfully in *Ms*. *Garland at Twilight*. Finally, the idea that the Garland story could be used to help contemporary women appealed to me: I could create a biographical play for a "bigger" purpose than disrupting perceptions of Garland. The biographical theatre work could somehow disrupt women's perceptions of themselves. Over time, these ideas became part of my interior landscaping. As I approached the task of drafting *Judy Strikes Back* I asked: "what if the new play is about my unconscious / conscious attempt to rescue Garland but it's time to save the women in the world now".

(reflective journal, May 8, 2015)

Steinem no doubt had an effect on the development of *Judy Strikes Back*. However, as an actress myself, I posit the pathological relationship Steinem perceives between childhood neglect and acting is valid but simplistic. To suggest a woman becomes an actress because she was neglected seems to negate a woman's innate artistic impulses, her ambition, tenacity and desire to work. It was in directing a production of *Hedda Gabler* in April - June 2014 (Appendix 8) that I discovered a pathology, or theory, I could apply to Garland to shift perception of her as an icon of tragedy.

***Constructing a Theory to Explain Garland: Nietzsche, tragedy and the will to power***

Ibsen's nineteenth century realist drama *Hedda Gabler* (Ibsen, 1965) includes a forbidden relationship between the main character Hedda and her husband's colleague Lovborg. In their interactions, the god of wine is mentioned and Hedda dreams of Lovborg with vine leaves in his hair. To assist the actors build their lustful relationship, and to develop a costume design concept, I researched Dionysus the god of wine. Nietzsche's musings on Dionysus, and his adversary Apollo, provided a clue to a version of Garland I could construct: the life-affirming struggle between order and disorder these deities represent mirrored Garland's biographical details. From the control she could command over her acting choices to the lack of control evident in her drug abuse, and the lust for life she demonstrated throughout. I could envision Garland as an embodiment of this struggle. Yet I worried this meant I would be constructing Garland as an embodiment of Nietzsche's tragic vision. In this way, I would be contradicting my own goal of shifting perception away from tragedy towards accomplishment.

Undeterred, I found another clue in Nietzsche's conception of the will to power. He suggests we possess both "yes" and "no" instincts and argues "Industry, modesty, benevolence, temperance are just so many hindrances to a sovereign disposition, great inventiveness, heroic purposiveness, noble being-for-oneself" (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 196). His ideas reminded me of a Garland orchestrator / conductor Gordon Jenkins who stated in defense of Garland's unpredictable behaviour "An artist without temperament is more likely to end up as a plumber than a star" (as cited in Fricke, 2003, p. 216). I subsequently came to see Garland as both good and bad. Not

temperate but temperamental, and thereby capable of great inventiveness, heroic purposiveness and noble being-for-oneself.

This view of Garland complimented my aim to focus upon her artistic ability and skills. It made me see the potential for celebrating the notion of tragedy in the play rather than avoiding it. Instead of living a life dedicated to the will to good that only creates “ideal slaves” (Nietzsche, 1967, p. 195) Garland’s will to power allowed her to embody a true Dionysian state: “Dionysus cut to pieces is a promise of life: it is eternally reborn and comes back from destruction” (Brockett & Findlay, 1973, p. 145). Relating these discoveries back to Steinem’s rescue fantasy, I concluded “we don’t rescue her, [Garland] rescues us” (reflective journal, May 14, 2015). That is, through her work and her life Garland encouraged us to embrace our imminent destruction, value the life we have, and seek to gain creative mastery over ourselves. Unlike Steinem’s neglected child theory, this was a theory I could work with to explain my subjective understanding of Garland.

***Let the Drafting Begin: but what about poetic license?***

Throughout my Cycle Two investigations into the written biographies of actresses, material for *Judy Strikes Back* began to emerge. My stream of consciousness writing provided me with the phrase ‘shit happens to everyone’ which in time evolved into the original composition *Shit Happens to Us All*<sup>15</sup>. The possible relationship between Monroe’s “nobody / somebody” quote and Garland’s “first rate version / second rate version” quote stirred my interest in creating a Subjective Biographer character, who was on a crusade to rescue Garland from tragedy. This method for positioning the biographer inside the Garland story became key to the script drafting process. Moreover, the rescue conclusions drawn from my engagement with Nietzsche provided insight into the content of monologues, scenes and songs I wanted to create to disrupt the tragedy narrative. However, these investigations did not offer any clues into the degree of poetic license I could have over the biographical subject’s life story.

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<sup>15</sup> See pages 122-130 of this chapter for further details regarding the creation of this song.

*Consulting Audience Questionnaire Data: writing a pitch for a new life story*

In the early stages of Cycle Two I once again asked myself the core ‘what if’ question that had assisted in the creation of *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. What if Garland had recovered from her well-publicized addictions and went on a concert tour to commemorate her fiftieth birthday? In conference with my director, we considered the audience questionnaire data to assist in answering this question anew, and thus find a new way to shift perception of Garland. We gravitated toward comments in the data such as “I have never associated Judy with happy” (audience questionnaire, Female 31 – 50, September, 4, 2013) and “A happier her than I had imagined” (audience questionnaire, Female 31 – 50, September, 4, 2013). Our considerations lead to a working title for the play: *When Judy Got Happy*.

To assist in giving us a clear guide to the next phase of creative development I wrote a pitch, or a short outline, of the potential play:

It’s June 1972 and the rumours of Judy Garland’s death were greatly exaggerated.

Tonight she’s back to celebrate her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in style.

Fresh from a stint on Aunty Emm’s farm, that nasty bump on her head is all gone and Judy is ready to set the record...and herself...straight.

This is Garland in her own words and on her own terms, coming clean about her family, her career and the men she truly loved. Reunited with her musical director Mort Lindsey and guest starring some fella named Fred, Judy is ready to host a birthday party you’ll never forget.

From the director of the Matilda Award winning *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *Women in Voice 17 and 20*, Lewis Jones. Scripted by and starring Bernadette Meenach.

*When Judy Got Happy* is much more than a Garland comeback. It’s a resurrection.  
(reflective journal, November 23, 2012)<sup>16</sup>

My director and I agreed we were committing to the creation of a fictional play set in 1972, albeit filled with biographical data and Garland verbatim material. We recognized the Subjective Biographer character did not have a voice in this version

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 7 for the YouTube trailer for *When Judy Got Happy*. This trailer contains content from the dress rehearsal recording of *Ms. Garland at Twilight*.



of the story as yet. However, we trusted this period of “perching” would allow an answer to reveal itself. As the biographer, I knew I was agreeing to engage in a degree of poetic license over the Garland life story that unsettled me.

***Positioning the Subjective Biographer in the Story: too much poetic license?***

To deal with my discomfort over the possibility of distorting the life story of Garland by convincing an audience she did not die in 1969, I wrote a new pitch that moved the focus to a Subjective Biographer character:

It’s Toto Kendall’s forty-something birthday and what has she got to show for it? By this age Judy Garland had won an Oscar, sold out Carnegie Hall and starred in her own TV show. There’s nothing else to do but grab the pills and head for the bathroom right? An accidental overdose will finally make her famous right?

A bump on the head, a visitation from her Fairy Garland Mother and a trip down one hell of a rocky road will give her the answers she’s been seeking.

*When Judy Got Happy* breathes new life into the Garland legend and questions our notions of ambition, tragedy, and what it means to finally get over that rainbow. This all singing all dancing dark night of the soul is a coming out story for the little girl lost in all of us (reflective journal, December 2, 2012).

In this version of *When Judy Got Happy*, I envisioned building the Toto Kendall character in a way that borrowed from my own life and my relationship to the Garland legend. (Indeed, the character name was derived from the name of my first dog and the first street on which I lived). I would not perform as Garland, leaving that to Patrick Dwyer, who would play a version of Garland ‘as if’ she was a fairy godmother dedicated to rescuing, what Boyt (2009, p. 199) would call, the “bad fans” from despair. The journey of the play would borrow from *The Wizard of Oz* stories penned by Baum between 1900 and 1920. This play would see Garland help Toto overcome a series of obstacles until she is ready to see worth in her own life. In the climax Toto would sing in her own voice, free of the Garland worship that has held her captive most of her life. This version of *When Judy Got Happy* would thereby allow me to position myself as the biographer inside the play. It also provided me with an opportunity to use a large degree of poetic license because an audience would know it was a fictional story from the outset. However, I wondered

whether the use of so much poetic license would invalidate it as a piece of biographical theatre.

***Abandoning Garland to Poetic License: a new monologue takes shape***

It was the Empire Theatres' call for Expressions of Interest to audition for the Toowoomba production of *Women in Voice 21* that challenged me to abandon my fear of poetic license for a time. The audition brief explained:

The local vocalist will be chosen by audition and will work with *Women in Voice* founder Annie Peterson, Director Lewis Jones and Musical Director Stephen Russell to create their set for inclusion in the *Women in Voice* performance at the Empire Theatres on Wednesday 29 October 2014.

Each set usually consists of up to four songs brought together either through a common thread e.g. a theme, a composer, a vocalist – or through a narrative structure suited to a cabaret format.

Auditionees will be asked to prepare two contrasting songs and to provide sheet music in the correct key or backing track. Preference is given to the use of live accompaniment. An accompanist will be available or auditionees can provide their own.

Auditionees should be ready to discuss what form their set might take and the panel will be happy to discuss a number of options. (J. Wedmaier, personal communication, June 4, 2014)

Knowing I would be auditioning for my director I planned to use the audition as a form of creative development for *When Judy Got Happy*. In collaboration with my musical director Chalmers I would create a short set to test new material. The set would include a new Garland monologue and song 'as if' she was alive in 1972.

Firstly, I searched the internet to find information regarding what songs had been released in 1972. As I searched, I remained committed to my focus upon artistic accomplishment. Thus, I considered songs according to how they complimented my version of Garland. I discovered Helen Reddy's song *I Am Woman* (Burton & Reddy, 1971) was released in May 1972, but did not become a hit until December. My instincts told me the song had potential to shift perception of Garland. I drew on my biographical archive to confirm Garland never knew Reddy but her protégée Peter Allen did. Again I drew on my archive to ascertain that a Garland fiftieth birthday celebration concert would have to take place in June 1972. This information

allowed my interior landscaping to begin. I sculpted a monologue in my imagination that linked Garland to Reddy through Allen, in a time just after this feminist anthem was released but before it became popular. Remembering that Garland enjoyed introducing new or unusual songs on her television show, I discovered the objective of the monologue. Garland's monologue would explain she wanted to sing the song by this little known Australian, introduced to her by Allen, to reach a wider audience and thereby help make it a hit. I never wrote the monologue down, preferring to workshop my interior landscaping in the studio, in role as Garland. I became convinced I had included as much probable and possible information in the monologue to make an audience believe it was true rather than poetic license.

### ***Trickery with the Musical Director: creating a fictional Garland sound world***

Secondly, I asked Chalmers to arrange *I Am Woman* in a manner that would transform it from a simple 1970s pop song to a Garland classic. In this way, we could fool an audience into accepting an anachronistic song choice. Recalling this process Chalmers (personal communication, October 30, 2015) explains:

I tried to approach it as if Helen Reddy had written it in the '30s and that it was going to be that song that Garland had looked at and stayed away from because she thought I can't do that. I can't do that and then it gets to 1945 say and she says, no, I've just got to do this.

So I looked at the '30s and '40s and who the big composers were, and obviously Gershwin, his music at least is really, really popular by this moment. I thought, well who are some other big composers who are not necessarily still alive, but whose music is still very much at the forefront of world music? For me it was - there were elements of Edward Elgar...there's always a majesty to his music...

The other one was Rachmaninoff because Rachmaninoff, aside from being one of my favourite composers and musicians, his piano concertos really kicked off that 1940s sound world of every movie having this big piano thing...I thought, well if it's just going to be for piano, Rachmaninoff is the man to go to, to create something pianistic and in terms of harmonies, let's look at Gershwin's really sophisticated levels of harmony. Let's see how they fit together. So obviously the piano part became rather tricky, but using the big Rachmaninoff sonorities, really big chords, minus the arpeggios, but a lot of Rachmaninoff's piano writing is in that, coupling that with a Gershwin harmonic world.

Then when we get to that high point, I just decided to quote the Nimrod Variation from Elgar's Enigma variations...if we are going to take this song to that level of sophistication, let's put something in it for the absolute

quintessential musician who is sitting in the audience.

Then thinking well what about that person who is going to sit there with a scowl anyway because they don't like the song? What can I put in there? Yeah, in that big recapitulation, there is in amongst all the texture in the middle of piano part, a direct quote of the Nimrod variation.

I picked that one too because Elgar's Enigma variations were written as portraits of all of his friends. They're incredibly clever...the variation was for his good friend and publisher...and everyone said...why does he get such royal music? He's not royal and he's not regal, and he said, but he's very royal at heart.

I thought well that's kind of the one to put in there then because it just matched where it was going musically and the development of Judy's character...

With Chalmers accompanying me in the audition on July 12 2014, the performance of the new material was so convincing that our director wanted to know more about the relationship between Garland and Reddy. Both Chalmers and I delighted in our trickery, reminding Jones that Garland had been dead for three years by the time *I Am Woman* was released. But trickery it was.

To realize as the biographer and the biographical performer that I had the power to use poetic license to covertly distort Garland's life story was very problematic for me. My thoughts turned to Garland's children and the repercussions of representing their mother in a misleading biographical theatre work. Using my emotion memory I meditated on how I would feel if my mother's life was misrepresented.

***Determining the Limits to Poetic License: an encounter with Garland's daughter***

In September 2014 these feelings prompted a decision regarding the limits of my use of poetic license. After presenting at the Work-in-Progress Symposium at University of Queensland, a fellow delegate offered his assistance with the development of the play. He worked with Garland's daughter Lorna Luft and could act as conduit if I wished to communicate with her. Excited by this opportunity I set about devising a series of questions for Luft. To be sure I did not waste her time with questions she had already addressed, I reread her memoir. A particular passage halted my progress:

It is strange being the daughter of a screen idol, especially one who died so young. As one of a very small group of celebrities' children, I am reminded daily of my mother's life – and, of course, her death. When most people lose

a loved parent, they go through a process of grief and bereavement and then move on with their lives. When your parent is a public idol, you never really have a chance to lay that parent to rest...I'm still approached in public places by strangers who grab my hand or even my shoulders, sometimes with tears in their eyes, and offer their condolences as if my mother died last week instead of almost thirty years ago (Luft, 1998, pp. 23-24)

I contemplated how it would make me feel if I was prevented from grieving my mother. Thus, I decided not to become yet another fan reminding Luft of her loss. Instead, I committed to creating a play that would “massage” (Valentine as cited in Oades, 2010, pp. 59-63) biographical data for dramatic effect. However, it would not stray so far from my Garland archive as to warrant the work a piece of pure fiction. This decision also led to rejecting the *When Judy Got Happy* title in favour of *Judy Strikes Back*.

***Massaging the Biographical Data: a monologue illustrating the fact and the license***

The Irving Berlin monologue illustrates the degree of poetic license used in the creation of *Judy Strikes Back*:

*(JUDY collects her stool, and settles it near the piano. She sits, stretching her sore feet. While this is happening, MORT, black shoes in hand, goes to his bag that resembles an old-school doctor's bag. He sifts through sheet music, pills, and a bunch of yellow roses. He puts the black shoes in the bag, and pulls out a pair of ruby slippers. He helps JUDY put them on. She does a shoe “bit” here, enjoying the attention of her younger man MORT. Once he has managed to put her shoes onto her feet, JUDY gets on with the show)*

**JUDY:** The press likes to paint me as a woman who could never find the right man. But I've been very fortunate to have many wonderful and talented men in my life. I've worked with great song and dance men like Gene Kelly, and wonderful actors like Spencer Tracy, and ah ah I've had the great thrill of singing songs by some brilliant composers, like the darling Harold Arlen who wrote “Over the Rainbow”, and Mr Irving Berlin. You know, it was Irving Berlin who helped me trust my artistic choices as an actress.

Most of you, if you've seen the movies and television shows about me will know the horror stories about how when I was 26 I had a nervous breakdown and cut my wrist with a broken glass and caused so many delays on that dreadful film “The Pirate” that it didn't make a profit for MGM and they were all scared that I'd ruin their next film “Easter Parade” if my therapy at the sanitarium hadn't worked. They really like telling that story. Now there's another story from that time that they don't like to tell so *I'm* going to tell it.

The first time I read the script of “Easter Parade”, I knew the ending was all wrong...I was just heart-broken: this beautiful Irving Berlin music and all this glorious MGM Technicolour was just going to go down the drain with this cockamamie ending! So I went up to the studio executives – Mr Berlin was there too – and I really laid it on them, kindly but firmly, about this bummer of an ending. Well, they listened; then I was told: “That’s our department!” So my dander got ruffled a bit. “Wait a minute,” I said. “This is not the time to be concerned with departments. I’m in this film, too, you know...and we’re all going to be in trouble unless that ending is changed!” Then I explained to them what was to me a very simple script solution, but they just repeated themselves and shouted: “Out!” Well, Mr Berlin had just stood there quietly, taking all this in. Then he finally opened his mouth: “That little girl happens to be right, you know. Her suggestions are exactly on the nose”. They started to protest again, and this beautiful gentleman simply said, “We can do it her way, or you can do it without Irving Berlin”. In a matter of hours, we had the new ending, and everybody was smiling again. And my darling Irving and I made that movie the highest grossing musical of the year, and that’s nothing to be sneezed at, there were 99 musicals released that year. Now how’s that for a woman who was supposed to be so difficult? (Play 2a, pp. 99-101)

There are several elements in this monologue that can be considered factual. There are photographs and television footage of Garland sitting on a stool, wearing a red-feathered costume just as I wore in *Judy Strikes Back*. She included a shoe changing ‘bit’ with her young male accompanist during live concerts in a manner we aimed to re-present. Garland was addicted to pills, her favourite flowers were yellow roses, and red shoes have become synonymous with her film *The Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy & Fleming, 1939). The male artists mentioned are only a handful of those she worked with. However, they were selected due to my creative team’s belief they had currency with a contemporary audience. Sourced from her television show and her Carnegie Hall concert, the verbatim phrases “ah ah I’ve had the great thrill of singing songs by some brilliant composers” and “the darling Harold Arlen” were massaged to create a new sentence. “The first time I read the script of ‘Easter Parade’” through to “In a matter of hours, we had the new ending, and everybody was smiling again” is verbatim Garland data sourced from Fricke (2003, p. 156). The statistical information regarding the success of *Easter Parade* in 1948 is reported by the Internet Movie Database (*Most Popular Musical Titles Released 1948-01-01 to 1948-12-31*, n.d).

Poetic license framed the monologue and gave voice to the Subjective Biographer's aim to shift perception from tragedy to accomplishment. The opening line was written to alert an audience to the possibility that Garland had been misrepresented. The line "You know, it was Irving Berlin who helped me trust my artistic choices as an actress" demonstrated the Subjective Biographer's construction of Garland as an artist who achieved success due to the lessons she learnt collaborating with great talents of the time. Including the 'horror stories' reinforced the Garland tragedy narrative evident in extant Garland biographical plays. However, the line "They really like telling that story. Now there's another story from that time that they don't like to tell so *I'm* going to tell it" set up the Subjective Biographer's intention to re-story the twenty-six year old Garland. The statistical information was massaged into the verbatim story to emphasize to a contemporary audience the positive financial impact of her battle with the studio executives. In this way, I could highlight Garland as an accomplished female artist rather than a victim of the will of the studio system. To maintain a sense of Garland's impulsivity in performance, I allowed myself a degree of poetic license by altering the phrasing, intonation, stress, and even some words at times. (Audio / Visual Material 9).

### ***Theory Gives Way to Practice: returning to the Greeks for guidance***

Cycle Two investigations of poetic license led me down a number of different creative development paths. In my role as the Subjective Biographer I became aware of the degree of poetic license I was comfortable with in order to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. Massaged biographical monologues emerged from these investigations. During this cycle another creative development path led me toward an understanding of how I could include tragedy in the new version of the Garland biographical theatre work. As noted in Chapter Four, the major tactic used to shift perception of Garland in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* was to omit any mention of tragedy. Challenged by my director and the two audience questionnaire participants who noticed my omission of Garland's 'tragedies', I used Steinem and Nietzsche to develop a deeper understanding of how I perceive Garland. My newfound theory of Garland provided clues as to how I could collect and arrange biographical data to construct a version of the historical figure for *Judy Strikes Back*. After a considerable amount of time reviewing literature on theories of tragedy, I became aware I was losing sight of theatrical practice. I turned then to the ancient Greek tragedies. Rather

than reading academic theories on tragedy I wanted to learn how the playwrights dramatized tragedy. Another ‘what if’ question subsequently formulated: what if I could use the tragic theatrical form to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative?

To answer this question I immersed myself in viewing or listening to performances of tragedies to experience the plays as an audience member. Secondly, I read the plays. The tragedies about females were of particular interest, as I wished to investigate how their tragedies befell them and whether their stories bore any resemblance to the tragic tales we attach to high status females today. In August 2014, I began selecting key speeches from the canon to adapt to the life story of Garland.

For example, the opening speech in *Medea* (Euripides, 1965, pp. 25-26) is spoken by Medea’s Nurse. It establishes the oncoming tragedy of the play with the phrase “if only”. From my research I believed “if only” is a phrase frequently associated with Garland: if only she had a better mother, if only the studio did not give her pills and abort her first child, if only I had been there to rescue her. This speech seemed a perfect choice to adapt for the new biographical play. I decided someone Garland knew in her early years would speak it and, like *Medea*, it would be the opening speech. It would act to remind an audience of the tragedies that had already befallen Garland and point toward her ultimate tragic demise. Below are three stanzas from the original speech, each followed by my adaptation, rewritten line by line, to fit the tragic Garland icon.

**Nurse:**

If only the Argus, skimming its way among  
The blue Symplegades, had never reached  
The land of Colchis, nor the ax-hewn pine  
Been felled in Pelion’s glen to furnish oars  
To put into the hands of warrior princes  
Whom Pelias urged to seek the Golden Fleece!  
For she who is my mistress, then, Medea,  
Would not have voyaged to Iolcus’ towers  
With love for Jason burning in her heart:  
Nor would she have persuaded Pelias’ daughters  
To kill their father and be living here  
In Corinth with her husband and her children.

**Garland’s Childhood Friend:**

If only the movies, spreading their way through



The country's psyche, had never reached  
The town of Grand Rapids; if only vaudeville  
Had never been reimagined in Culver City  
Putting ideas in the minds of ambitious mothers  
Who heard MGM's call to seek stardom.  
Because, then, that little girl, Frances,  
Wouldn't have set out for Hollywood  
With love for singing burning in her heart:  
Nor would she have persuaded the executives  
To sign her up to live inside the movie factory  
With her mother for fifteen years.

**Nurse:**

An exile in the land to which she came,  
She soon found favour with the people there  
And worked with Jason in complete accord;  
And this is the greatest safeguard of the home –  
A woman not divided from her husband.  
But love is sick now, hate is everywhere:  
Abandoning his children and his mistress,  
Jason has taken a royal wife to bed,  
The daughter of Creon, ruler of this land.

**Garland's Childhood Friend:**

An ugly duckling in the Culver City studios,  
She soon found favour with the people there  
And worked with Louis B Mayer, eager to please;  
And this is the greatest safeguard for an actress –  
A producer who supports her talents.  
But then that bond grew sick, and hate was everywhere:  
Forgetting her childhood innocence  
Mr Mayer colluded with her mother,  
The ruler of the child's finances.

**Nurse:**

And poor Medea, slighted, cries aloud  
Upon their vows, invokes the mightiest oath  
Of right hands clasped, and calls the gods to witness  
What recompense from Jason she received.  
Since first she knew wrong her husband did her,  
She lies there fasting, with her body bowed  
In grief, wastes the whole day long in tears.

**Garland's Childhood Friend:**

And poor little Frances, ignored and abused, cried aloud  
Upon their schemes, and cried the fans to witness  
What punishment she received as reward for her talent.  
At 22 she knew the wrong these two could do,  
So she lay there, mourning for the child they ripped from her body,  
In grief she wanted to waste the whole day long in tears.

***Let's Hear It For the Girls: using tragic heroines to disrupt the tragedy narrative***

This exploration allowed me to see how I could adapt whole sections of plays like *Medea* (Euripides), *Antigone* (Sophocles), *Phaedra* (Racine), *Oedipus* (Seneca), and modern tragedies like *Hedda Gabler* (Ibsen), into an original dramatic script. By reinterpreting these texts I could reveal the nature of theatrical tragedy. I could comment on the treatment of women in the tragic theatrical form. I could expose how the tragic form can distort the lives of historical women like Garland. Most significantly, the creation of such a play could clearly draw the audience's attention to the biographer as the perceiving subject. In doing so, I could meet the challenge of making a biographical theatre work impacted by postmodernist thought. I knew I had exceptional material to use to shift perception. However, I feared the lens of artistic accomplishment could be lost through such an intense deconstruction of tragedy as a theatrical form. "So again I need to return to the question of 'what acting lessons can Judy Garland teach us?'" (reflective journal, May 14, 2015)

***Fans' Misconception of Performance: Garland prepares the tragedy***

This question allayed my fear and directed me back to the biographical subject herself for answers. As I sifted through my Garland biographical archive, listened to her recordings, and watched footage on online fan sites or YouTube, a fresh interpretation of tragedy emerged. I was reminded of Clement's (1997) research into the relationship between opera's tragic divas and the chromatic songs they sing. As noted in Chapter Two, Garland may be perceived as tragic due to a misconception about the performance of her repertoire. Indeed, myriad online sites display fan comments that relate her interpretation of a song with biographical data. From their comments it seems Garland's emotionally compelling performances stem purely from unfortunate events that have occurred in her life. For example, comments regarding footage of Garland singing *Over the Rainbow* in the 1950s include an association between her song interpretation and a recent suicide attempt. Apart from the fact that the fan had inaccurate biographical data, as a practitioner I recognized this as a simplistic view of performance and the job of a performer. We may use emotion memory during rehearsals to assist believability in performance. However, professionals do not leave interpretation choices down to whatever has happened in the days prior to the performance: as Stanislavski would say, the actor prepares.

Following this line of thought, I accessed data in my archive that explained how Garland interpreted a song. She used Stanislavski's "magic if" to personalize her relationship to the text. Most significantly, she intentionally missed the first notes of songs or forgot lyrics to create dramatic tension. Like the ancient Greek playwrights, she was able to manipulate an audience to experience a theatrical journey. Her purposeful mistake evoked pity for Garland, and then fear as to whether she would be able to make it through the performance. Finally, she induced catharsis when she successfully hit the highest and strongest note in the climax of the song. In my view, Garland used 'the tricks of the trade' to conjure emotion in her audiences, only using material from her own life to assist in developing a connection to lyrical content. Her personal life may have been peppered with domestic tragedies but in her professional life she was a master of the tragic form. My newly discovered theory on the extent of her artistic accomplishment resulted in the creation of a song and dialogue in which I would disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. This new unit of action highlighted her own conscious understanding and use of tragedy.

***The Dueling Divas Take Two: shaping a tragedy debate***

The original idea for the *Shit Happens To Us All* song emerged from the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* Dueling Divas unit of action. Rather than dueling through a medley of Garland classics, my interior landscaping saw the two Garlands take sides on the tragedy debate. I envisioned the Drag Judy would embody the tragic Garland identity, singing lyrics related to the domestic tragedies of her life. The artist Garland identity I played would retaliate by singing of the world tragedies that occurred during her lifetime. In my role as Subjective Biographer, I could satirize the bad fans that thrive on her tragedy. I could also argue that compared to those directly affected by world events such as the holocaust, atomic bomb attacks, and Mao's Great Leap Forward, she did not have such a tragic life. My conception of Garland's use of the tragic form fine-tuned the focus of the song and the dialogue. I would satirize the bad fans by giving them a lesson in Aristotle and Acting. Thereby I would disrupt the perception of Garland as a 'raw' talent only capable of performing her own personal tragic pain.

In a meeting with my musical director on June 13 2015 it was agreed *Shit Happens To Us All* would be a moderate to slow paced song so the audience had time to reflect on the lyrical content. Chalmers suggested using the song *How About You?* (Lane & Freed, 1941) from the Garland / Rooney movie *Babes on Broadway* as a model. In this way, we had a guide for how the two Garlands could present their arguments through song. Chalmers also believed that if the song sounded similar to an existing Garland classic it would make it easier for an audience to engage in the original lyrical content. Drawing on knowledge I gleaned from auditing a songwriting course in Semester 2 2014, I stipulated that musically, the ending of the song had to sound unresolved. That is, to leave the audience feeling slightly off balance. Thus, I hoped to destabilize the Garland tragedy narrative through the lyrical content and the experience of the musical arrangement.

As I organized my approach to satirizing and educating through the lyrics, Chalmers explored options for a chorus. This chorus needed to reinforce the objective of the song and sound so familiar that an audience would be able to sing along after one hearing. In a singing practice session later in the month, Chalmers played the first draft of the chorus. He taught me to sing it. I kept the rhythm of his chorus in mind as I wrote the verses that became the first draft of the song:

### **SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL**

#### **ARTIST JUDY:**

In ancient Greece they made rules  
And defined the tragic form  
Theatre starring kings not fools  
Used to teach us and to warn.

Imitation of action  
Is the key to tragedy:  
A playwright's main intention  
A theatre device you see.

#### **TRAGEDY JUDY: (*speaking*)**

But I'm like Phaedra who had to suffer and die because she loved too deeply.

#### **ARTIST JUDY:**

AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I'VE LIVED IN THRALL  
BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
AND SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

**TRAGEDY JUDY:**

MGM gave me the drugs  
My Mum looked on in silence  
Lost all my money to thugs  
Lovers lead me to violence

**ARTIST JUDY:**

Get some perspective, recall  
While I was in Hollywood –  
Hitler, the bomb and the wall  
A world in pain, seeking good.

**TRAGEDY JUDY:** *(speaking)*

Why care about geo-political circumstances when a movie star is in crisis?

**ARTIST JUDY:**

AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I'VE LIVED IN THRALL  
BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
AND SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

**TRAGEDY JUDY:**

My domestic tragedy  
Is what makes my fans so true.

**ARTIST JUDY:**

It's my songs, it isn't me  
They stir up fear, makes them blue.

**TRAGEDY JUDY:** *(speaking)*

Enough with the Greek theatre references!

**ARTIST JUDY:**

AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I'VE LIVED IN THRALL (AT TIMES!)  
BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
AND SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL  
*(Speaking)* Can we agree?

**BOTH JUDYS:**

BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
AND SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

***Like Bernstein and Sondheim: finding the flow in a song with a direct agenda***

Recalling his first impressions of this draft, Chalmers states:

It reminded me a little bit of Bernstein and Sondheim working on *West Side Story* in that Bernstein favoured very, very flowing lyrics and that's what he wanted, whereas Sondheim by nature is a very direct lyric writer.

(personal communication, October 30, 2015)

Chalmers was concerned my direct Sondheim approach would prevent an audience from fully comprehending my argument. Especially considering they would only have one opportunity to hear the song in performance. He agreed to employ his Bernstein approach to flesh out my draft. Thereby, he assisted in translating theatre theory-laden lyrics into flowing poetry that an audience may understand more easily. We discussed the meaning behind every line I had written to ensure his new draft did not misrepresent my argument regarding Garland's artistic use of the tragic form.

Over the following months, he emailed me drafts and I edited them. We continued to test drafts of the song during Cycle Two with the rest of the creative team. As a team we only settled on a final draft during the dress rehearsal. We agreed this version met the aims of satirizing and educating: the bad fan's obsession with the domestic tragedies of Garland's life in conflict with the good fan's plea to consider her historical context and her mastery of the tragic theatrical form.

Musically the song did in fact resolve in the last lines, however we achieved a level of musical imbalance throughout the editing process. Referring to the affect of adding and then subtracting musical bars during the process Chalmers explains:

My foresight sees the musicians in the audience cringing in an oddly barred – but in terms of the dramatic tension, it didn't matter...it did mean that when you got to the chorus which then became halved, yeah, so you had eight bar verses and then what was originally an eight bar chorus. So you had a nice even eight, eight, eight, eight, eight, eight, eight, eight, became eight four, which then in the overall thing, because that's the chunk that's repeated, you actually have twelve. So that's an odd – twelve in music when you then divide that by your four becomes three. It's an odd number. So that odd number of phrases just naturally doesn't feel quite finished...but it gives it that – yeah...no, this is not a tribute show. There's something wrong here (personal communication, October 30, 2015)

In performance then, the divas dueled (Play 2a, pp. 94-98):

**JUDY:** When I act I make up a story to make myself believe.

**JUDY G:** I don't have to *make up* a story. My life story is full of pain and tragedy.

**JUDY:** Your – (*she is so frustrated with JUDY G that she becomes lost for words. So she slowly moves to singing*)

## **SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL**

### **JUDY:**

YOUR STORY FULL OF PAIN AND YOUR FRAGILITY OF LIFE  
IS NOT SO MUCH A *TRAGEDY*, BUT SIMPLY: “LIVING LIFE”  
THOUGH YOU MAY THINK THE WORD IS APT FOR LIFE’S GREAT  
UPS AND DOWNS  
FOR AN ARTIST AND A SINGER THIS WORD HAS MEANING  
YOU’VE NOT FOUND

A TRAGIC TALE IS USED TO WARN  
THE PLIGHT OF KINGS IN DAYS FORLORN  
A FORM THAT MIMICKED MORTAL PLEA  
A PLAYWRIGHT’S VERSE - A *THEATRE TRICK* YOU SEE.  
FOR TO IMITATE AN ACTION, CAST A TRAGIC SILHOUETTE  
IS A LESSON YOU SHOULD NOT TOO SOON FORGET.

### **JUDY G:** (*Interjecting*)

But I’m like Phaedra who suffered and fell all because she loved too  
deeply...

### **JUDY:**

WELL *IN LIFE* WE’RE BOUND TO FALL  
AND OUR HEARTS BE BROKE IN TWO  
BUT WE RALLY STANDING TALL  
FOR EACH ACT BEGINS ANEW

And,

AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I’VE LIVED IN THRALL  
BUT MY LIFE AIN’T WORSE THAN HELL  
SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

### **JUDY G:** (*Somewhat irritated, JUDY G lists her tragedy in a both dramatic and victimized manner*)

BUT PILLS UNDO ME... LIQUOR FOAMED...  
WITH DEBTS TO PAY... MY VIOLENT BEAU’S

### **JUDY:**

GET SOME PERSPECTIVE TO THOSE DAYS:  
WHILE I MADE FILMS A LIGHT BEGAN TO FADE.  
WITH HITLER, CHAIRMAN MAO, THE “WALL” – A DARKENED  
WORLD IN PAIN  
YES, TRAGEDY EXISTED *HERE* ‘TILL DAYLIGHT SHONE AGAIN.

### **JUDY G:** (*Interjecting and like a Prima Donna*)

Why care about geo-political circumstances when a movie star is in crisis????

**JUDY:**

'CAUSE THERE'S MORE *TO LIFE* THAN GRIEF  
AND BENEATH OUR GRIM VENEERS  
LIES A NOBLE, FIRM BELIEF  
THAT TO GOOD WE SHOULD ADHERE

So,

AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I'VE LIVED IN THRALL  
BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

**JUDY G:**

BUT IT'S TRAGEDY AND ANGUISH THAT MY FANS SO DO ADORE

**JUDY:**

IT'S MY SONGS, NOT MY WOE, WHICH KEEP THEM COMING BACK  
FOR MORE

**JUDY G:**

BUT MY DEVOTEES - THEY SEE THAT EVERY SONG I FILLED  
WITH PAIN

**JUDY:**

THEN PERHAPS I SHOULD EXPLAIN  
MY FEELINGS, WHEN I SANG, WERE NOT RAW TEARS OF PAIN  
AND GRIEF  
BUT I EVOKED CATHARTIC FEELINGS IN YOU, A THEATRE TRICK  
MY SWEET!

**JUDY G:** (*Growing tired of the academic nature of JUDY'S argument*)

Oh, enough with the Greek theatre references!

**JUDY:**

WELL I KNOW *THE LIFE* I CHOSE  
MEANS A BUMPY ROAD TO 'HIM' (*referring to JUDY G*)

**JUDY G:** (*Interrupting, offended*) Him?

**JUDY:**

BUT WHOSE STORY ISN'T CLOTHED  
IN OUR FAULTS AND BY OUR SINS?

AND AT MISTAKES I DO EXCEL  
AND FOR THIS I'VE LIVED IN THRALL.  
BUT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL  
SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL

(*Spoken to JUDY G*) Can we agree?



**JUDY & JUDY G:**  
THAT MY LIFE AIN'T WORSE THAN HELL

**JUDY:** (*Encouraging the audience*) Everybody sing!

**JUDY & JUDY G:**  
SHIT HAPPENS TO US ALL.

***Dueling Divas Dialogue: establishing a meta-biographical device***

As the lyrics took shape so too did the dialogue for the new Dueling Divas unit of action. This unit left the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* audience confused because it broke from the modernist biographical approach I had established in the first half of the performance. Now, using an approach to biographical theatre that encouraged the use of meta-biographical devices, I was determined to expand this unit of action. My aim was to playfully differentiate between the ‘tragic victim’ Garland construction and the ‘accomplished artist’ Garland construction through the interaction between two actors performing Garland. I believed that by drawing audience attention to two disparate Garlands, the unit of action could shift audience perception of the relationship between Garland and tragedy.

To construct the ‘tragic victim Judy G’, to be played in drag again by Patrick Dwyer, I searched my biographical archive and shuffled through my Index Cards for material that supported the tragedy narrative. I wanted Judy G to embody the dominant perception of Garland to highlight the absurdity of accepting such a narrow view of a historical figure’s life. When we workshopped ideas with my director we agreed that the accomplished Garland must be convincing enough to win the battle and claim ownership of the Garland identity. Thus, the duel between the two identities had to be amusing but the conflict had to be believable.

To meet this challenge I massaged verbatim material, movie dialogue and biographical information into dialogue that pointed toward the tragic. This became Patrick Dwyer’s text. The verbatim material included: sections of the infamous Garland tapes, in which she recorded herself talking about her life when clearly angry and inebriated; a comedy ‘bit’ from the Carnegie Hall concert; and bad fan comments sourced from YouTube. Recycling from *Ms. Garland at Twilight*, the movie dialogue was taken from the climactic scene in her final film *I Could Go On*

*Singing* (Millar et al, 1963). The biographical data selected to point toward the tragic included: the mention of her first movie, which she reportedly hated because she looked fat; listing the names of all her alleged gay or sycophantic husbands; and referencing the Hollywood actresses that apparently made Garland feel inferior due to their glamorous images. In rehearsals the director encouraged Dwyer to play loud, drunk, and self-obsessed. The faded film star character Norma Desmond in the classic film *Sunset Boulevard* (Brackett & Wilder, 1950) was a model for the larger than life playing style required to counterbalance the accomplished artist version of Garland I was to play.

Again I looked to my biographical archive and Index Cards to draft the dialogue for the ‘accomplished artist Garland’. Although in this unit of action, the character had to act as the mouthpiece for my subjective views. Each unit of action in the play was drafted to draw attention to the Subjective Biographer’s opinion of the historical figure but prior to this unit, the monologues, scenes and songs were designed only to hint at my subjective presence. Garland never directly stated she was aware of Aristotle’s theories. Thus, I knew in this unit I was putting words in her mouth to give credence to the historical figure I had uncovered under the carpet. Garland did, however, explain to a guest on her television program how she interpreted a song. Using this verbatim material as a lead, I searched for additional biographical data to support the association I had made between tragedy and Garland’s artistry and thereby create dialogue that could sound biographically credible. Like Steinem (1986, p. 48), I became the detective in search of the pieces of coloured glass in the Garland kaleidoscope that could form a pattern to fit my belief that Garland was aware of how she performed tragedy in her work.

***Television, YouTube and Stanislavski: what if the pattern fits?***

On her television program Garland calls her approach to song interpretation “Method singing”. This reminded me of her acting coach at MGM studios, Lillian Burns. When archiving her YouTube interview, mentioned in Chapter Four, I noted she had seen Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre perform when they toured to America in the early 1920s. Burns had been struck by the performance and showed great respect for the company’s methods when working with the company member, Maria Ouspenskaya, in Hollywood years later. With my detective cap on I asked a new

question. What if Lillian Burn's approach to coaching Garland at the studios was informed by:

- the Stanislavski System,
- and the Method acting approach that had its roots in that Moscow Art Theatre tour,
- and the teachings of Ouspenskaya at the American Laboratory Theatre?

I liked where this lead was taking me because it suggested Garland may have been aware of a systematic approach to performance. It was only when I discovered a Garland interview originally published in 1951 that a pattern formed.

I had already archived much of the interview material in Schmidt's (2014) edited collection of Garland interviews in preparation for the 2013 production of *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. However the 1951 interview he uncovered became key to the creation of my Judy dialogue for the dueling divas unit. In the interview Garland explains how at twenty-two years old, in 1944, she visited the celebrated actress Laurette Taylor who was performing on Broadway in Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*. Garland does not clearly articulate the acting lessons Taylor taught her but she says she came away feeling like she could do anything (Schmidt, 2014, p. 188). Immediately upon reading the interview, I followed links on Wikipedia to discover Taylor was considered one of the best stage actresses of the twentieth century, respected by the likes of Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Tennessee Williams and Method actor Martin Landau. She had written an essay on acting and was the idol of the acclaimed acting teacher Uta Hagen. Again with my detective cap on I asked: what if Laurette Taylor's lessons filled in the gaps in Garland's understanding of her own talent and provided her with a secure technique to interpret any script or song? A kaleidoscopic pattern revealed itself to me that fit with my perception of Garland as an artist who was in control of her interpretive choices rather than at the whim of her passing raw emotions.

The Judy dialogue drafted for the Dueling Divas unit of action subsequently massaged together the verbatim quote from the television program, my findings regarding Burns and Taylor, and Taylor's advice on acting as explained on Wikipedia. In this way, the Judy character was designed to make fun of Judy G's

lack of understanding about the craft of acting and thereby gain status over the tragic version of Garland. As the mouthpiece for the Subjective Biographer's views, the Judy character was designed to challenge an audience to be amused by the tragedy narrative and shift attention toward Garland's artistic accomplishment. Rather than omitting tragedy from this version of the biographical play, the Dueling Divas unit of action used tragedy to disrupt perception. (Audio / Visual Material 10).

***Readdressing the First Rate / Second Rate Quote: which version of self is needed now?***

The Cycle Two investigations of tragedy allowed for the creation of a pivotal unit of action in *Judy Strikes Back*, in which two opposing Garland identities fight for supremacy. What I found more difficult to investigate in Cycle Two was the notion of 'self'. Without a clear perception of 'self' I was not sure how I was to readdress the Garland quote "always be a first rate version of yourself and not a second rate version of somebody else" in the new biographical play. As noted in Chapter Four, for some practitioners this "first rate / second rate" quote would be deemed insignificant and discarded as material for a biographical play. For me however this quote seemed too important to ignore. My biographical archive was filled with data pertaining to events, actions and quotes that chronicled Garland's advice to actors about acting. Thus, the "first rate / second rate" quote spoke to me as a practitioner: Garland was telling *me* to be a first rate version of myself instead of a second rate version of somebody else.

I found an approach that helped me explore this advice in *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and thereby confront my fear of just being a second rate Judy. Unsatisfied with the audience response to my approach in *Twilight* however, I realized I had to reexamine my understanding of self and my fear. Only once I had done this would I be able to create a biographical play that shifted perception of an historical figure using an approach to biography that draws attention to the perceiving subject. That is, the Subjective Biographer character – my 'self'. I had to trust that dedicating time to this reexamination would tell me how I was to reveal my 'self' in the performance of *Judy Strikes Back* rather than hiding myself, as I was able to do in the modernist biographical theatre work *Ms. Garland at Twilight*.

***Cycle One Journal Reflections: deconstructing Garland, constructing my 'self'***

Reviewing my reflective journals from Cycle One I rediscovered a shiny bit of information relating to the fleeting nature of performance, memory, mortality and self. I had noted the autobiographical performer Heddon (2008, p. 176) took inspiration from Phelan (1993), who believes live performance may be a healthy way to deal with loss and the fear of loss we experience in life. Heddon thereby posits “performing ‘self’ might be considered a gesture to our mortality, our inevitable absence, rather than our seeming presence”. When I mentioned these ideas in my journal I stated: “...don’t know why but I find this interesting” (reflective journal, March 19, 2013). Now in Cycle Two these ideas helped me see a relationship between my biographical subject, my ‘self’ as the perceiving subject and the dramatic through-line of the new play. I contended: “The show prepares people to let go of an old self to face the future: constructions of Garland, deconstruct Garland, reconstruct self” (reflective journal April 25, 2014).

I was subsequently able to begin the process of interior landscaping. In my imagination I saw the first section of the play needed to include material that demonstrated the tragic constructions of Garland’s life story I had found in extant biographical theatre works. In the second section of the play I could then create material to deconstruct elements of the tragedy narrative to fit with my perception of Garland as an accomplished artist. Finally in the third section, my identity as the Subjective Biographer could be revealed. In this section I could find a way to let go of the Garland legacy, free to speak, sing and behave as my ‘self’ rather than as my subjective construction of the dead star. However, if I believe there is no coherent self, as noted in Chapter Four, what ‘self’ was I to become in this performance moment? Harrington (2000, p. 117) had taught me whatever ‘self’ I present onstage, it is still in fact a practiced construction: “your stage persona comes from you and is part of you, but it is a creation that’s developed and tailored to evoke a certain reaction in an audience. That’s part of the artistry of entertainment”. It begged the question: what persona or ‘self’ could I create and develop to evoke audience reaction?

In my Cycle One reflective journals I then uncovered a question pertaining to the notion of self that appeared to have dramatic potential: “what happens when you are

so scared of being yourself that you become somebody else entirely?” (reflective journal, April 4, 2013). I recall this question emerged after discussions with my director regarding a Garland impersonator who became so immersed in her subject that she abandoned her own identity. At the time I was flabbergasted by the thought of becoming addicted to drugs in order to embody a character. Now in Cycle Two, I associated this impersonator with the Marilyn Monroe quote “When you’re a nobody, the only way to be somebody is to be somebody else”. I began to envision a new character for inclusion in the work, so I asked myself: rather than playing Garland, what if I play a Garland impersonator with such low self-esteem that she has lost touch with her own identity? The ‘self’ to be revealed in the final section of the play could then be the Garland impersonator, stripped of the wig, the costume, and the Judyisms, ready to face life as a performing artist in her own right.

My interior landscaping consequently began shaping a new understanding of how to use the “first rate / second rate” quote. Through the Garland Impersonator’s performance of Garland and then through the Garland Impersonator’s performance of herself, I could dramatize how a fan can use their ‘idol’ to self-actualize. No longer a tribute show, *Judy Strikes Back* would be a performance of my examination of biography. It would aim to inspire an audience to reconsider their own contextualization of ‘media celebrities’ in the future. These discoveries however may not have emerged had I not continued with a limited amount of studio practice during Cycle Two.

***Releasing Tension in the Studio: drawing audience attention to all the Judys***

To maintain my vocal, physical and imaginative impulses during Cycle Two I engaged in a series of exercise sessions. In one of these sessions I recognized my instrument was blocked so I decided to complete an exercise known as a Dump (Morris, 1998, p. 6) to free myself from tension. This exercise includes the use of stream of consciousness speech so I audio-recorded the process. I had just returned from a meeting with the Project Manager at the Empire Theatre in which I was able to confirm their interest in producing *Judy Strikes Back*. The meeting was successful but it left me unsettled creatively. In my stressed state I “dumped”:

The big elephant in the room is always I feel like in my own heart, is that there’s all these other people who do Judy Garland. So of course they’ve [the

Empire Theatre] booked a woman who does a Liza and Judy show...She [the Project Manager] did say, “we’ve got the tribute show idea covered” and that’s true. They’ve got Queen, and a whole bunch of other things they’ve got. But it just, yet again, reminded me of what Judy herself said, be a first rate version of yourself instead of a second rate version of somebody else.

I feel embarrassed about everything that I’ve been doing. I feel like when I say, “oh I’ve been doing – I did a show about Judy Garland”. I feel like people are thinking, why would you be able to do a show about Judy Garland? Of course, gay friends of mine, gay male friends of mine have said: “why would you want to do Judy Garland? There’s enough gay guys doing it. There’s enough drag queens doing that. That’s already done”. It makes me feel like I’m just being a second rate version of myself let alone a second rate version of somebody else.

Christen O’Leary just keeps on flowing through my consciousness. She did Judy before me. She has done Judy again. She’s won awards for Judy...There’s so many Judies out there that the world doesn’t need another one. The world’s only trying to deal with – coping with the grief that we lost the original. None of us can bring her back. I don’t want to just sound like a sad fan. That I’m doing this stuff – I don’t know...Judy’s been done to death. Anyone, anyone can do Garland.  
(studio practice session, September 11, 2014).

In expressing my frustration and my embarrassment I was able to articulate my fear of the biographical theatre project as a whole. Reflecting upon my feelings, I realized this Dump held the key to transforming the modernist *Ms. Garland at Twilight* into a play impacted by a postmodernist biographical approach. Rather than ignoring the many talented people who perform as Garland, I could make an audience aware of these artists in the early stages of *Judy Strikes Back*. In this way, I could indicate to the audience that they are not viewing a traditional Garland tribute show. I could hint at the fact that every Garland performance they see is not a ‘true’ presentation of her life story but a biographer’s construction, including this performance. Moreover, I could introduce the Garland Impersonator ‘self’. The concept for the song *Everybody Does Judy* was born.

My musical director and I collaborated on this song using the same approach we used for *Shit Happens to Us All*. In our composition meetings in June 2015, I told him I wanted to mention the many performers who have played Garland before me. Chalmers suggested the song should be similar to a ‘list song’. Such a song is recognized as a novelty number where the lyrics work through a list of information.

He drew on the song *Johnny One Note* (Rodgers & Hart, 1937) from Garland film *Babes In Arms* (1939) to use as a model. Yet again, in this way, an audience would feel the song was somehow familiar and thereby relax into absorbing the new lyrics. Recalling Harrington's (2000) advice regarding song order, I knew a novelty song was best positioned as the second song in a set.

Agreeing on this position, I wrote the first draft of *Everybody Does Judy*.

During the drafting of the song, a key meta-biographical device became clear: the use of the "always be a first rate version of yourself instead of a second rate version of somebody else" quote. The *Everybody Does Judy* song lyrics would serve the purpose of reflecting on biography if I sang them in role as the Garland Impersonator, 'as if' I was Garland, making a plea to take her "first rate version of yourself" advice seriously. The song would simultaneously comment on the biographical figure, the extant tragic biographical constructions, and the irony of yet another actress performing Garland. The song would act as the first major moment in which I aimed to challenge the audience to consider their own relationship with the biography of Garland. (Audio / Visual Material 11).

Drafting the lyrics encouraged me to draft the units of actions preceding the introduction of the song so as to understand how dialogue would move into the song. The *Ms. Garland at Twilight* audience questionnaire findings had prepared me for this phase of the drafting process.

### ***Using Audience Questionnaire Results: building the new biography through requests and reflections***

To understand how to transform the first biographical play into the second biographical play I initially considered the audience's responses to the musical numbers presented in *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. I believed they could tell me which songs and stories could be eliminated to make room for new material to disrupt the Garland tragedy narrative. The questionnaire results told me the songs *Judy* and *Drums of My Heart* could go. The *Dueling Divas* medley and unit of action could remain but needed further clarity. The audience also made it very clear that a Garland show is not complete without the song *Over the Rainbow*. Taking this



information on board, I then considered my personal connection to the songs in the first play to assist in shaping *Judy Strikes Back*.

In my reflective journal (May 7, 2015) I noted the audience appreciated the Humphrey Bogart story that led to the song *I Can't Give You Anything But Love* (McHugh & Fields, 1928). It provided them with a newfound professional respect for Garland. This unit of action was therefore successful in shifting perception but I complained: I don't care about the song. To compromise, I decided to eliminate the song but expand upon the Bogart story to reinforce a disruption of the tragedy narrative. Knowing the new biographical play was being produced by two venues with a different target market from that of USQ Artsworx *Twilight Series* I was concerned the *You Made Me Love You* (Monaco & McCarthy, 1913) sing-along would not work. The audience average age would be younger and may not know the words. Not wanting to alienate the audience, I cut it from the set list.

The questionnaire results told me the songs *The Man That Got Away* (Arlen & Gershwin, 1953) and *Smile* (Chaplin et al, 1954), and their respective units of action, emotionally moved the audience. I enjoyed performing this material, however I knew if I kept it, the second half of *Judy Strikes Back* would be exactly the same as *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. It would also mean I had limited space for the inclusion of new material to shift perception of Garland using a postmodernist approach. To meet the aims of the project I could not consider this material for inclusion in the new biographical theatre work.

This process left me with a list of audience requests to assist in building *Judy Strikes Back*: they wanted more song and dance routines, more duets with fellow actor Dwyer, and the inclusion of songs such as *Get Happy* (Arlen & Koehler, 1930). I was also left with a pile of Index Cards of material I believed could meet their requests and disrupt the tragedy narrative by drawing attention to the perceiving subject. My interior landscaping allowed me to grow a play that would include six new songs, two of them original, while maintaining five songs from the previous play. Each song would be supported by a monologue or scene: eight units of action adapted from the existing play material and five completely new units. I was

therefore able to set about drafting the full script, plotting in meta- biographical moments.

***Plotting Meta Moments: disrupting perception of the subject and the biographer***

To draft a biographical theatre work that could expose the structural devices used in biography I peppered the script with lines and ‘bits’ from my Garland biographical archive in a way that hinted at my subjective position. In this way, I hoped to disrupt the tragic construction of the biographical subject and draw attention to my subjective position as the biographer.

As noted above, I hinted towards my subjective construction of Garland by using the “first rate / second rate” quote in the song *Everybody Does Judy*. Using the second song in the play to act as the first major meta-biographical moment, I then repeated the quote throughout the play to instigate the Garland Impersonator’s journey to self-actualization. The quote was used directly or implied in phrases such as “try doing your own material sometime!” (Play 2a, p. 105) and “Imposter!” (Play 2a, p. 91).

In my role as the Subjective Biographer I wanted to satirize a review of my 2011 performance of Garland in *The Boy From Oz*, in which a critic explained I was Garland “resurrected”. Thus, I reworked the first unit of action from *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. I massaged phrases into the verbatim material such as “...it’s even, magically, come with me into the afterlife” and “when I was alive” to absurdly suggest to the audience that they were watching the real Garland resurrected from the grave (Play 2a, p. 79). Thus, in the opening moments of the play, I hoped to cue the audience that this was not going to be the average Garland tribute show. That is, they were not going to experience a modernist construction of Garland’s life story.

To persuade the audience to consider the construction of this biography I also drafted a disagreement with the accompanist in the early stages of *Judy Strikes Back*. This theatrical moment served as an alienation device. The audience was challenged to accept whether he was in fact Garland’s real accompanist Mort Lindsey or the Toowoomba based musician Morgan Chalmers (Play 2a, p. 80).

I drafted three different variations of the phrase “from where I sit now” to preface some Garland dialogue based on my own point of view (Play 2a, pp. 81, 81, 100). By the use of such a reflective phrase I wished to gently cajole an audience into recognizing the biographer’s subjective control over the biographical material. Mentioning my own name throughout the play but using Garland behaviours to dismiss “Bernadette” was also used as a conscious meta-biographical device. My name was strategically plotted into the song *Everybody Does Judy* and in the Vaudeville monologue (Play 2a, pp. 82, 101) to remind the audience that my performance of Garland may be convincing in some way but it is still a construction of Garland in accordance with my subjective biographical perspective.

### ***Collaborative Studio Work: from perching to flight***

For a great deal of Cycle Two, I perched, or reflected upon the findings from *Ms. Garland at Twilight*, to allow *Judy Strikes Back* to emerge as a draft script. This draft then acted as a springboard for work on the studio floor with the director, musical-director, production manager, choreographer and fellow performer. To assist my creative team, I also provided them with a list of YouTube links to material that would help our creative decision-making in the studio (Appendix 9). From July 2015 Cycle Two therefore evolved into what Mercer (2009, p.44) would identify as “flight”. That is, the period whereby we collaborated to create, embody and perform a biographical theatre work capable of shifting perception of Garland as an icon of tragedy.

During the first table read of the draft with the director and the production manager the meta-biographical moments I had plotted into the draft script became known as the ‘fissures’. This term was introduced by the director to mean the times when a tear appears in my Garland biographical construct threatening to reveal the Garland Impersonator underneath. In simple terms, the fissures were the times when the cast would step out of role to reveal them ‘selves’ and their relationship to the Garland biography. We dedicated a great deal of the initial rehearsal period to exploring how the fissures could become clear to an audience through the development of character backstories and performance behaviours.

Through a process of questioning, the director was able to establish the identity of each character, why they were involved in a Garland show, and how their interactions lead to a crisis of identity for the Garland Impersonator. Borrowing from our own experience, it was agreed Patrick Dwyer, Morgan Chalmers and Bernadette Meenach had been touring our original production *Ms. Garland at Twilight* for two years. Dwyer and Chalmers had noticed Meenach losing herself in the Garland impersonation over this period. They had been happy to develop the show as it toured, adding and subtracting material, to keep the show ‘fresh’. Together however they had become concerned with Meenach’s developing belief that she was indeed the resurrected Garland, performing her show to ‘strike back’ at those who had tarnished her reputation. So, one night when the show starts and Meenach begins her resurrection antics, Dwyer and Chalmers decide to take action.

With our backstories secure, we were able to explore acting choices that could ensure the audience noticed the dramatic arc of the fissures designed to shift perception of Garland as a tragic icon.

***Creating Performance Behaviours: adapting the script on the studio floor to build dramatic tension***

Workshopping the fissures in rehearsal Jones (personal communication, July 26, 2015) explained:

There needs to be enough of this stepping out of character for them [the audience] to go, oh I can see something’s going on here. We don’t want to go, oh I see what’s happening here. We need to go, what are those moments that are peppered through this piece that are going, she stepped out of character there. We’re not going, she’s a bad actor... We need to go – there’s dramatic tension from the start to go, oh there’s something not quite right with this.

We focused on the moments when Dwyer could step out of character as Bogart and the drag Judy G. The director coached us into moments whereby Dwyer tried to make me feel like a bad actress hiding inside the shell of Garland. These moments were confronting for me, as I found “the tension between the world of the play and the real world” (Haseman and O’Toole, 1987, p. 32). In turn, my discovery of the possible reality within the fiction stimulated the dramatic tension we needed to drive toward the final confrontational scene.

In our exploration of the Fred Astaire unit of action we discovered it was time for Dwyer to become more direct in his attempts to break down my Garland façade. Through improvisation we decided he should make no attempt to impersonate Astaire. We adapted the script so it became clear that he was aware of his identity as an actor, with lines such as “I’m playing Fred Astaire to *your* Judy Garland” (Play 2a, p. 102). As a team we hoped this unit of action would act as the final clue to the audience that something was “not quite right with this” and subsequently be open to the final scene’s revelation of the Dwyer, Chalmers and Meenach ‘selves’. (Audio / Visual Material 12).

As we rehearsed the biographical theatre work in full, it became clear how the dramatic tension could build to shift perception of Garland as an icon of tragedy. However I was uncomfortable with the final scene. I asked myself: is *Judy Strikes Back* a cabaret or a drama?

### ***Accepting the Cabaret Form: happy compromises***

In the drafting of *Judy Strikes Back* in Cycle Two I accepted the use of the cabaret form so that it could be easily compared to the first biographical theatre work *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. However, from my contextual review of cabaret performed in South East Queensland I realized that none of the cabarets I experienced included a dramatic arc climaxing in a confrontational exchange between the performers as I had imagined for inclusion in *Judy Strikes Back*. Instead, these cabarets created “the illusion of sharing a highly personal experience” (Harrington, 2000, p. 41) by stitching together jokes, anecdotes, songs and a finale an audience can clap or sing along to. Thus, to remain faithful to the cabaret form in the final scene, I scripted the climax and denouement so as to end with a celebratory song for the audience. We called the song the *Happy Medley* as it combined the Garland classic *Get Happy* (Arlen & Koehler, 1930), Barbra Streisand’s hit *Happy Days Are Here Again* (1963) and the contemporary Pharrell Williams’ (2013) song *Happy*. The first draft of the final scene consequently read:

*(Lights fade as the accompaniment to the song ONCE IN A LIFETIME concludes. Spot on JUDY almost fades to black but then the light darts to PAT. PAT no longer wants to pretend to be somebody else, he wants to be a first rate version of himself)*

**PAT:** That's not Judy's trunk. (*PAT rushes towards JUDY and pulls her wig off*) You're not Judy Garland.

**JUDY:** (*Her voice changing*) What the fuck are you doing? (*PAT opens the trunk. He pulls out items: a cassette and a framed photo*)

**PAT:** What's this?

**JUDY:** Be careful with that. That's a cassette of Judy Garland live in concert that I got from Annissa in 1983.

**PAT:** What's this?

**JUDY:** My dog Toto that I got after seeing "Wizard of Oz" onstage at Twelfth Night Theatre when I was two.

**PAT:** And what's that? (*Pointing at JUDY*)

**JUDY:** A Judy Garland tramp costume.

**PAT:** Take it off.

**JUDY:** What?

**PAT:** Take it off.

(*Reluctantly JUDY starts to take the costume off until she is left in her red leotard and clown shoes*)

**PAT:** Now what is the most important piece of advice Judy Garland gave us? (*He begins to clean the Tramp makeup off her face*)

**JUDY:** To be a first rate version of yourself, instead of a second rate version of somebody else.

**PAT:** And what are you doing *Bernadette*?

**JUDY:** I don't know how to be a first rate version of myself.

**PAT:** Why?

**JUDY:** I'm scared.

**PAT:** Have you learnt nothing from Judy? She was a celebration of the two great conflicting human tendencies we all share – the desire for clarity and order, and the wild, irrational urge for disorder. She made us gaze into the horror of individual existence. She let us see the struggle, the pain, the intoxication, the destruction of her appearance, not so we'd feel sorry for her but so we'd come to terms with our own inevitable destruction and take joy in it. She wasn't some bourgeois bitch who thought happiness was just about pleasure. Her happiness came from pursuing her ambitions and trying to overcome the hurdles that life put in her way. Bernadette, Judy doesn't need saving, you do. Now get out of here until you can stop being afraid of your own life.

**JUDY:** But it hurts.

**PAT:** And that's life. Go on, get. And don't come back til you find your own voice.

(*JUDY exits, rejected tramp with clown shoes lazzi as she goes*)

**PAT:** (*Turning on MORT, PAT is on a roll*) And who are you?

**MORT:** (*Relieved to concede*) Morgan.

**PAT:** Pat. Now, here's what we're going to do Morgan. We're going to do a song and we're going to do it our way? We're going to be first rate versions of ourselves okay?

**MORGAN:** I've only got Garland numbers.

**PAT:** Think of this as a hurdle I've put in front of you to help you experience true happiness in life okay? (*To the audience*) Do you want Morgan to be happy? Yes? Do you want me to be happy? Yes? (*PAT can play with the*

*audience here to get the audience YES vote loud. This also allows for JUDY's costume change to BERNADETTE)*

**PAT:** Ready?

*(MORGAN begins to play his interpretation of a Garland classic, the HAPPY MEDLEY)*

**Insert Song Here**

*(BERNADETTE enters and joins in the song. She is no longer trying to be Judy Garland. Her clothes, voice and gestures are her own.)*

In our first table read the director expressed concern that Pat's monologue beginning "Have you learnt nothing..." felt more like written language than spoken language. He also believed Pat's approach was too confrontational. My challenge was to "free up" the language and transform the scene to resemble an intervention, whereby a more caring, gentle manner would draw Bernadette out of Judy. He was content with the standard cabaret finale.

Throughout the following weeks I redrafted the scene on paper and then we improvised in rehearsal. After each acting rehearsal I returned to my reflective journals to search for more clues as to how I was to 'tie up the loose ends' in the final scene. That is, how I could create a theatrically satisfying conclusion that reminded an audience of *my* theories on Garland's affiliation with tragedy and the significance of the first rate / second rate advice. In this way, I believed I could meet my goal of disrupting the association between the historical figure and the tragedy narrative.

In the meantime, Dwyer and I were learning the choreography Alison Vallette created to compliment Chalmers' *Happy Medley* musical composition. The choreography was designed to reflect the action of the final scene. Thus, rather than mimicking classic Garland moves, we were challenged to move in a way that revealed our 'selves' (Audio / Visual Material 13).

### ***Life Imitating Art: the subjective biographer's intervention***

After one particularly frustrating rehearsal I complained:

Did a full read through again today of the latest draft of the script... We talked about how the last scene can go further. I suppose I'm striving for how to do the final scene in action not just in words... I may as well just write an exegesis. So don't put it on the stage. Write the theory behind the action in the exegesis and get back to 'doing' in the play Bernadette.

(reflective journal, July 25, 2015)

At home I continued to complain about my predicament. To my surprise, I found myself in a real intervention situation. In a caring and gentle manner, my husband asked me a series of questions regarding the aims of the play to help me overcome my creative block. As these questions tore away at my academic musings on biography, my personal relationship with the material emerged: I would hate to be perceived as a tragic figure. Like life imitating art, the Garland Impersonator character was stripped away to reveal a particular version of my ‘self’ I had not explored during the drafting and rehearsal process. This ‘self’ was much more emotionally vulnerable. The professional cabaret artist was not revealed, as I had drafted in the play. Instead, a little girl who wanted reassurance was revealed.

When I returned to my study to resume redrafting, I remembered Jones’ dual challenge. Firstly, to position myself inside the story. Secondly, to find the universal story inside the Garland story. Up until this point I believed I was meeting these challenges through the Garland Impersonator ‘self’ and the self-actualization through-line. My husband’s intervention offered the clue as to how I could “go further”, as Jones had insisted during rehearsal. I thereby redrafted, massaging the existing scene material with what I could recall of my own verbatim material and the behaviour of the Bernadette ‘self’ that emerged that night. Still committed to the *Happy Medley* finale, I shaped the work to show the vulnerable little girl reassured by Dwyer and Chalmers. She would then have the courage to change into a glamorous sequined gown to join them onstage for the clap and sing-along cabaret ending.

***Editing in the Studio and in the Study: a cabaret, a drama, a play-within-a-play***

Dwyer and I worked with the new material before we did a full run of the play with the creative team a week before Production Week. However, at the run, the production manager became concerned the duration of the play was now too long, running over ninety minutes. As each monologue or scene was designed to support a song and a shift in perception it was difficult to discern what could be erased without weakening the dramatic arc and the Subjective Biographer’s argument. We



systematically moved through the script on the studio floor to decide where edits could be made.

Chalmers agreed to cut repeat choruses from *Everybody Does Judy* and *Shit Happens to Us All*. I agreed to cut any extraneous details from the monologues. The team suggested we cut the encore material including singing *Over the Rainbow* but I knew we had to maintain this song to meet an audience's expectation of a play about Garland (as noted on page 135 of this chapter). The decision was consequently made to cut the *Happy Medley* as the finale and replace it with *Over the Rainbow*.

Spending the remainder of the day improvising how to incorporate this song into the final scene, I became very aware my aim to remain inside the cabaret form had failed. *Judy Strikes Back* would not end with a happy sing-along finale but with a scared woman-child finding her own authentic voice for the first time. This biographical play had transformed from a cabaret into a drama: it was "a theatre piece sitting uncomfortably within a cabaret genre" (L. Jones, personal communication, October 29, 2015).

Taking a deep breath, I remembered the advice of choreographer Deborah Hay (as cited in Albinger, 2012, p. 94) and asked myself: what if where I am is what I need? This in turn led to the question: what if the move from cabaret to drama as we follow the dramatic arc of *Judy Strikes Back* is the overarching meta-biographical device I have unconsciously used to shift perception? To answer this question I returned to my reflective journals.

In amongst the biographical archiving, literature review notes, and creative development observations I found what can only be described as personal diary entries. In these entries I wrote as a Garland fan. I made superstitious connections between the creative problems I was trying to solve and her ongoing presence in the media. By which I mean, I hoped a supernatural force, or the ghost of Garland, was guiding my decision-making process. My entries denote that when I was having difficulty with the creative process, the screening of her films on television was her way of reaching out from beyond the grave to help me. At times I reflected upon the fact that major turning points in the project occurred on the same day as major events

in her life. I saw these as signs of Garland's personal approval of the work. These ramblings were never intended for inclusion in either of the biographical theatre works but as a way to maintain a sense of creative playfulness throughout the duration of the project.

As we moved toward Production Week I realized these entries, however childish, were still the voice of the Subjective Biographer, she was indeed a Garland fan. It became clear then that *Judy Strikes Back* was using the 'play-within-a-play' form as a meta-biographical device: an audience would think they are watching a cabaret about Garland and come to realize they are really experiencing a play about the fan. The biographical theatre work that had come into being through Cycle Two was therefore designed to shift perception of Garland by disrupting the cabaret form usually used to tell the life stories of famous singers.

## ***Part Two: Performing postmodernist biographical theatre and shifting perception***

### ***Differences Between the Plays: the personalizing affect of the subjective biographer***

*Judy Strikes Back* had been created and embodied to shift perception of the biographical subject Garland as a tragic figure. It grew from the theatrical "skeleton" (Haseman & O'Toole, 1987, pp. viii-1) of the modernist biographical theatre work *Ms. Garland at Twilight*. Through a cycle of perching and flight, a biographical theatre work impacted by postmodernist thought had emerged. Accordingly, *Judy Strikes Back* used meta-theatrical devices in order to draw attention to the perceiving subject. The performance of my overtly subjective version of Garland's life story would test this form of biographical theatre's potential to shift perception. (For a virtual experience of *Judy Strikes Back* see: Play 2a and 2b; Audio / Visual Material 14; and Appendix 11.1 and 11.2).

Eighteen of the eighty-seven *Judy Strikes Back* audience questionnaire participants had experienced the first biographical play. Below, in monologue form, is their explanation of how *Judy Strikes Back* differed from the 2013 modernist Garland biographical offering. The material that forms the monologue is verbatim audience

data representing responses of all age and gender groupings. The monologue confirms their recognition of the Subjective Biographer's role in the telling of the life story:

The show has evolved since performance at USQ *Twilight*. This is far more sophisticated. This production is more fleshed out. More structured. This one better grounds the real person. The theatre references and theory informed the work without intruding upon the enjoyment. More editorializing – “more self-awareness” and self-critiquing. The first one I really believed Bern was Judy and she knew all those famous people! I was just so in the moment – I LOVED that fantasy! The second one “woke me up” when Bern actually became Bern!

The underlying message was stronger. Be a good version of yourself. Greater emphasis on “shit happens” and respect her for her talent and joy. The final scene makes the entire story somewhat more personal. *Judy Strikes Back* touched some “soft spots” with me. It hit home. It reminded me that we are all “feeling” people.

This show seemed much more engaging and challenged audiences' perceptions.  
(audience questionnaire, August 6, 13, 14, 15, 2015)

It would seem this small group believes biographical theatre that makes the audience aware of the biographer can be more effective at shifting perception than biographical theatre that hides the biographer. The modernist biographical approach used for *Ms. Garland at Twilight* successfully shifted perception of Garland as a tragic figure and reframed her as an artist. However, by revealing the biographer's role in the construction of the life story told in *Judy Strikes Back*, this group became more inclined to personalize the story. In this way, biographical theatre impacted by postmodernist thought may be more successful at challenging an audience to reflect upon their own lives and thereby reconsider their attitudes toward the dominant narratives associated with public figures. This form of biographical theatre can become a tool to inform our futures, as Heddon (2008, p. 157) suggests. That is, by using postmodernist theatrical devices, biographical theatre can bring the past into the present to disrupt dominant narratives.

### ***Mission Accomplished II: shifts in audience perception***

Of the eighty-seven audience members who participated in the *Judy Strikes Back* audience questionnaire 72.5% came to the theatre with their own “life world knowledge” of Garland. Thus, they came to the production with their own

perceptions of the role tragedy played in Garland's life. After viewing the production, 87.5% of those questioned believed their perception of Garland had shifted. Giving voice to the audience by means of the dialogue form, what follows articulates their shift:

A: I respect her more now. She came across as a stronger person – one who seemed to have more control. She appeared a stronger player – with a stronger role in the industry. It gave me more respect for her as an artist. I had no idea how talented and diverse a performer she was.

B: I saw Judy as so much more than just a lost little girl, and obviously so much more than what everybody else thought of her. You could see that she wasn't just the tragic drug addict that everyone saw her as. She didn't just have a terrible awful tragic life. My sense of her as a tragic figure has diminished. I'm upset that I knew she was a drug addict and that was most prevalent.

C: I saw how her life was tragic in parts but also amazing. It's sad that famous people seem to be remembered for their tragedies and not happy things in their lives. She was not portrayed honestly in the media. Judy surfed life's curve balls like us all – but media had to sell news. I wish the story I'd known had been told this way.

D: I saw how a woman's image is so easily defined by the "mistakes" she makes rather than the amazing things she has done. In a different time her tragedy may have been seen as a victory.

E: It made me empathize with Judy and walk in her shoes - see her as an individual and woman. Her circumstances are something every successful woman has been faced with - the beautiful tragedy of life in all its parts. It reminded me that there are shades of grey in everyone's life. It reminds us all to look at achievements rather than failings.

(audience questionnaires, August 6, 13, 14, 15, 2015)

The biographical performance created was therefore able to disrupt the relationship between Garland and tragedy through the use of meta-biographical devices that evoked reflection and empathy in the audience. However, what was troubling in the data was the mathematical disconnection between those who came to the theatre with a life world knowledge of Garland (72.5%) and how many audience members then posited their perception had been shifted (87.5%). As I sifted through the questionnaire data I asked: how can your perception of Garland be shifted if you do not know anything about her?

On closer inspection of audience comments for Questions One and Three, a new category of audience members emerged. This category highlights the potential of biographical theatre to ‘form’ perception. Fifteen percent of the audience may have noted they had their perception shifted but I contend, through exposure to *Judy Strikes Back*, their perception of Garland was formed. Again, using monologue, I give voice to the audience members whose first perception of Garland has not been dominated by the tragedy narrative:

My perception wasn't so much *altered as formed*. I only really knew Judy Garland from *The Wizard of Oz* but being introduced to her in this honorable way is a great way to have a first impression of one's life. I'm so glad that that was my first experience of her, rather than watching someone who did not do her justice. I loved learning about her. Now that I know about her life, challenges and strength, I respect her very much.  
(audience questionnaires, August 6, 13, 14, 15, 2015)

***Finding the Hook to Draw an Audience: a contract to live the biography with the biographical performers***

It is recognized it may be difficult to persuade the public to attend a theatre production about an historical figure they know nothing about. The director of the Garland biographical plays suggests the key to attracting an audience is selecting what he calls the right “hook”: the appropriate choice of poster image and media coverage to convince the public to attend. This hook establishes a “contract” between the performers and the audience, whereby the performers agree to deliver what has been theatrically hinted at through the hook (L. Jones, personal communication, July 26, 2015).

Evidently the hook employed for *Judy Strikes Back* successfully drew an audience that included those with no knowledge of Garland (Appendix 10.1, 10.2 and Appendix 11.1 and 11.2). However, from the questionnaire data it is possible to posit the “contract” established between the performers and the audience of biographical theatre goes beyond what is communicated through the two dimensional mediums of photography and media releases. The audience recognizes a difference between written biographies and performed biographies. Thus, by attending a live performance of a biography they expect to gain a three dimensional experience of *living* the biography. Using the monologue form, the *Judy Strikes Back* audience explains the contract they expect the performers to uphold:

The physicality of stage gives a different experience to simply reading and imagining through words. Performance is a lot more intimate: you feel closer to the person and connect more emotionally – because of the live story telling.

It is good to see a live person; see how they act and who they are as a PERSON. We can “feel” the live body. It is real – it relates personally. Your ability to empathize with their world is heightened. You can take away a lot from the experience.

There’s audience participation. It’s interactive. You’re immersed as an audience member. Rather than being told what happened, you go on a journey of sorts.

In reading you imagine their personal story. In performance, you share it, together. The audience is living the biography.  
(audience questionnaires, August 6, 13, 14, 15, 2015)

It is true that Canton (2011, p. 20) recognizes that the meaning of a performance can only take place when there is a joint act of understanding between the performers and the audience. However, I posit that the contract between the performers and the audience to live the biography together in real time creates more than understanding.

Like *Ms. Garland at Twilight*, *Judy Strikes Back* provided the audience with a lived experience that aimed to disrupt associations between Garland and the tragedy narrative. However, rather than simply living the biography of Garland as they did in the modernist biographical theatre work, *Judy Strikes Back* allowed the audience to live a small part of the biographical performers’ autobiographies. Through the biographical subjects Dwyer, Chalmers and I performed and the ‘selves’ we revealed, the audience shared a life with us. This ninety-minute life challenged the audience to reflect on their own lives and thus, their relationship with dominant narratives associated with public figures. In this way, biographical theatre that draws attention to the Subjective Biographer through the use of meta-biographical devices can form and shift perception.

***A New Term for a Distinct Form: biographical theatre that shifts perception***

As noted in Chapter Two, biography literally means life *writing*. The Greek root of the word *theatre* is behold, or to be contemplated. Biographical theatre can thereby be plausibly defined as: life writing in a place where something can be contemplated.

Throughout the journey of the research project, the primary importance of the word 'writing' in biography and biographical theatre troubled me as a theatre practitioner. Of course, my biographical archive contained myriad written documents and I wrote the two plays in the form of scripts for the creative team to use (Plays 1a and 2a). However, through each Cycle of the study I did not value the written word or the act of writing over the spoken word or real time interaction with other people and mediums.

Indeed, in performance the biographical performers maintained a 'fluid' approach to the script, adjusting text and gesture to meet the real time experience of each unit of action. Every psycho-physical action of the performers was committed to the super-objective. Thus, the biographical performers used biographical action, or behaviour, to shift perception of Garland 'in-the-moment'. The audience's visceral, sensory, or affective experience of the biographical subjects, the biographical performers, and the other audience members was critical. Collectively, we lived the Garland biography and a chapter of our own autobiographies in real time. In this lived experience, a shift in perception was possible. Self-reflection could occur, new personal memories of Garland could be formed and new personal Garland narratives could begin to take shape. It is for this reason that I wish to introduce a new term to the biographical theatre-making lexicon. This term aims to highlight the significance of the lived experience of biographical theatre and its ability to shift perception. This term also aims to eliminate the primacy of writing in the genre.

The findings from Cycle Two of the project suggest that biographical theatre can shift perception when a group, consisting of the biographer, biographical performers and audience members, gain personal knowledge of a life story through a shared lived experience. Further, it is the self-reflective nature of this shared lived experience that allows for shifts in perception to take place. I have borrowed from the ancient Greeks to create the neologism 'khorobiognosis' to explain this phenomenon. Khoros, is derived from 'choros', or 'group'. Bio, is derived from 'life'. Gnosis, is derived from 'personal knowledge', or what I understand as knowledge through lived experience. Mathematically this form of theatre can be articulated as: group + life + lived experience = biographical theatre that has the potential to shift perception. Thus, 'khorobiognosis' is the affective experience shared between the

biographer, biographical-performers and the audience that conjures and transforms in between the negotiable and non-negotiable space of perception.

‘Khorobiognosis’ is distinct as a phenomena. For ‘khorobiognosis’ to occur the biographer must take part in the live experience, and the biographical performers must be involved in the creation and embodiment phases of the biographical theatre-making. In this way, the script becomes a ‘blueprint for action’ and the live experience can be open to moments of fluidity so as to meet the super-objective of shifting perception. The written word must not have superiority over the ‘in-the-moment’ live biographical action. Liveness is the key material required for shifting perception of an historical figure.

### ***Conclusion***

Using an approach to biography impacted by postmodernist thought *Judy Strikes Back* was created in an attempt to shift perception of Garland, disrupting the view of this woman as a tragic historical figure and reframing her through the lens of artistic accomplishment. In role as the Subjective Biographer I borrowed from the strategies of the life writers and drew on my embodied practices to transform *Ms. Garland at Twilight* into a biographical play that embraced meta-biographical devices. I embodied a truthful version of the biographical subject and revealed a version of my ‘self’ to provide an audience with a visceral and self-reflective experience of biography. In collaboration with my creative team, the performance of the play was successful in forming and shifting the perception of 87.5% of those that completed the questionnaire on August 6, 13, 14, or 15, 2015.

This chapter has described how and why I created an original biographical theatre work to shift perception that could only have emerged from my relationship with the biographical subject and my subjective understanding of Garland. Chapter Six articulates the significance of biographical theatre. Using the experiences of the *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* projects the chapter builds upon the work of Canton (2011) by arguing that biographical theatre can shift perception.

‘Khorobiognosis’ can occur if the tasks of creating, embodying and performing adhere to certain emergent theatrical principles.



## **CHAPTER SIX: Biographical Theatre: a place where “life world knowledge” can be negotiated**

### ***Introduction***

*Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* is a study that builds on the research of Canton (2011) in the field of biographical theatre. Canton concluded that the theatre could be a place where the construction of our “life world knowledge” could be negotiated however biographical theatre could not shift perception of historical figures. That is, biographical theatre could fill in the gaps in an audience’s knowledge of an historical figure but it could not alter an audience’s preexisting opinion of a biographical subject. The creation, embodiment and performance of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* challenged this view. Both biographical theatre works were successful in shifting audience perception of an historical figure. If biographical theatre-makers want to shift perception through the medium of biographical theatre it is important to consider three emergent theatre-making principals. In this way, the genre can disrupt dominant narratives that may be associated with historical figures and lead audiences toward fresh understandings of biographical subjects.

This final chapter draws on discoveries made during Cycle One and Cycle Two of the practice-led study. In keeping with Cycle Three of the Research Design, Chapter Six identifies the principles that biographical theatre-makers can use to enrich and inform their work in fresh contexts. Thus, my aim is to ensure the transferability of the practice-led research that resulted in the original biographical plays *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back*. As noted throughout this study, my embodied practice is heavily influenced by the work of Stanislavski and those who have expanded upon his teachings. It is recognized that other practitioners will have other embodied knowledges that they will bring to the biographical theatre-making process. However, I maintain that the principles described below will aid practitioners in their attempts to recover, rediscover and reframe historical figures. The three simple principles will allow biographical theatre to become ‘khorobiognosis’.

### ***Biographical Theatre-Making Principle 1: commit to your super-objective***

To make biographical theatre that reclaims a historical figure from a narrative you posit misrepresents the subject, commit to your super-objective. Thus, anchor all creative development in your overall goal. As you build the theatrical work, consider how you can disrupt the narrative in each unit of action. Whether you create monologues, scenes, songs, movement sequences or digital imagery, they must all serve your goal. Continue to ask: how does this dramatic moment shift audience perception? When the material you explore distracts from your super-objective, dismiss it and allow your pre-existing arts practice to lead you in alternative directions.

To maintain control of the practice-led enquiry and remain true to your super-objective, I recommend using the Critical Response Process (Lerman & Borstel 2003) for collecting feedback. CRP aims to help practitioners absorb the views of others in a way that encourages innovative creative development. The four core steps involved in the process provide a rigorous structure for reflective journaling, work-in-progress showings, interviews, forums and audience questionnaires. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be collected for analysis using CRP so as to ascertain how best to use the biographical theatre form to shift perception of an historical figure, and to determine whether your biographical theatre works are successful in shifting audience perception.

### ***Biographical Theatre-Making Principle 2: include other people's thinking***

Cameron (2012, p. 54) encourages practitioners to develop a “magpie bibliography”. Other people's thinking can assist you in finding direction and instruction. Thus, seek diverse literature from myriad discourses to enable the creation, embodiment and performance of your biographical theatre works. Canton (2011, p. 34) acknowledges that theatrical productions result from negotiations between all the contributors. Therefore, accept the ‘slippery’ nature of authorship when theatre-making. As the biographical playwright it is your duty to shape the data collected but the theatre work will only emerge in collaboration with your creative team. Each member will bring their own unique autobiography, set of talents and ideas to the

studio floor so be prepared for growing your vision with them. Also, be prepared to provide your team with stimulus material from your magpie biography that can assist them solve the problem of shifting perception through their respective roles on the production.

There is one particular person crucial to the creation and performance of your theatrical work, that is, the historical figure you wish to recover, rediscover or reframe. Through close examination of your biographical archive, you and your creative team will note patterns in how your subject wants to be perceived. By exploring these patterns in the studio, you can allow the subject to create the biographical play for you. In this way, the historical figure will actively be involved in shifting perception.

### ***Biographical Theatre-Making Principle 3: embrace ‘liveness’***

Biographical theatre provides an audience with a three dimensional interactive experience whereby they live the biography with the performers. The theatre is therefore a place of visceral, sensory, or affective experience. Biographical performers can guide an audience’s moment-to-moment reactions. It is through this shared lived experience that biographical performers can disrupt an audience’s preexisting “life world knowledge” of an historical figure. The liveness allows for an audience to experience new ‘in-the-moment’ knowledge of the biographical subject. In this way, the biographical performers can help an audience feel, embody and thereby come to know an alternative construction of the historical figure. When the contract established between the performers and the audience is a shared lived experience, ‘khorobiognosis’ can occur. That is, perception of an historical figure can be shifted.

It is imperative then that you embrace the affective influence of the performed biography. To do this, rigorous Dramaturgical Research, Character Research, and Skills Preparation must be ongoing throughout the creation of the biographical theatre work. Such research and preparation will inform the content, style and point of view of the play. More significantly, it will ensure that you can effectively embody the biography in real time together with an audience. As you rehearse, continue to ask: what action am I playing in this unit that can shift audience

perception? As you perform, trust that your research, preparation and rehearsal have paved the way for you to shift perception of the historical figure in real time.

To further ensure that ‘khorobiognosis’ can occur it is recommended that the biographer take part in all three stages of the biographical theatre-making process. That is, the biographer must not only write a blueprint script for performance in collaboration with the rest of the creative team. The biographer must also be engaged in the embodiment and performance of the biographical theatre work. In this way, an audience can be challenged to be self-reflective. Moreover, the fluid nature of the lived experience of the biography and the biographer’s autobiography can assist an audience make new personal memories of the biographical subject and begin the process of shaping new personal narratives about the historical figure.

### ***Theatre Reviewers: a practice problem left unsolved***

In Chapter Two I noted that theatre reviewers have criticized alternative tellings of the life stories of Bennelong and Garland. They preferred to cling to the tragedy narrative and the notion of a unified identity as their lens through which to judge the biographical theatre works. Reviewers of *Judy Strikes Back* maintained this habit (Appendix 11.2). The reviewers complimented the individual performances. However, they did not appreciate the post-modernist devices used to shift perception of Garland. Moreover, they judged certain verbatim dialogue and gestures as invalid because they did not meet with their life world knowledge of Garland. It would seem then that an audience may be able to experience ‘khorobiognosis’. Yet, theatre reviewers may not experience a shift in perception during the live shared experience.

The reason for theatre reviewers’ reticence to accept alternative biographical performance sits outside of the realms of this study. Further investigation into the role of the theatre reviewer may offer biographical theatre-makers clues as to how to shift their perception of historical figures. In this way, biographical theatre-makers could work towards limiting the reviewers’ ability to police control over the life stories being performed. Biographical theatre-makers may also benefit from scrutinizing theatre reviewers’ unconscious familiarity and preference for culturally endowed plot structures. In doing so, they may devise innovative theatrical devices to disrupt the reviewers’ predilection for the performance of dominant narratives. It

may also be helpful to identify the risks associated with favourably reviewing alternative biographical narratives. As noted in Chapter Two, biographical theatre-makers risk isolation by deviating from familiar narratives. Theatre reviewers may also risk isolation from their community, or readership, if they encourage the work of biographical theatre-makers using unfamiliar lenses. A deeper understanding of the plight of theatre reviewers may assist biographical theatre-makers develop strategies for more open dialogue with reviewers during the creation of new biographical works. Such strategies may help theatre reviewers appreciate the significance of re-storying the life of historical figures traditionally associated with distorted or discriminatory modes of storytelling.

### **Conclusion**

Thomasina: Oh, Septimus! – can you bear it? All the lost plays of the Athenians! Two hundred at least by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides – thousands of poems...How can we sleep for grief?

Septimus: By counting our stock. Seven plays from Aeschylus, seven from Sophocles, *nineteen* from Euripides, my lady! You should no more grieve for the rest than for a buckle lost from your first shoe, or your lesson book which will be lost when you are old. We shed as we pick up, like travellers who must carry everything in their arms, and what we let fall will be picked up by those behind. The procession is very long and life is very short. We die on the march. But there is nothing outside of the march so nothing can be lost to it. The missing plays of Sophocles will turn up piece by piece, or be written again in another language. Ancient cures for diseases will reveal themselves once more. Mathematical discoveries glimpsed and lost to view will have their time again. (Stoppard, 1993, p. 38)

This exegesis is a narrative of my practice. It serves to tell the story of how I tried to pick up lost pieces of Garland's biography so as to reveal an alternative view of the historical figure. Rather than grieving for the Garland imprisoned in the tragedy narrative, this practice-led study documents how lost, rarely glimpsed or discarded narratives can be created, embodied and performed to disrupt what has been left behind by the Garland biographical theatre-makers who came before me. The word-bound scripts of *Ms. Garland at Twilight* and *Judy Strikes Back* disseminate new biographical readings of Garland. Through the creation, embodiment and performance of the plays, 'khorobiognosis', was achieved.

*Performing Biography: creating, embodying and shifting history* makes a significant contribution to knowledge in the field of biographical theatre-making and performing. Misrepresented, forgotten or lost historical figures can have their time again if the biographical theatre-makers who come after me commit to their super-objective, include other people's thinking and embrace liveness. If these emergent theatre-making principals are followed, biographical theatre will become a place whereby "life world knowledge" can be negotiated and perception of an historical figure can indeed be shifted.

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