

Maternal practice and maternal presence in Jane Harrison's *Stolen*

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This paper offers an analysis of the representation of Aboriginal mothers in Jane Harrison's play, *Stolen*. It argues that the Aboriginal mother characters in *Stolen* endeavour to engage in maternal practices even after their children are taken from them. The act of a non-Aboriginal person speaking about Aboriginal representation is acknowledged as problematic. Further, this paper proposes that if white feminists seek to analyse the representation of Aboriginal women then they should be open to criticism of their analyses. Engaging with dramatic criticism, postcolonial theory and maternal philosophy, the author presents Harrison's play-text as constituting an important contribution to discourses surrounding the Stolen Generations.

Introduction

Aboriginal drama articulates a world vision differing significantly from that of the European literary canon. First and foremost, both Canadian and Australian aboriginal playwrights wish to offer a new perspective on their forgotten history, thus undermining the biased vision of white settlers. (Maufort 2001, 8)

The writing of Aboriginal women possesses powerful potentialities, and I argue that the writing of Aboriginal women about Aboriginal women's lives offers significant counter narratives which challenge the "culture of forgetting" (Manne 1996) which is endemic in the nation of Australia. Helen Thomson writes that "Forgetfulness in Australia is a politically charged strategy that has characterised settler history" (2001, 23). Further, Thomson proposes (quoting Joy Hooyton), "No document has a greater chance of challenging the cult of forgetfulness than a black woman's autobiography" (Hooyton 1990, 313; in Thomson 2001, 23). Jane Harrison's play-text *Stolen* (2007) offers significant representations

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of strong maternal subjects, and I propose that those representations might be understood to function as an important rewriting of Australian history. Harrison represents the stolen children's mothers as active subjects whom write to, knit for and never give up searching for their children. I propose in this paper that the Aboriginal mother characters in *Stolen* undertake maternal practices and that through their engagement in acts of mother work they are represented as being responsive to the requirements of their children, despite their separation from "the reality of a biological child in a particular social world" (Ruddick 1989, 17).

Australia's First Nations people will be referred to in this paper as "Aboriginal" (Casey 2012, xi). Maryrose Casey chooses to use this naming in her text *Telling Stories: Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander Performance* (2012). Further, she writes, "The capital 'A' signifies that the word refers to the traditional owners of Australia" (Casey 2012, xi). Hence, the term Aboriginal will be employed in this paper as an acknowledgement of this.

I propose that play-texts may be analysed as sources that might be considered independently from the theatrical performances which have been staged in response to them. Rob Baum refers to play-texts as "dramatic literature" (2003, 13). She writes that she approaches them as "scribed works and also anthropological phenomena, as the writing of and about women's lives" (Baum 2003, 13). This paper considers the text of a play, and the potentialities which that text holds. Baum describes "the work of theatre" as being both "repeatable" and "never-to-be repeated" (2003, 13), identifying perhaps the most notable difference between the play-text and the staged performance. A play-text is repeatable, a performance is not. Live performance is, as Baum puts it, "ephemeral" (2003, 13). This paper will consider the text of Harrison's play *Stolen*, and the maternal representations called for by that text.

Articulating injustice

Stolen articulates some of the injustices perpetrated against Australia's Aboriginal people, by showing the experiences of its five central characters, and by permitting those characters to speak about their experiences. Harrison's five central characters are stolen children who have been stolen from their mothers. The play depicts the characters at multiple stages of their lives, giving its audiences the opportunity to see them as children recalling their experiences of being taken from their families, children suffering abuse after their removal, and adults severely

impacted by their separation from their families, their communities and their culture.

Stolen was commissioned by Ilbjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative. In 1992 they advertised for a writer and Harrison applied for the position. Alongside a team of researchers, Harrison interviewed community members and commenced the process of devising a script in response to those interviews. Wesley Enoch directed a reading of the play (then titled *The Lost Children*) in 1993. According to Enoch, "The title was changed when audience members argued that the children were never lost, they were stolen" (2007, viii). Enoch writes that "*Stolen* is a play that helped to change the course of history" (2007, vii). It received a standing ovation at its 1998 Melbourne premiere and sold-out seasons across Australia. *Stolen* has been staged in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong and Japan, and has had readings in Canada and New York (see Ilbjerri Theatre Company website for a partial production history). Through the vehicle of theatre Harrison has shared the stories of the stolen generations with thousands.

The process of development from which *Stolen* was devised fits within Deirdre Heddon's definition of verbatim theatre as "a form of theatre which places interviews with people at the heart of its process" (2008, 127). Verbatim theatre is sometimes referred to as documentary theatre or theatre of testimony. Of the characteristics of verbatim theatre, Heddon writes,

Though there are wide variations in terms of form and practices, [...] many productions do share a dramaturgical structure. Typically, they create a collage that enables multiple points of view, represented through multiple voices, but anchor this to a single or central storyline or thematic [...] (2008, 128).

Harrison's play-text *Stolen* has a central thematic and a common location. All of the central characters are stolen children and all of the central characters-bar one (Anne is adopted by a white family)-are, at different points in the play, together at a children's home. There is not a single or central storyline, but the stories of the five central characters share significant commonalities. The play-text does not follow a linear narrative, but rather, to adopt Heddon's terminology, it creates a "collage" (2008, 128) of multiple stories.

Harrison identifies Antoinette Braybrook as the primary researcher in *Stolen's* developmental process (2008, 64). However, it is clear that Harrison did listen to the stories of members of the stolen generations and their families, and that those stories directly impacted upon the play-text of *Stolen*. In a book chapter written by Harrison (2008, 62-75), and published approximately one decade after *Stolen's* mainstream premiere (1998). Harrison describes some of the stories she was told and talks about how those stories influenced the play-text of *Stolen*. Harrison writes that, "[She] heard of a mother who, having seen her child bundled into the welfare's big, black car without a word said to her, was paralysed with grief and stood in the rain unable to move or speak" (2008, 66). Harrison states this story "became the basis of two vignettes in the play for the character of Shirley" (2008, 66). Hence, when audience members observe Shirley's memories of her removal they are observing a lived experience. Through a reading of Harrison's book chapter, *My Journey through Stolen* (2008, 62-75), it is clear that multiple scenes within *Stolen* were inspired by the stories told to Harrison by members of the stolen generations and their families. Many of the experiences which are depicted within the play-text of *Stolen* were inspired by real experiences. Audience members who watch *Stolen* collaborate in the remembrance of real and traumatic events.

Who speaks?

In the act of writing about drama (play-texts) and theatre (live performance) exists the dilemma of remaining mindful of the place from which one writes. I watch, read and write from the place of a white feminist woman. Of the significant and problematic issues related to the act of a non-Aboriginal person writing about Australian Aboriginal identity Carolyn D'Cruz writes, "The matter of who speaks for and about whom is possibly the most sensitive and impassioned issue circulating within discourses of identity politics" (2001, par. 1). D'Cruz discusses the tumultuous ground a scholar treads when speaking for or about an identity when they do not "satisfy the criteria of bearing the marker of identity that [they are] speaking about" (2001, par. 1). D'Cruz in fact problematizes my own self-identification. Writing of the matter of non-Aboriginal people speaking about "Aboriginal identities and issues", D'Cruz writes, "[...] each speaker presumably enters some kind of power relationship with the investigated identity in the act of participating in the debate" (2001, par. 3). D'Cruz says that non-Aboriginal speakers and writers are often compelled by this recognition "to declare a list of their

identity markers" (2001, par. 3), as I have done. D'Cruz describes two possible uses of the declaration of the non-Aboriginal speaker or writer's "identity markers" (2001, par. 4). She writes, "Sometimes the declaration is used to problematize the speaking subject's 'right' to speak about the particular identity in question (such as a non-Aboriginal person speaking about issues pertaining to Aboriginal identity); at other times, the declaration acts as some kind of verifier of what is being said" (D'Cruz 2001, par. 4). I hope that in this case my own declaration of identity will be received in the first instance. I recognise that there are problems with the act of a white feminist woman writing about representations of Aboriginal women. I do not believe that my whiteness, my feminism or my gender equip or qualify me to speak about Aboriginal representation. However, I perceive that highlighting the significance of Australian Aboriginal women's writing might be suggested to be an important feminist responsibility.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson considers that "despite – or perhaps because of – feminism's commitment to a politics of difference, thinking and writing about whiteness has not yet had widespread impact upon theorising difference. Whiteness remains the invisible omnipresent norm" (2000a, xviii-xix). I approach the act of writing about the representation of Aboriginal mothers within *Stolen* from a place which is influenced by my whiteness. Yet, I believe that in identifying the place from which I write as problematic I can begin to approach the task called for by Moreton-Robinson. She writes, "To recognise that whiteness has shaped knowledge production means academia would have to accept that the dominant regime of knowledge is culturally and racially biased, socially situated and partial" (Moreton-Robinson 2004, 88). It is from this place that I write, with the recognition that my reading is influenced by whiteness.

Moreton-Robinson suggests that Adrienne Rich may be the first scholar to have written about whiteness. Moreton-Robinson states that Rich "argued that white feminists practice white solipsism" (Rich 1978, in Moreton-Robinson 2000b, 348). According to Moreton-Robinson, "[Marilyn] Frye and Rich both suggest that feminists should be disloyal to their whiteness by refusing the material and ego rewards conferred on them through their association with white men; they should actively work against their white race privilege" (2000b, 348). How might this disloyalty be manifest in writing? I suggest that in order for white feminists to write with or about Aboriginal women perhaps it is necessary for them to recognise and identify their whiteness and the potential that it has to bias their vision.

Further, I suggest that if white feminists seek to analyse the representation of Aboriginal women, perhaps they should invite and be open to the criticism of their (our) analyses. Anna Haebich provides a theoretical discussion of Australia's "national forgetting" (2011, 1035) of Indigenous histories, and this discussion of forgetting might be considered to act as a call to remember. I write this paper with a view to remembering the stolen children's mothers, and with a view to reading their stories.

Australian female playwrights

Australian Aboriginal female playwrights have begun to influence the "cultural imagination" (Fensham and Varney 2005, 63). Casey states that "[*Stolen*] provided a compelling force of resistance to the ongoing denial of indigenous realities by white Australian culture, as well as a celebration of indigenous survival and diversity after nearly two hundred and twenty years of white settlement" (2005, 200). Within the context of Rachel Fensham and Denise Varney's "dolls' revolution" (2005, 1) Harrison's play-text can be understood to have contributed to a significant shift within mainstream Australian theatre. Fensham and Varney propose that in the drama and theatre of the 1990s and early 2000s a group of female playwrights instigated a "dolls' revolution" (2005, 1). This revolution was characterised by a shift in Australian drama, toward the depiction of strong and complex female characters. Fensham and Varney use the metaphor of the kewpie doll as an analytical tool, moving away from its feminine connotations they imbue the doll with the power to create and spread revolution. Fensham and Varney say that the effects of the "dolls' revolution" (2005, 1) have spread beyond drama and theatre, to "the cultural imagination" (2005, 63). Fensham and Varney suggest that female playwrights are boldly depicting a range of possibilities for being and playing female. I propose that Aboriginal female playwrights have the ability to speak to and transform the "cultural imagination" (Fensham and Varney 2005, 63) and to dismantle the "cult of forgetfulness" (Hooyton 1990, 313; in Thomson 2001, 23) which permeates Australian society.

Maternal practices

Drawing from the "practicalist' conception of 'truth'" (1989, 13) Sara Ruddick proposes that "thinking arises from and is tested against practices" (1989, 13). Upon the basis of this preposition Ruddick asserts that there is such a thing as "maternal thinking" (1989, 13) and that this

thinking arises from “maternal practice” (1989, 17). It is Ruddick’s position that mothers engage in maternal practices “in response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world” (1989, 17). For Ruddick, an individual is a mother “because and to the degree that they are committed to meeting the demands that define maternal work” (1989, 17). Ruddick describes the demands which “constitute maternal work” (1989, 17) to be the demand for preservation, the demand for growth and the demand for social acceptability. Ruddick asserts that “to be a mother is to be committed to meeting these demands by works of preservative love, nurturance, and training” (1989, 17). Ruddick identifies the demands for preservation and growth to come from the child, and the demand for social acceptability to come from the mother’s social group (particularly other mothers) and society more broadly.

Jean Keller has identified Ruddick’s “birthgiver/adoptive mother distinction” (2009, 173) to be problematic. Further, Keller refers to the published letters of Korean birthmothers (Dorrow 1999) to argue that birthmothers may engage in maternal thinking, even prior to the birth of their child. It is suggested here that the Aboriginal mother characters within *Stolen* undertake acts which appear synonymous with Ruddick’s conception of maternal practices, even after their children are taken from them. The mothers within *Stolen* engage most notably in the maternal practice of nurturance, and through their acts of maternal practice they exert a strong presence within the world of the play.

Fostering growth

Ruddick describes the maternal practice of nurturing, or fostering growth, as “to nurture a child’s developing spirit” (1989, 82). She follows this statement by explaining her meaning of the term “spirit” (Ruddick 1989, 82). Ruddick suggests that a child’s spirit might be suggested to be “whatever in a child is lively, purposive, and responsive” (1989, 82). Ruddick positions the mother as the individual responsible for the nurturing of a child’s “developing spirit” (1989, 82). She offers seven definitions of the term “development” (1989, 82) which she perceives pertain to the child’s “developing spirit” (1989, 82). The definitions of development offered by Ruddick are: “to ‘unfold more completely,’ ‘to unfold gradually, as a flower from a bud,’ ‘to free from that which enfolds or envelops,’ ‘to form or expand by a process of growth,’ ‘to evolve the possibilities of power,’ ‘to make active (something latent)’ to ‘perfect, advance, further.’” (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82). I suggest that the

Aboriginal mothers within *Stolen* foster their children's growth (when they are with them) and seek to do so (when they are separated from them).

The mothers within *Stolen* attempt to foster the growth of their children. In the scene entitled "Sandy's story of the Mungee" (Harrison 2007, 10-11), Sandy asks the children in the children's home if they want to hear the story of "the big bad Mungee" (Harrison 2007, 10). When he begins telling the story he refers to the sun, speaking in his Aboriginal language (or dialect): he says, "The yurringa" (Harrison 2007, 10). Shirley (another child in the children's home) responds by saying "But you're not allowed to say that..." (Harrison 2007, 10). This line of dialogue reveals a cruel and racist rule within the children's home. Shirley's statement indicates explicitly that the children are not permitted to speak in Indigenous languages. However, Sandy has the memory of them. Further, in the scene entitled "Desert sands" (Harrison 2007, 22-23) Sandy tells the children a story his mother told him about his people. He tells them that "When [he] was a little boy, [his] mother would tell [him] the story of how the desert sands were created, a long time ago" (Harrison 2007, 22). Sandy remembers the stories which his mother told him, and he remembers his language, or at least a small part of it. It might be suggested that Sandy's memories of the stories he was told and the language which he spoke illustrate that his mother (and his extended family) sought to nurture Sandy's "developing spirit" (Ruddick 1989, 82) to "unfold more completely" (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82) and that they did so through the telling of stories and through the sharing of language. The stories they told and the language that they shared with Sandy remain with him, and he is able to share those stories and speak that language to the other children at the children's home. It is evident that Sandy's mother did share stories with him. Sandy clearly states, in the "Desert sands" scene, that the story which he tells was imparted to him by his mother. The stories which Sandy remembers provide him with a significant link to his culture, despite his removal from his family.

It is interesting to note that the second definition of development offered by Ruddick "to unfold gradually, as a flower from a bud," (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82) appears to be manifest most notably when Sandy is cared for by his uncle. Ruddick states, "whatever difference might exist between female and male mothers, there is no reason to believe that one sex rather than the other is more capable of doing maternal work" (1989, 41). Ruddick considers women to be no more equipped than men for the work of mothering. Within the text of *Stolen* it might be suggested that Sandy's uncle engages in the maternal practice of fostering growth, and

that his manifestation of this might be suggested to be most representative of Ruddick's description of development as "to unfold gradually, as a flower from a bud," (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82). Sandy's uncle says, "When I took the boy in he had nothing but the shirt on his back and a wild look in his eye. He couldn't sit still" (Harrison 2007, 4). In order to help Sandy relax and feel settled, Sandy's uncle takes him fishing. He states, "I'd take him down to the river and slowly he'd start breathing again. We'd catch a few fish and have a yarn, and he'd even crack a smile now and then" (Harrison 2007, 4). It might be suggested that Sandy's uncle engages in the maternal practice of fostering growth. Further, it is clear, from his description of the changes which he could see in Sandy, that his methods were successful.

The Aboriginal mothers within *Stolen* attempt to provide freedom for their children. The third definition of development offered by Ruddick, "to free from that which enfolds or envelops," (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82) is an aspect of development which two mothers within the text of *Stolen* clearly attempt to foster. The most significant examples of mothers attempting to free their children from that which has the potential to enfold, envelop and potentially consume their children, are the scenes in which the Aboriginal mothers cry out to their children warning them to run or hide from 'the Welfare'. In the scene entitled "Hiding Sandy" (Harrison 2007, 3-4) it is evident that Sandy's mother is trying to protect him, and that she perceives in order to protect him she must make him run from "the Welfare" (Harrison 2007, 5). The scene is fast paced. The dialogue (comprised of short sentences which express urgency) functions to create a rhythmic driving force. Sandy's mother sends Sandy away from her so that 'the Welfare' will not catch him. In the scene entitled "It rained the day" (Harrison 2007, 4-5) Jimmy's mother speaks the words "Don't you get caught... The Welfare- Don't... or the Welfare... If you... the Welfare... Willy, hide! Hide! The Welfare..." (Harrison 2007, 5). Like Sandy's mother, Jimmy's mother acts as a voice of warning; a voice telling him to hide, a voice telling him to run. Both Sandy's mother and Jimmy's mother warn their children to run and hide from 'the Welfare', and it might be suggested that they do so because they recognise that 'the Welfare' will not foster the growth of their children, but rather "enfold or envelop" (Ruddick 1989, 82), constricting their growth.

Jimmy's mother attempts to provide him with instruction, despite their separation. The fourth and seventh definitions of the term development offered by Ruddick, "to form or expand by a process of growth," and "to 'perfect, advance, further.'" (Bhasin 1987; in Ruddick 1989, 82) might be

suggested to be aspects of development which Jimmy's mother seeks to foster with her letters. It is evident that she wants to make contact with Jimmy. She continues to write to him year after year, never receiving a response.

The authority figures in the children's home tell Jimmy that his mother is dead. In the first of two scenes with the same title "Your mum's dead" (Harrison 2007, 11-13), Jimmy asks for his mother. He says, "When's my mum gonna come for me?" (Harrison 2007, 12), to which the Matron responds, "Your mother's not coming. She's dead" (Harrison 2007, 12). Jimmy declares that his mother is not dead, and almost instantly his mother is revealed to the audience, they see her "*standing offstage, isolated, spotlit, reading a letter*" (Harrison 1998, 12). She is not dead. She speaks the words:

22nd October, 1963. Dear Willy, they say it's for the best, but I'm missing my boy. They won't tell us where they took you, but perhaps you could write and tell us so we could come and visit you and your sister. Now try to do nothing naughty... Love, Mum and Dad (Harrison 2007, 12).

The stage directions state that the letter which Jimmy's mother reads is to be projected upon Jimmy's face. As the letter is read, the stage directions state that the audience will witness:

"[...] a silent demonstration of JIMMY being subjected to humiliation. He's being beaten (we hear the sound of the strap being applied), he's forced to clean shoes, he's sent to his room and an old tin plate of shapeless goo, his dinner, is slid across the floor in his direction. We see the once happy boy slowly shutting down" (Harrison 2007, 12).

Jimmy calls for his mother because he is not being preserved, he is not being nurtured, and he remembers her as someone who cared for him. The representation of Jimmy's mother, elsewhere, but thinking of him, writing to him, asking him to tell her where he is so that she can visit him, clearly presents her as a mother attempting to preserve her child, attempting to engage with her child and attempting to nurture him. Furthermore, when she tells him to "try to do nothing naughty" (Harrison 2007, 12), it appears Jimmy's mother is aware that wherever her son is it is likely that there will be very different ways of doing things. Her instruction, it would seem, is for his preservation.

Jimmy's mother continues to write to him regardless of the fact that she does not receive a response. In the second of two scenes entitled "Your mum's dead" (Harrison 2007, 11) the stage directions state that "JIMMY *is whimpering in his bed*" (Harrison 2007, 15). He says the words "I wanna go home" (Harrison 2007, 15). This time it is unclear whom he is speaking to; the voice that responds is not specified to be the Matron, it is simply referred to as "voice" (Harrison 2007, 15-16). The voice tells Jimmy to be quiet and the voice tells Jimmy that his mother is dead. Again, Jimmy's mother is revealed in bodily form, she is offstage and spotlit. This time she reads the sentences of her letter one by one. She reads one sentence, pauses, then Jimmy speaks. They do not hear or see one another, but they speak as if in dialogue. Jimmy's mother has aged a good deal in a short time. The stage directions tell us "*She's aged-her hair is now greyish*" (Harrison 2007, 16). Jimmy's mother says that she has not received any replies to the letters which she has sent, but she writes that she imagines that he is probably too busy to write to her "with school and everything" (Harrison 2007, 16). She says that 'the Welfare' doesn't tell them much (she and Jimmy's father). Further, she writes that Jimmy's father is unwell, and that they are poor, but that she found some red wool and has knitted him a pair of warm socks. Jimmy does not receive the socks, nor does he receive the letter. The stage directions specify that the filing cabinet is "*slammed shut*" (Harrison 2007, 16). However, audience members learn that Jimmy's mother continues to think of him and to write to him, though she has received no response to her letters. Jimmy's mother seeks to ensure that Jimmy is well. She sends him socks because she wants to make sure his feet are warm and she wishes to contribute to his wellbeing. Jimmy's mother endeavours to preserve Jimmy and to mother Jimmy, though he has been taken from her. By telling Jimmy to "try to do nothing naughty" (Harrison 2007, 12) it is clear that Jimmy's mother attempts to foster the formation and expansion of Jimmy's behaviour (despite their separation). She seeks to assist him to behave in a way which will be acceptable to those around him, for his own benefit. This might also be considered to be an act of training for social acceptability, which is the third maternal practice identified by Ruddick.

Preservative love

It is evident within the play-text of *Stolen* that the stolen children's Aboriginal mothers seek to nurture and train their children, whilst

preservative love is the first maternal practice identified by Ruddick, it will be the final maternal practice discussed here. Ruddick describes preservative love as an action of mother work performed in response to a demand made by a child, the demand for preservation. In order to explain her conception of preservative love Ruddick describes a story told by the mother of a child who slept poorly due to croup and bronchitis, caused by allergies. The story tells of the mother's suffering, spending hours, days, and nights alone with a crying and screaming baby. In this story the mother's partner is mostly absent and uninvolved; though he supports the mother and child financially, he is not home much. Ruddick describes one night in particular, a night when the mother's partner (the child's father) could not come home. She describes how the child "[wailed] as usual" (Ruddick 1989, 66). Further, she goes on to describe the mother experiencing a shortness of breath and an image which frightened her. Ruddick reveals that the mother imagined harming the child and was very disturbed by what she imagined. However, Ruddick states that the mother changed the baby and gave the baby warm milk, before "[shutting] the door to the baby's room, [and] barricading it against herself with a large armchair" (1989, 67). Here, Ruddick begins her chapter on the nature of maternal love by offering a story of a mother who imagined harming her screaming baby, but did not. It is interesting that in the introduction to Ruddick's chapter on preservative love Ruddick offers a story of a mother shutting a door between herself and a child and barricading that door shut as an example of the maternal practice of preservative love. For Ruddick preservative love is a maternal practice, and through her description of preservative love in action it is evident that Ruddick considers preservative love to be a maternal practice which is chosen.

The mother within Ruddick's story is divided. In her imagination she causes her child harm. However, in her actions she chooses to preserve her child. Of "mother-love" (1989, 68) Ruddick writes, "What we are pleased to call 'mother-love' is intermixed with hate, sorrow impatience, resentment, and despair; thought-provoking ambivalence is a hallmark of mothering" (1989, 68). Hence, it can be understood that Ruddick considers maternal emotions to be comprised of a complex mixture of "hate, sorrow, impatience, resentment, and despair" (1989, 68). She refers to the story which she tells as being "emblematic of maternal work" (1989, 67), and it is evident that "the child within this story is not preserved as a result of "mother-love" (1989, 67). For Ruddick, mother-love is complex and contains both positive and negative emotions. Preservative love is a choice, to undertake the maternal practice, or

mother work, of preserving a child. Hence, for Ruddick, a mother engages in preservative love and expresses preservative love when they choose (not necessarily because of-but potentially in spite of-their emotions) to preserve the child.

Within the play-text of *Stolen* the Aboriginal mothers long for and mourn for their children. In regards to their children and their maternal emotions they do not appear divided. It is clear that the Aboriginal mothers within *Stolen* want to engage in the maternal practice of preservative love for their children. Furthermore, it might be suggested that the Aboriginal mothers do engage in the maternal practice of preservative love, even after their children are taken from them.

Shirley (a stolen child and a mother whose children have been stolen from her) makes clothes for her children, despite their absence, because she longs to care for them. In the scene entitled "Shirley knits for her family" (Harrison 2007, 19) the stage directions state: "*SHIRLEY has a big bag of knitting that she lays out-from small garments to large, representing the years that she has knitted for her family without ever getting the chance to give them her symbols of love*" (Harrison 2007, 19). Shirley tells the audience about her experience in the wool shop "the other day" (Harrison 2007, 19) and her experience is enacted upon the stage with an offstage voice speaking the words which the shopkeeper said. The audience members learn that the shop keeper asked Shirley how many grandchildren she had, and that at hearing this Shirley had to leave the shop, because she did not know how many grandchildren she had. Shirley knits for her children and grandchildren, but it is revealed that she is unable to give her children or grandchildren the clothes which she knits for them. Shirley has two children, a son and a daughter, both were taken from her. She believes, but does not know, that she has grandchildren. Shirley knits for her children and the stage directions describe this knitting as "*symbols of love*" (Harrison 2007, 19). It appears that Shirley longs to actively care for her children, and hence she knits for them, persistently.

Shirley is persistent in her search for her children. In the scene entitled "Shirley never gives up searching" (Harrison 2007, 21-22) Shirley calls the authorities to ask about her children. The stage directions state: "*One by one all the others join her on the bed and they all make calls-to the authorities, social services, anyone who might know anything regarding the whereabouts of her children. The voices crowd over one another so it becomes a wall of sound*" (Harrison 2007, 21). The scene ends with

Shirley standing alone, spotlit. She speaks the words: "Put me on hold... [...] You people have been putting me on hold for twenty-seven years..." (Harrison 2007, 22). With these words it is revealed that Shirley has been searching for her children for twenty seven years, and still she refuses to give up searching.

Jimmy's mother does not stop writing letters. In the scene entitled "Jimmy's story" (Harrison 2007, 26-28) Jimmy's mother sends another letter, this time she writes to the authorities. She writes, "I am writing to let you know that we would like our son Willy to come back home" (Harrison 2007, 26). In this scene Jimmy's mother is named for the first time, she signs her letter: "Nancy Wajurri" (Harrison 2007, 26). In her letter she states that she and her husband are employed, clearly attempting to convince those in power that they are productive members of society and well able to care for and provide for their son. This time Nancy is not present on stage, nor is she spotlit in the wings, she is present as a voice, speaking her letters. As Jimmy's mother speaks Jimmy is present on stage, in a gaol cell. It is evident that his mother believes that he is still in the care of those who took him, that she believes he is in foster care-or similar. It is evident in this scene that Nancy wants to provide for Jimmy, wants to preserve him, and wants to nurture him. However, she does not know where he is and he does not know where she is, and the authorities have no interest in addressing this.

In the scene entitled "What do you do?" (Harrison 2007, 29-30) Jimmy and his mother Nancy prepare to meet for the first time since he was taken. They speak, one after the other, however, they do not hear one another. The stage directions state that: "*NANCY pulls the twenty-six presents from out of the box and lays them on the floor. She takes the time to consider each one, as they represent all the love she was not able to give her son*" (Harrison 2007, 30). Nancy has twenty six presents, one for each of the years that has passed since Jimmy was taken from her. The stage directions state that after considering each present, "*NANCY collapses and dies*" (Harrison 2007, 30). The presents act as tangible evidence of Nancy's active thinking of Jimmy. The pathos here is potent, as Nancy dies before she is able to give Jimmy a single gift, a single expression of her love.

Jimmy commits suicide in prison

When Jimmy learns that his mother is dead (for real this time) he loses all hope. In the scene entitled "Racist insults" (Harrison 2007, 32-34), the character of Jimmy commits suicide in prison and he is found by a prison warden, "hanging, swaying" (Harrison 2007, 33). Jimmy is taken from his mother, and before he is able to meet her as an adult, she dies. He no longer wants to live in a world where his mother is not. It is as if when his mother dies his hope dies with her. The depiction of Jimmy's hanging is at once desperately sad and poignant. The image-in text-is immensely powerful, and the words of Jimmy's letter speak the tragedy of the play clearly. He calls for babies not to be taken from their mothers' arms. This call links Jimmy's death by hanging with the act of 'the Welfare' taking him from his mother's arms. The act of child removal in this instance is synonymous with murder. The message of the play is delivered powerfully through Jimmy's suicide note. Perhaps the message would not be so piercing, so unforgettable, if it were not delivered alongside the hanging, dead body of a-now adult-stolen child. Jimmy's voice can be heard as he speaks the words of his suicide note though his body hangs lifeless. Jimmy speaks the words of his letter, just as his mother speaks the words of her letters. It is evident throughout the play-text of *Stolen* that the stolen children's Aboriginal mothers want to care for their children. Further, through the acts of maternal practice which they undertake, the Aboriginal mothers within *Stolen* are depicted as offering that which their children are crying out for.

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