

SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
CO  
EDUCATION

ON CUE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

About <i>On Cue</i> and STC	2
Curriculum Connections	3
Cast and Creatives	4
From the Director	5
From the Playwright	6
Synopsis	7
Character Analysis	8
Themes and Ideas	11
Style	16
Elements of Production	18
Elements of Drama	19
Bibliography	21

Compiled by Lisa Mumford.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Lisa Mumford is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Lisa on [lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au](mailto:lmumford@sydneytheatre.com.au)

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# ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

## ABOUT *ON CUE*

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Ed page on our website.

**Such resources include:**

- Director documentaries
- Design sketchbooks

## ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 40 years later, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Roslyn Packer Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

[sydneytheatre.com.au](http://sydneytheatre.com.au)

# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS



Luke Carroll in rehearsal for STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

## SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 10 to 12

## SUBJECTS

Links to HSC Drama Individual Project text *War Crimes* by  
Angela Betzien  
Contemporary Australian Theatre  
Australian Gothic Theatre  
Crime Thriller

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

# THE HANGING

BY ANGELA BETZIEN

DETECTIVE FLINT  
LUKE CARROLL

IRIS HOCKING  
ASHLEIGH CUMMINGS

MS CORROSSI  
GENEVIEVE LEMON

DIRECTOR  
SARAH GOODES

DESIGNER  
ELIZABETH GADSBY

LIGHTING DESIGNER  
NICHOLAS RAYMENT

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER  
STEVE FRANCIS

VIDEO DESIGNER  
DAVID BERGMAN

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
PRISCILLA JACKMAN

VOICE & TEXT COACH  
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER  
KATE CHAPMAN

STAGE MANAGER  
TANYA LEACH

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER  
JENNIFER PARSONAGE

VENUE TECHNICIAN  
ROMY McKANNA

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER  
HON BOEY

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER  
LISA TOMASETTI

1 HOUR 30 MINUTES, NO INTERVAL  
THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT  
WHARF 1 THEATRE ON 2 AUGUST 2016

SUPPORTED BY

THE DONOR SYNDICATE



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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

## SARAH GOODES

Directing new work, especially new Australian work, is always a thrill. The chance to develop a close relationship with a writer and to work with them in refining the play for its first performance is a great privilege. The discoveries we make in the rehearsal room and in conversations about the text evolve in an organic, collaborative way that I find particularly exciting.

So it is with *The Hanging*. Angela is a wonderful writer and a true collaborator. Together with her, the design team and the cast, we have been breathing life into the story as we bring it to the stage – refining the tension in the rhythms, finding the exact nuance of each character, carving out the space for them to inhabit. It is a wonderful opportunity to be able to work on such a strong text with a group of artists like this.

In essence, we have a detective thriller. The crime genre is one that Angela has been exploring in a few of her recent plays and, in this one, she weaves into that genre a sense of mystery. That mystery is the internal world of a 14-year-old girl – someone on the precipice of adulthood.

In many ways, the play explores people at the edge of things. Both Corrossi and Flint consider themselves guardians wanting to save children from falling into the abyss. Both Corrossi and Iris are women in transit from one stage of life to another. Iris, in particular, is at a stage when society's many ideas of youth and beauty quite often contradict the lack of autonomy and inability to be heard that this time of life can hold.

Some of the influences we talked about during rehearsals were the books *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Virgin Suicides* and the movie *Heavenly Creatures* – stories that explore the private worlds that young people create in order to escape the perceived corruption of the adult world.

The challenge that designer Elizabeth Gadsby and I had was to find an intersection between the real and psychological worlds – a space in which the very real language of the police interview could sit alongside Iris' internal world and the Australian bush into which the girls disappeared. Elizabeth decided to intersect the space with a large wall and we decided to include projection in order to capture some of the girls' experience on the other side of the 'threshold'.

One of the fascinating things in what Angela has written is the way in which three such different characters mirror each other. They recognise themselves, their weaknesses, in the vulnerabilities of the others. And they go after them. Genevieve, Ashleigh and Luke are all very different actors, watching them work together and the moments of tension arise between their characters has been thrilling to watch.

I thank all my collaborators for the very special experience of bringing this piece together.



ALSO AVAILABLE ONLINE IS OUR DESIGNER SKETCHBOOK WITH  
COSTUME DRAWINGS BY ELIZABETH GADSBY

# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

## ANGELA BETZIEN

### **Where did the inspiration for *The Hanging* come from?**

The initial idea for the *The Hanging* emerged from a number of conversations I had with STC's Literary Manager Polly Rowe, while I was on the Wharf as the Patrick White Fellow. We discussed, at great length, the role of genre in the theatre and, in particular, the tropes of crime and detective genres.

For a number of years, I have been working on a cycle of crime plays including *The Dark Room* (Belvoir, 2011) *Tall Man* (La Mama, 2012) and *Mortido* (STCSA/Belvoir, 2015). I see the crime genre as a political form, an opportunity to critique social and economic systems in a thrilling and entertaining way. A key part of my research for *The Hanging* was Mary Pipher's seminal book *Reviving Ophelia*, which explores the psychology of adolescent girls. And a quote by French philosopher Denis Diderot also planted a potent seed. In a letter to his young mistress, Sophie Volland, Diderot wrote, "You all die at 15." I seized upon the idea that for many young women, 14 is an age of dangerous transformation.

### **How does this play sit within your broader body of work?**

After writing a big play about the global cocaine trade for Belvoir in 2015 (*Mortido*), I wanted to write something intimate and claustrophobic. I settled on a three-hander in a single time and space. In many ways, *The Hanging* is an excavation of ideas and images I have been playing with for many years. In particular, the motif of the lost child, which is so prevalent in Australian art and literature. Through *The Hanging* I wanted to interrogate our somewhat morbid obsession with this idea.

### **On the surface, *The Hanging* is a thriller. What questions, for you, lie beneath?**

The psychological thriller or detective genre is simply a frame on which I have chosen to hang a number of ideas and questions.

I am interested in interrogating the nature of our obsession with young, lost, beautiful, dead girls.

I am also interested in the nature and philosophy of teaching. When we are young and impressionable, the relationships we have with our teachers can be incredibly powerful, formative experiences. My teachers certainly shaped my desire to be a writer. When writing *The Hanging*, I became very interested in Socrates' theories on pedagogy and Plato's theories regarding platonic desire. Interestingly, Plato was Socrates' prized student and Socrates was condemned to death for corrupting the city's youth. He was forced to commit suicide by swallowing poison.

### **You have an interest in Australian Gothic. Do you feel *The Hanging* slots into that notion of a genre?**

In Australian Gothic narratives, the lost child features prominently and the landscape is very much an antagonist. These elements are certainly present in *The Hanging*. I think the Australian Gothic offers a lens through which many Australian writers are able to articulate their anxieties about the atrocities of our past. As an Anglo-Australian playwright every time I sit down to write a story set in Australia, I do so with an understanding that this country always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

### **Is the play we are watching the one you imagined when you started writing?**

I love theatre because of its truly collaborative nature and it has been terrific redrafting *The Hanging* in response to both director Sarah Goodes' vision and designer Elizabeth Gadsby's ideas.

The play has emerged over a number of distinct drafts and, as with most new Australian plays, the development process continues right up until opening night and beyond. A new Australian play is uncharted territory, it is a wild place to which audiences have never been. I hope that makes the journey a thrilling one.

# SYNOPSIS

Brighton, Victoria, 19 February 2016. Iris Hocking, aged 14, is a boarder at Maidstone Girls College, a \$30,000-a-year private school in Geelong. Together with two other students, she was reported missing six days ago. Iris turned up at a police station 48 hours later, but the other two girls remain missing. Detective Sergeant Flint, a specialist in child protection, is set to interview Iris in one of her parents' homes to find out where the other girls are and why they went missing. Iris has nominated her English teacher, Ms. Corrossi, to act as her support person for the interview. And, as the interview progresses, a fatal web of secrets and cover-ups slowly unravels.

Ashleigh Cummings, Luke Carroll and Genevieve Lemon  
in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©





# CHARACTER ANALYSIS



Ashleigh Cummings and Luke Carroll in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

## IRIS HOCKING

Iris is the central character of the play and it is her actions that drive the plot. As an adolescent girl she is conditioned to be polite and pleasing, in how she looks and behaves. This conflicts with the expectations that Iris feels to fit in with her peers, and together they break rules and rebel. These conflicting expectations result in troubling and unhealthy consequences.

With her friends Hannah and Ava, Iris is a part of 'the circle' – the name they have for their friendship group. Before becoming part of 'the circle' Iris did not feel accepted, or 'cool' at school, resulting in her willingness to behave however necessary to maintain her social inclusion. The three girls have a reading group on Sunday afternoons with their English teacher, Ms. Corrossi, at the teacher's house. They read and discuss books together, but it is also a social occasion. Throughout the course of the play, the happenings of the reading group are revealed and interrogated.

The central tension of the play is driven by Iris' inability to remember anything about the period in which she went missing, including how or where she went with Hannah and Ava. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that this is selective memory loss for the sake of protecting herself and her friends, as well as her abusive father.

Iris is dealing with complicated circumstances beyond what is ordinarily expected of a girl her age and is struggling to deal with this while maintaining social acceptance and meeting the expectations of her parents. This is a difficult balance and a lot of pressure for a fourteen year old. Ultimately Iris is an innocent girl; her crime is being young, beautiful, and female.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



## MS. CORROSSI

Ms. Corrossi is Iris' English teacher and is initially introduced in a benign capacity as Iris' chosen 'trusted adult' for the sake of the police interview. However, it becomes apparent as the play progresses that Iris requested her presence for more strategic reasons.

Corrossi is a single, middle-aged High School English teacher who enjoys red wine and television crime dramas. These character traits do more than create a clichéd image of a probably lonely, easily understood and trusted woman, but are deliberate attributes written by Angela Betzien to make a comment about the ways women are treated in society and literature, especially as they age. Corrossi says to Flint: 'You won't experience this as a man but from a certain age women disappear' (Betzien, 2016, p. 51). If women are valued for their beauty, and youth is considered beautiful, it follows that the older they get the less beautiful they become and hence less valued, interesting, or even noticed. In this way, Corrossi is a direct contrast to Iris; Iris is young and beautiful, the object of the gaze of others, to be seen and not heard. By contrast, Corrossi is representative of the stage of women's lives in which they become heard and not seen. Together they represent the

damaging expectations placed on women at various stages throughout their lives.

Corrossi has worked at the school for a long time and is highly critical of the structured system of rules and the treatment of the young girls who attend. She refers to Maidstone as a prison and encourages the students to read literature which takes them beyond their world and into their imaginations. When Iris discloses that the girls were part of a reading group that met at Ms. Corrossi's on Sundays, Corrossi starts to become implicated in the disappearance of the girls. Her relationship with Hannah, who is still missing, is brought under the microscope and forces the audience to ask questions about what Corrossi may be hiding.

While it appears that Corrossi wants to help the police and solve the mystery of the missing girls, her relationship with Hannah and her true intentions ultimately remain ambiguous.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS (CONT.)



Luke Carroll in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

## DETECTIVE SERGEANT DAVID FLINT

Detective Flint is attempting to solve the mystery of the missing girls. Iris is his only real hope of piecing together how and why the girls left their school and discovering where Hannah and Ava are now. While at times he is visibly frustrated by Iris' memory loss, it is obvious he is genuinely concerned for her wellbeing and wants to find the other two girls.

Early in the play, Flint admits to Iris that he has a daughter of his own, which establishes him as a father figure but also means he is particularly invested in this case through a fear of losing his own daughter. He has also previously worked for a specialised child protection unit, which means he has witnessed horrific abuses of young girls and doesn't want the missing girls to become victims. There is an exchange with Ms. Corrossi in which she says 'You've cast them as victims. Little Red Riding Hoods lost in the woods.' To which Flint responds 'I've met a lot of wolves.' (Betzien, 2016, p. 22) This demonstrates Flint's belief that the girls have been abducted, or come to harm for reasons outside of their own control. It also shows his ignorance to the complex relationship between the teacher and her three students, as well as showing that he doesn't understand what the girls might be capable of.

Flint is objectively good; he wants to solve the crime for the sake of the safety of the girls and he relies heavily on Iris, desperately wanting her to hold the answers, to remember. It is Flint himself who solves the truth of Iris' abuse with minimal clues, he is able to piece together the memories Iris offers and solve more than just the mystery of why they ran away.

# THEMES AND IDEAS

## YOUTH, AGEING AND BEAUTY

There is a stark contrast between Iris and Ms. Corrossi, the two female characters at the centre of the drama. Iris is a fourteen year old girl, embodying youthful beauty and the mystical qualities of early adolescence, an age at which young women start to feel pressure to look and behave in a way that is pleasing to others. After the carefree play and adventure-focused days of childhood, adolescence marks the beginning of a time in which girls are conditioned to become concerned with what other people think of them above all else (Pipher, 1996). Iris is at this stage of her life. It is a time when young women become highly visible objects of the gaze of others. Corrossi represents the antithesis of this, describing that she is at a time in her life when women become invisible. However, she uses this to her advantage. As Corrossi is not inhibited by the gaze of others, she has the freedom to live her life how she chooses. She is open about her opinions of the school and the students, and seems unconcerned with the opinions others have of her. This contrast between the characters serves to critique the unreasonable expectations placed upon women throughout their lives.

In her book *Reviving Ophelia*, Dr. Mary Pipher refers to rules which govern society's expectations of girls, one of which is to be 'competent without complaint' (Pipher, 1996, p. 39). When girls and young women report cases of abuse or assault, they are often seen as complaining, being difficult, and lying. She says girls learn to be 'nice rather than honest' (Pipher, 1996, p. 39). These are the cultural conditions in which girls turn towards their peers and away from parents and trusted adults, especially in cases of abuse. Iris can't tell Flint and Corrossi the truth of her father's abuse because she is afraid of the consequences; she has been conditioned to feel that she is the one who has done something wrong and that she is best to keep the truth to herself.

'The circle' which the three girls form together is Betzien's way of investigating the intense relationships that often form between adolescent girls. 'The circle' is the name the girls use for their friendship group; it is exclusive and according to Iris, 'can't be broken.' (Betzien, 2016, p. 8) As they retreat into themselves and away from parents and authority figures, the friendship between girls intensifies as a result of their attempts to better understand themselves and relate to those living similar experiences.

Ashleigh Cummings and Genevieve Lemon in rehearsal for STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©



The play investigates the ways women are expected to respond to trauma and interrogates how women are treated if and when they fail in this unrealistic expectation. When Flint accuses Corrossi of not being suitably upset about the missing girls, she says 'Should I cue the tears, cue the wringing of hands? Sometimes trauma doesn't always present the way you think it should. It's where Lindy Chamberlain went wrong and didn't she pay for it.' (Betzien, 2016, p. 29) If women do not react to trauma in a prescribed way, they are immediately suspicious, and become a subject for interrogation themselves.

# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

## THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE

*The Hanging* exists as part of a long tradition of writing about missing children in the Australian landscape. Throughout Australian colonial history, art has been interested in the power of the bush to disappear people and the play refers to the landscape 'swallowing people'. For example, Frederick McCubbin's 1886 painting *Lost* portrays a girl lost in the Australian bush and captures a prevalent anxiety from the time it was painted. It is an anxiety which has continued, and remains to this day. It is a narrative that is explored most notably in the 1975 Peter Weir film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, based on the 1967 Joan Lindsay novel of the same name. The critical and enduring reception of the film points to the interest the public has in stories about missing people in the Australian landscape and particularly in adolescent girls. When the girls go missing in *The Hanging*, it is implied that their disappearances may have been inspired by the book, which they have read in their reading group with Ms. Corrossi. The play interrogates this national anxiety, and explores the Australian fascination with the landscape as a site of terror. Although the land has been colonised, it remains essentially unknown to the white settler, and therefore needs to be tamed and feared. This dubious relationship with the surrounding environment can be seen as the inspiration for works such as McCubbin's *Lost*, and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, as well as an explanation for the national obsession with real life cases of children missing in the Australian landscape.

There is a parallel interest for Angela Betzien in another national obsession, that of young women, their sexuality and safety. *The Hanging* uses the Australian landscape as a lens through which to examine this idea. The missing girls in the landscape become a metaphor for the ways girls can become introverted and introspective when they enter adolescence – in other words, they go missing to the people around them.

Corrossi says adolescent girls, 'all die at fifteen' (Betzien, 2016, p. 28) quoting Diderot and suggesting that young girls essentially go missing to those who know them at this age. As they enter puberty and move towards adulthood, girls enter a mysterious transitional period characterised by a developing sexuality. Girls get lost in the pressure to perform their femininity in ways expected by society. The unknowable nature of this transition is the impetus for the idea of 'losing' the individual. In *The Hanging*, the young girls go missing both literally and figuratively.

*The Hanging* director Sarah Goodes talks about this period of adolescence for young women as being similar to entering a cocoon, and that it can be very lonely within the cocoon. What is projected onto it from the outside, especially by adult onlookers, is a sense of mystery that can make it look beautiful and transgressive. This shapes one of the central tensions of the play; the conflicting experience of the young person within this transition, and the external perspective of the adult onlooker.

Unlike the teenage girls of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* who are lost in the landscape and at the whim of forces beyond themselves, the girls of *The Hanging* have more autonomy in the landscape, they are not intimidated and they mythologise themselves in the landscape in their own way. Angela Betzien takes the connection between landscape and identity further by suggesting the developing selfhood of the girls can be seen as allegorical for a developing nationhood. The history of colonial Australia is young and often still struggles to assert a unified identity against a fraught and often contentious reality.

Iris says she feels safe at Maidstone, and throughout her interview asks numerous times when she can return. She says she likes the rules and boundaries afforded by the school. This is a direct contrast to the landscape in which the girls are missing; it is hostile, hot, and dangerous. The assumed safety or hostility of these two worlds is reversed, as it becomes apparent that Iris is safer in the landscape than at home. This contrast of the interior world of the school versus the external landscape of the bush serves to disrupt conventional ideas about safety; it is assumed the domestic, interior world is safe and the landscape is dangerous. As the action of the play progresses and Iris' experiences are revealed it is suggested that the bush is the safest place for Iris, a place where she can be on her own terms, away from the world of her father and her compromised safety.

# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)



Ashleigh Cummings and Genevieve Lemon in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016.  
Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

## YOUNG WOMEN AS UNTRUSTWORTHY

The main action of the play is a police interview; Iris is interviewed by Detective Flint about her disappearance, and Ms. Corrossi is present as her trusted adult supervisor. This setup implies that Iris is guilty of something – she has absconded from her boarding school and has been missing for two days; she has broken the rules. Establishing Iris in this position of guilt immediately makes her less inclined to want to talk to the detective. Until the audience discovers at the play's end why Iris was running away, she remains in this position of guilt and is in trouble. Through the unexpected shift at the play's end, Angela Betzien is challenging the dominant cultural ideas of women as dishonest accusers or unreliable witnesses.

Unfortunately this theme is based in reality, as there is a prevailing assumption that women are lying when they accuse a perpetrator of sexual assault in court. An ABC News article titled *Courts, Credibility, and Convictions for Rape* (05.07.11) quotes lawyer and Fox News commentator Susan Estrich, saying that 'the myth of the lying woman is the most powerful myth in the tradition of rape law'. She goes on to say 'the doubt about women's credibility was institutionalised in western law through the requirement that other witnesses must corroborate

a woman's evidence... even in the select cases that make it to trial, conviction is rare, particularly where the victim and perpetrator know each other and there is no injury beyond the rape.' This enforces the idea of assumed guilt which the play serves to challenge. When Iris' horrible truth is revealed, the audience is forced to feel complicit in assuming her guilt and assuming she had done something wrong.

# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

## REBELLION AND YOUTH IDENTITY FORMATION

Iris is fourteen years old, an age at which young people are forming their identity. This can often be a tumultuous time of experimenting with new music, increased interest in ethical concerns, changing social groups and sometimes destructive behaviours (Pipher, 1996). Adolescence is a time when children start to separate from their parents and become more independent, and this can be very challenging for both parties. The play shows a number of ways in which Iris is attempting to rebel and form her own identity.

While Iris is a good student and abides by the school rules, she engages in power battles with Flint and Corrossi in an attempt to assert herself. She refers to Flint by his first name and behaves very flirtatiously towards him. Along with her friends, she runs away from boarding school and into the bush as a deliberate act of rebellion. They are forming their identities through an intense friendship which involves them testing each other and pushing themselves beyond their comfort zones.

## TIME

Time and how it is experienced is a central motif of the play. The action plays out in the real time of a police interview, and the timeline of Iris' disappearance is central to Flint's line of questioning. The Brighton house, where the interview is taking place is one of Iris' father's properties, and when Flint asks if she has been there before she responds, 'a million years ago' (Betzien, 2016, p. 4). References to millions and the ways time is experienced as fleeting or eternal recur.

The play is set against the ticking of a clock, literally in the room, but also figuratively as Flint races to save the girls. This race against the clock is a metaphor for the ways we attempt to 'save' girls from themselves as they enter adolescence, but it is not a possible task. As time passes and they grow and mature it is inevitable that girls will go through adolescence and become women.

Time is also examined through a comparison of the temporary and the permanent. Iris has a tattoo on her arm which she shows to Flint. He says: 'you know that's permanent?' and she responds: 'that's the point' (Betzien, 2016, p. 8). This is in contrast to the fact that adolescence is a temporary state, which Iris will grow out of and the experiences that occur with it will be in the past. She explains that the tattoo is a circle which signifies 'no beginnings no endings' and says that she got it 'a million years ago' (Betzien, 2016, p. 8) even though it is clearly fresh. This exchange early in the dialogue establishes that time will become complicated in the narrative of the play.



Ashleigh Cummings in rehearsal for STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

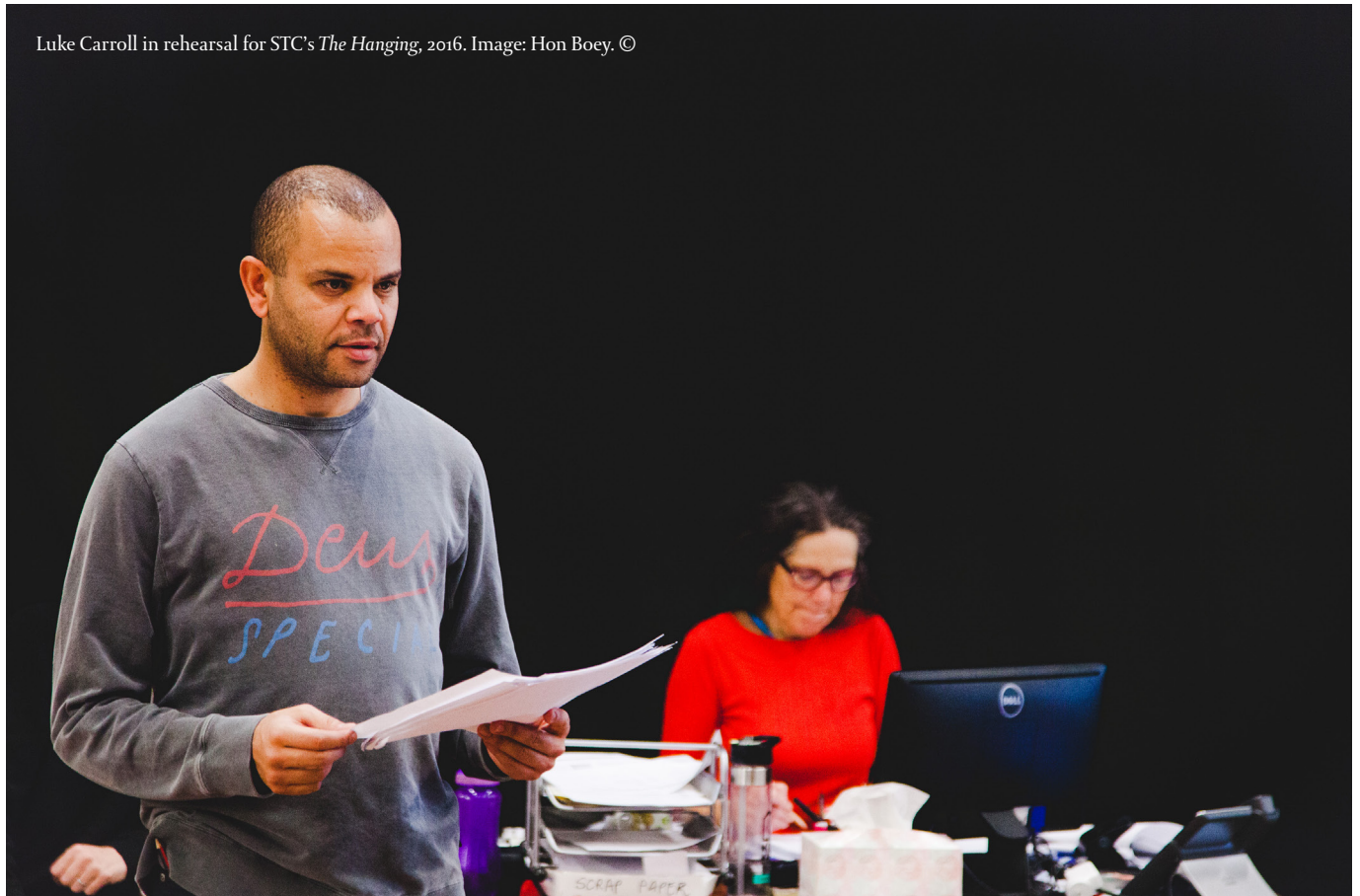
# THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

## INTERTEXTUALITY

The play makes reference to texts which explore similar ideas and concerns to *The Hanging*. In the reading group, the girls are reading Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the most significant Australian work about girls missing in the landscape, and it is suggested that their disappearance may be a copycat act. The play also makes subtle references through its form to the Nordic Noir genre, and Corrossi says she enjoys watching these television shows. This is an important aspect of the play because of how this genre represents women.

The Diderot quote is included to point to how prevalent the idea of young women going missing when they enter adolescence is, and has always been. There is also a reference to Ophelia, the famously troubled teen of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hannah in one of her games stays underwater longer and longer in the lake, a visual evocation of the Shakespearean character who drowned in a stream.

Luke Carroll in rehearsal for STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©





# STYLE



Luke Carroll and Genevieve Lemon in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

## AUSTRALIAN GOTHIC LITERATURE

The play uses conventions of Gothic literature and exists as part of a tradition of Australian Gothic writing, which includes such novels as *For The Term of His Natural Life* by Marcus Clarke through to *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay, and more recently Australian television shows such as *The Kettering Incident*. Australian Gothic literature is a genre that has been developed collectively by Australian writers as a way of attempting to understand the Australian bush, the scope of it, the awe it inspires, and the mystery of it. Angela Betzien is particularly well known for writing in this genre with plays such as *Children of the Black Skirt* and *The Dark Room*.

## THRILLER

Angela Betzien uses the Crime Thriller genre as a way to tell this story of youth identity formation and our national obsession with the idea of the missing child in the landscape. It is also a particular interest for Betzien as it is a mode in which women are usually victims, appearing as beautiful dead bodies. There are references in the play to Scandinavian Crime Dramas, a nod to a genre which has inspired the structure of the play.

# STYLE (CONT.)

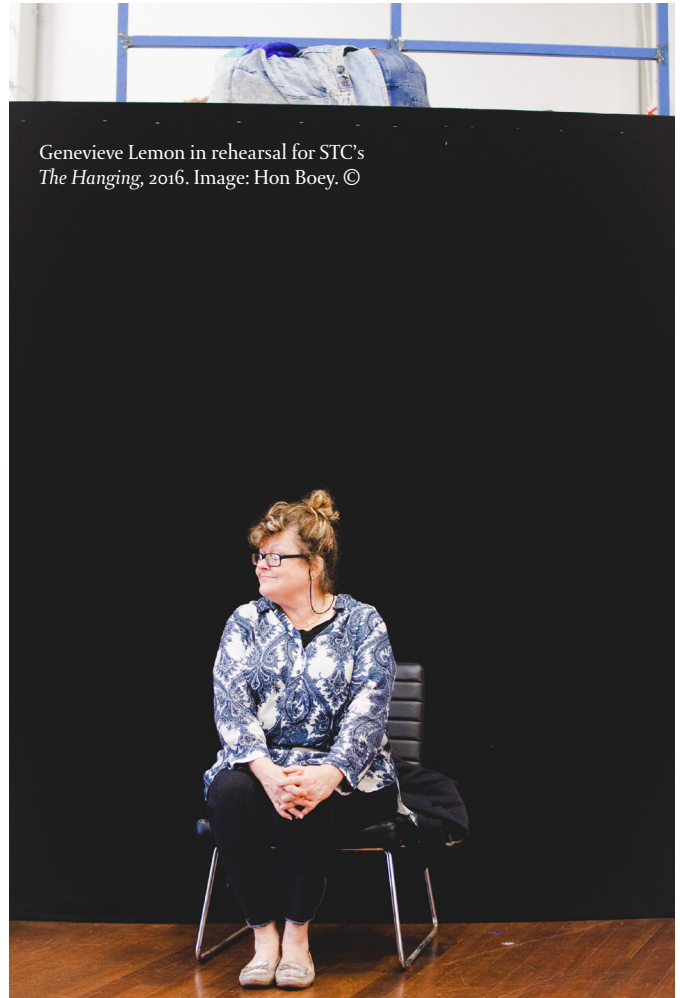
## CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

This is a new work from Australian playwright Angela Betzien, commissioned by Sydney Theatre Company, and premiered as part of STC's 2016 season. It has been developed in response to the creative process of the rehearsal room, a process unique to new work. Betzien has made significant contributions to the Australian theatrical canon in recent years, and is an important contemporary Australian playwright.

## HEIGHTENED REALISM

The play's tone, created through the combination of writing, design and direction, can be described as otherworldly. Time is often confusing and reality is distorted. At times the audience is in the real world of the characters, and at times it feels as though we are in their imaginations. This is a deliberate effect created to represent the lost feelings associated with youth identity formation and the internalisation of the process of transformation.

The design also contributes to this sense of other-worldliness. The wall that intersects the space is representative of both the interior and exterior world and the sound and lighting design complicates the sense of time passing conventionally. The world of the interview is lit as the conventional dining room that it is, but at times pools of light narrow over Iris to indicate she is remembering, and the sound of the outside world is used to support this. At times we are in the domestic world of the house in Brighton and at times we are transported to the landscape in which the girls are missing through the projections. This encourages the audience to call on their imaginations, to enter into a world where the truth is not always accessible, and to try and understand the strange and complex experience of adolescence.



Genevieve Lemon in rehearsal for STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

# THE ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION



Ashleigh Cummings in STC's *The Hanging*, 2016. Image: Lisa Tomasetti. ©

## DESIGN

The set is an abstract design with real world functionality. The main set piece is a wall, which is an intervention through the space, clad in stone which references the architecture of the Brighton house, Iris' father's house which is the real world of the interview that the characters are in, but the wall also conjures the stone of nature, of the world into which the girls have absconded.

The wall crossing the space is also referencing the horizon; it divides the space but also points to the possibility of what is happening in the world beyond this domestic realm, the world of the landscape that the girls have explored.

The platform above the wall is a liminal space, sometimes the house, sometimes the space beyond in the landscape. It is also where Iris stands when she is remembering and when she is not present in the house or the outside world, but somewhere in between.

The projection gives insight into the world of the characters, beyond the present setting. It contextualises the experiences of the girls before the action of the play and creates a dreamlike visual representation of their experiences.

# THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

## CHARACTER

'Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character.'

## SYMBOL

'Symbols can help you understand and focus the drama – they can sum up the meaning of the performance, sometimes on a subconscious level.'

## TIME AND PLACE

'All dramatic action occurs at a time and place... Time affects the place and situation that characters find themselves in.'

*These definitions are from the NSW Drama syllabus.*

### TAKE YOUR CUE

For each of the following character moments, identify one intention or attitude the character was expressing, and the belief or motivation which it reflects at that moment in the play. Give evidence of their attitude – what did they say or do?

- Iris when she tells Flint about the reading group
- Flint when he tells Iris about Hannah's relationship with Sebastian

### TAKE YOUR CUE

*The Hanging* uses some very key symbols to create meaning for the audience. What do the following symbols represent, and what is the meaning they convey to the audience?

- The references to time
- The black forest cake

### TAKE YOUR CUE

What is the place and time of *The Hanging*?

How does the design of the production represent this? Give detailed examples.

# THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT.)

## SPACE

'Space refers to both the shape of the stage/performance space and the spatial design contained in the performance space.'

## DRAMATIC MEANING

'Dramatic meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.' It is the meaning that is conveyed to the audience through the elements of drama.

### TAKE YOUR CUE

- What sort of stage is this and how does the design effectively utilise the space?
- How do actors manipulate the space, through their stage action, to create situations and build tension?
- What does the set design contribute to the story of the play? How does it serve the dramatic meaning?

### TAKE YOUR CUE

- Considering the above analysis of the themes and ideas explored in *The Hanging*, and your own experience of the play, what do you think the overall meaning of the play is?
- What do you think the writer and director want the audience to take away from this play?

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