A BLACK SWAN AND SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY CO-PRODUCTION

THE TORRENTS
by Oriel Gray

15 JUN TO 30 JUN

HEATH LEDGER THEATRE

CYGNET CREATIVE LEARNING RESOURCE
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This Creative Learning Resource was written by Libby Klysz.

- Students of Year 11 & 12 ATAR Drama will notice connections to course content in Unit 1: Representational, Realist Drama; and Unit 3: Reinterpretation of Drama for Contemporary Audiences. In particular, there are links to Values, forces and drama practice, Drama forms and styles, Drama conventions, and Design and technologies.
- Students studying Drama in Year 7-10 will note connections to both Making (Drama conventions, and forms and styles) and Responding strands, particularly those in Year 8 looking at realism, and in Year 9 looking at melodrama.
- Students of Year 12 English may wish to use this production to explore content in Unit 3, through analysis of conventions of genre, and purpose & style.
- English Literature students should think about how the show relate to Unit 4, looking at the dynamic nature of literary interpretation.
MESSAGE FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, CLARE WATSON

There is nothing more thrilling than the alchemy of theatre. Sitting in your seat and being invited into entire worlds created for you by brilliant artists. Thinking about who we are and the choices we make through the lens of a character realised by the extraordinary talent of an actor. The theatre invites our empathy and strengthens our compassion. The impossible becomes possible. And theatre can be ridiculously fun, the kind of fun that’s infectious.

In curating the upcoming season, we began with the question – what should we be talking about right now, as citizens of Perth, as citizens of the world, as humans? Black Swan creates theatre that promises to be adventurous, ambitious, and highly entertaining, as well as asking those big questions.

As the next generation of artists, policy makers, theatre goers and engaged citizens, I invite students to join in the fun, and become part of the conversation."

EDUCATION PROGRAM

Black Swan is committed to supporting educators in developing a lifelong love of theatre and inspiring audiences of the future. We are accessible to all school communities with selected performances at the State Theatre Centre, student and teacher workshops, quality teaching resources and in-school experiences that align with the curriculum. Heavily subsidised student priced tickets and school subscription packages are offered in addition to work experience, internships and student ambassador programs.

*The Torrents and Education Program supported by*

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**THE TORRENTS CREDITS**

**Director:** Clare Watson

**Assistant Director:** Emily McLean

**Writer:** Oriel Gray

**Set & Costume Designer:** Renée Mulder

**Sound Designer/ Composer:** Joe Paradise Lui

**Lighting Designer:** Lucy Birkinshaw

**Dramaturg:** Virginia Gay

**Cast:** Emily Rose Brennan, Luke Carroll, Tony Cogin, Gareth Davies, Rob Johnson, Geoff Kelso, Sam Longley, Celia Pacquola, Steve Rodgers.

LR: Sam Longley, Rob Johnson, Celia Pacquola, Geoff Kelso, Gareth Davies, image credit Philip Gostelow
ABOUT BLACK SWAN

ARE WE PART OF THE HEART OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA? AND TO WHOM DO WE BELONG?

Our theatre has brought about countless moments of human connection – laughter, tears, and everything in between. After 28 years as our State’s premier theatre company, we can’t help but wonder if these moments have amounted to a greater sense of belonging. Have we, in part, helped you find Where the Heart Is?

In a season where we are asking you to explore ‘Where the Heart Is’, it would be remiss of us not to ask ourselves the same question – to reflect upon the role we play in fostering creativity and bringing people together.

Our ambition, as Western Australia’s state theatre company, lies on a scale far bigger than just the stage. We have a responsibility to our State that is like no other, to lead and advocate for our culture – to grow and to share our Western Australian identity.

In a place as vast as WA, we have the entirety of our State’s story to tell, and we know the absolute importance of sharing it with both our own community and the world. We must hear and share all voices – together they make our image of Western Australian-ness whole. We seek to build a dynamic voice that matters, from a place of isolation.

Black Swan is a theatre company of national significance, creating exceptional theatre that nurtures Western Australian audiences and artists, and promotes our artists within the state, nationally and internationally.

Founded in 1991, Black Swan has earned both critical and popular acclaim for its world premiere productions and highly distinctive reinterpretations of international theatre classics – all of which are infused with the unique culture of Western Australia.

LR: Celia Pacquola and Emily Rose Brennan, image credit Philip Gostelow
A WOMAN’S PLACE IS IN THE NEWSROOM

“It’s the 1890s in the Goldfields. J.G. Milford has hopped off the train in the small town of Koolgalla to take on a job at the local paper. She’s smart, she’s savvy, she’s incredibly qualified, but nobody knew the J stood for Jenny!

Koolgalla is a gold town, but the gold rush is beginning to wane. In the office of the Koolgalla Argus, the editors must decide between protecting old interests and investing in the farmland of the future.

Oriel Gray’s *The Torrents* is a newsroom comedy that rivals George Bernard Shaw. Jenny’s arrival coincides with a trailblazing engineer’s outrageous idea to bring irrigation to the community and debate rages about whether the town should give up mining for a more sustainable economic future.

Meanwhile, newspaper editor Rufus Torrent and his son Ben are vying for Jenny’s favour, even as she pulls apart their chauvinistic assumptions.

*The Torrents* was written in 1955. That year, it was joint winner of the prestigious Playwrights’ Advisory Board Competition with *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Yet while Lawler’s play is considered a defining feature of Australian theatre, *The Torrents* is underappreciated and was perhaps ahead of its time. The themes of media chauvinism, environmental destruction and corrupt powers are chillingly relevant today.
NEW IDEAS, POWER AND ADAPTING TO CHANGE
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Great ideas

🌟 What insights about change and power are offered by the cast and crew about the characters dealing with change? Watch the videos to find out.

Gold mining and the environment
As well as the degradation of the land, there was also a huge overhaul of social classes for the government to consider:

“On a symbolic level, the idea of instant and arbitrary wealth was a spectre that colonial authorities did not want to contemplate. Convicts made up the majority of Australia’s population, after all, and a gold rush symbolized the horrific potential of a disenfranchised underclass controlling the majority of the colony’s new wealth.


🌟 What are your thoughts about the benefits of personal wealth created by mining versus the protection of our environment?

Women in Australian Journalism
In The Torrents, Jenny is a pioneer for women in the media.

🌟 How many Australian female journalists can you name? Think about television, print media and online. Do you have any favourites? What is their appeal?

MORE INFO?

LISTEN to respected Australian sports journalist Caroline Wilson deliver the Andrew Olle Lecture about sexism in sports journalism. A blistering 30 minutes!

READ a report released this year by the MEAA (the union that represents journalists) about women in media. Lots of great infographics!
https://www.meaa.org/download/mates-over-merit-full-report/

WATCH video of the Australian Goldfields history
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bbk9muStCPk&t=19s
Oriel Gray (1920-2003) was born into a politically active family in Sydney. At age eleven she began her long association with Sydney’s left-wing New Theatre, firstly as a comedian and then as a writer. She was a member of the Communist Party of Australia from 1942 to 1950. Her first plays were five-minute radio dramas for a trade union education program. Her plays are regarded as being ahead of their time due to the complex manner in which they deal with social issues. Gray inventively addressed issues of Aboriginal rights, life in the bush, migrant experience and women’s employment.

Her first full-length play, Lawson, was produced by Sydney New Theatre, in 1943. Gray’s play, The Torrents, was joint winner of the 1955 Playwrights’ Advisory Board Competition In her last published work (and her only novel), The Animal Shop, Gray returned to familiar themes—working women and class conflict.

Gray’s work received most attention within the New Theatre movement. These left leaning theatre groups more freely accepted women’s writing than in the mainstream Australian theatre of the time. Gray, a member of the Communist Party of Australia through the 1940s, worked with New Theatre as both a writer and an actor. This phase of Gray’s life is covered extensively in her 1985 autobiography, Exit Left: Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman. Gray met both her first and second husband at New Theatre Sydney: she was first married to John Gray and subsequently to John Hepworth.

In addition to writing for stage, Gray wrote extensively for radio and television. During the 1950s, Gray worked on the development of children’s education programmes for the ABC and later produced scripts for episodes of Rush, Bellbird and The Sullivans.

"I did try to hold up a mirror to my times, and sometimes I think I caught a reflection that no other writer will ever get because it will never be that way again.” Oriel Gray, 1985

Lots more to read about Oriel Gray in Michelle Arrow's 2002 critical work Upstaged: Australian Women Dramatists in the Limelight at Last.

The playwright Merrilee Moss wrote her PhD (Monash University) on Gray in 2016, and a play, Oriel, based on her life, which was produced by La Mama Theatre in Melbourne, September 2016.

NEW THEATRE

Does the New Theatre still exist? What other renowned playwrights have had work here?

https://newtheatre.org.au/
Oriel Gray is a great Australian writer whose work deserves an audience today and we are so proud to be bringing The Torrents to Perth. This is only its second professional production (the first and only, until now, was in 1996). The legend of this play is that it was the one that got away, it was joint winner of a prestigious playwriting award in 1955. The Torrents and Summer of the Seventeenth Doll shared first prize. Many of you will have joined us in this very theatre for Summer of the Seventeenth Doll last year, many of you would have seen it before and perhaps studied it at school or uni. But have you heard of The Torrents? Well that’s all about to change. We hope that you’ll find it searingly relevant in its themes – workplace gender politics, mining versus sustainable environmental practices and the power of money to corrupt truth in our media.

In the 1940s Oriel spent time in Kalgoorlie, which has inspired the fictional town of Koolgalla and the character of Kingsley bares some remarkable resemblances to our local hero C.Y.O’Connor. The play itself is a period piece, set in the late 1890s. We’re thrilled to bring you this local story that we believe should always have been a classic. It’s a fabulous melodrama full of big ideas and eccentric characters. As a team, we’ve approached it with the same fun and playfulness that a group of theatre makers would approach a new work. My heartfelt thanks to the team of The Torrents, the team of Black Swan and to Oriel’s family for keeping Oriel’s legacy at the heart of this production.

And thank you to the women who have walked the difficult path before us. This play is dedicated to the memory of Oriel Gray and I’d also like to dedicate it to my own Grandma, Margaret Watson, who is a contemporary of Oriel’s, she is one of the smartest, most dynamic and strongest women that I know.
ACTIVITIES: PRESHOW

Check out our six exclusive behind the scene team videos. The cast and creatives share their insights and processes, featuring Artistic Director Clare Watson, actors Emily Rose Brennan, Tony Cogin, Gareth Davies, Rob Johnson, Geoff Kelso, Sam Longley, Celia Pacquola, Steve Rodgers and Set & Costume Designer Renée Mulder. Please see links below.

- Video One: Four Funny Blokes
- Video Two: Acting Backgrounds and Processes
- Video Three: Three Funny Ladies
- Video Four: Best Bits
- Video Five: What is “The Torrents” about?
- Video Six: Set & Costume Design

POLITICAL SATIRE

WATCH three-minute video Australian political satirists Clarke and Dawe in 2015, skewering then Environment Minister Greg Hunt

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sJY7_1CPTI

Clarke and Dawe were a popular duo that wrote and performed satirical sketches for ABC news, based on weekly events.

As their ABC program page explains, “for 25 years John Clarke and Bryan Dawe have broadcast a weekly interview in which prominent figures speak about matters of public importance. John pretends to be someone he isn't pretending to be and Bryan behaves with grace under pressure.” Sadly, Clarke passed away last year putting an end to these beloved scenes.

You can watch more on their YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/ClarkeAndDawe

Australia has a rich history of political satire; this allows society to see the ‘underbelly’ of the political process and to gain insights into governmental behaviour and decision-making. Here’s a four-minute video to WATCH exploring this: https://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/1418/

There has been some analysis lately that Australians don’t “get” satire. Do you agree with this notion? READ an article about the impact of satire, with lots of video examples to WATCH here: https://theconversation.com/now-youre-laughing-the-unhappy-state-of-australias-political-satire-61742
Working in small groups, watch examples of political satire. You might want to look at the links in the articles above, or explore some from overseas such as Saturday Night Live, John Oliver's Last Week Tonight or The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.

Can you find examples of exaggeration, irony, parody, vividness, antithesis, humour, or stereotyping?

CREATE a storyboard of a short scene that satirises an aspect of your life.

In groups, FILM your scenes and present them to your peers. Were you successful in getting your point across?

Political cartoons in newspapers are often very satirical. DRAW your school satirical idea from the previous activity as a simple illustration.

Does the newspaper the cartoon appears in affect the target of satire? Why might this be?

Do some of your favourite animated series have satirical elements? Film maker Will Schoder has some insights into this here:

https://laughingsquid.com/why-cartoons-make-great-satire/

How can comedy be used as a vehicle to incite social change or highlight social inequity?

Satire has been around since ancient times. The Ancient Greeks had Satyr Drama, which were similar in spirit to the bawdy satire of burlesque. They were based on Greek mythology, and were rife with mock drunkenness, brazen sexuality (including phallic props), pranks, sight gags, and general merriment.

The National Theatre created this great short film exploring these origins:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-BvMbfkxcc

There are some good activities to explore writing comedy further here:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4Jd69Rf48R9LcS6xwbi22b/welcome-to-comedy-classroom-for-secondary-schools

NEWSPAPERS

WATCH this legendary Andrew Olle Lecture from Lisa Wilkinson, talking about how social media has changed journalism, and the current role of women in the press:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFUDkcPai9M

The survival of newspapers is a hot topic right now. Can you think of three good reasons why this might be?

What can newspapers offer than other news formats cannot? Do you read newspapers? Maybe online?

Some great READS here:


and

http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/intro.html

or have a WATCH of this cool designer saving newspapers in Eastern Europe:
https://www.ted.com/talks/jacek_utko_asks_can_design_save_the_newspaper?language=en

WRITE a newspaper article covering a hot topic in your community right now. Don’t forget to include the 5 Ws (who, what, where, when and why) in the first couple of paragraphs.

LISTEN to this podcast describe how the actual printing of newspapers has changed, and how it’s influenced the world along with it. https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3csv0rr

“As a woman in the media, it has long saddened me that while we delight in covering public issues of overt sexism – possibly the hottest topic in media over the last twelve months – the media itself can be every bit as guilty of treating women entirely differently to men. And in terms of our audience, the cliché is so often true – it is women who can turn out to be a woman’s harshest critic.”

Lisa Wilkinson

LR: Sam Longley, Tony Cogin, image credit Philip Gostelow.
The Torrents was written in a time that Australian theatre was beginning to flourish.

In the early 1900s, less Australian drama appeared on stages around the country; theatre companies relied on foreign work like Shakespeare. The first Australian play written by an Australian was The Bushrangers by David Burn, in 1829. There was a slow increase of national identity through drama up until the early 1950s where Australia’s theatre industry hit a boom. Plays portrayed the ‘battling’ way of life through Australian eyes.

Australia in the 1950’s was a time of post war reconstruction, immigration, affluence and a new self assurance as a nation and a loosening of the economic, social and cultural ties with England all of which was reflected in theatre. A new era had begun, and Australian drama was finally recognized.

A fantastic account of the progress of Australian Theatre can be found here: https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/genres/australian-drama-iid-21712

Black Swan’s Summer of the Seventeenth Doll image credit Philip Gostelow

The Torrents and The Doll

Oriel Gray won The Playwrights Advisory Board prize in 1955 for The Torrents. She was joint winner with Ray Lawler for his play Summer of the Seventeenth Doll. Part of the prize was meant to include a professional production of the play; however this never happened for The Torrents. Lawler’s play went on to major success, both in Australia and overseas. It is one of the most performed Australian plays- perhaps you saw Black Swan State Theatre Company’s version in 2018? The constant comparison of the plays dogged Gray’s career and she was subsequently swept out of theatre history until the Adelaide Festival revived it in 1996.

There is a great comparison of the two plays by Julian Meyrick here: https://theconversation.com/the-great-australian-plays-the-torrents-the-doll-and-the-critical-mass-of-australian-drama-69990
In small groups, rehearse scenes from Richard Beynon’s *The Shifting Heart*, *The Man from Mukinupin* by Dorothy Hewitt and *No Sugar* by Jack Davis. What similarities do you notice about language and themes? What changes as the plays traverse decades?

In pairs, tell each other a true story about your greatest ever sporting triumph (no matter how minor). Retell each other’s stories back to them, ensuring you use the same language and phrases as the original. Now imagine you were telling this story to a grandparent from another continent—what aspects of the story would you have to change or explain for them to understand?

Try your hand at writing a representational script based on a conversation with two people about something happening in your community. You might want to record a read conversation to help you (get permission first), or ask peers to improvise dialogue. What editing needs to happen? Where is the line between honouring the source material and crafting a structured piece of theatre? How does dialogue sound “real” or “fake”?

Ask two people to read the script aloud so you can hear how it sounds before you edit it further. Choose your own subject matter, or use some of the following suggestions that refer to topics discussed in *The Torrents*:

- Starting a new job
- Moving towns
- Climate change
- Unrequited love

MORE INFO?

**READ** this cool article about current female Australian playwrights

https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/dec/21/australian-theatre-2016-the-10-most-groundbreaking-shows-by-women

**WATCH** this old documentary made in the 1950s about Australian theatre! Times have certainly changed.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QONAuO8oBhM
How do you know what a West Australian regional newspaper office in the 1890s looked like?

How do you design a set that allows for dynamic movement by the cast when the action never really leaves the same place?

What choices would you make if you were designing costumes for *The Torrents*? What visual elements could you use to identify status and class amongst the characters?

Designer Renee Mulder had to research a lot of information to create the set and costumes so as to represent a historically accurate design that also assists the audience in understanding the characters and play.

She created lots of info sheets for the cast and crew to refer to in rehearsal and construction, as well as building a set model and drawing final costume sketches.

You can get a good start on all things Victorian era in terms of fashion and furniture here: [http://victorian-era.org/](http://victorian-era.org/)

A picture of the toile for blouse 1 for the character Gwynne.

A toile is a prototype garment made for a fitting - adaptations are made and transferred to the pattern before it is cut out in the actual fabric.

The sunray pleats on the front provide shape to the garment in a soft sculptured way.
Costume sketches by Renée Mulder

Set models by Renee Mulder

CREATE a sketch and set model of your favourite room in your house, or a for a play you are studying (consider theatrical style and time period).

The National Theatre in the UK have an incredible YouTube playlist of the design of heaps of their shows, complete with set models. WATCH them here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL48EDBCB4915D0ACA

The Rehearsal Room, image credit Philip Gostelow
The character of Kingsley in *The Torrents* has a definite resemblance to real life irrigation pioneer C. Y. O’Connor, the guy that built the pipeline from the goldfields of Kalgoorlie to the outer suburbs of Perth, over 500 km away, in the late 1800s. Although an engineering success that is still relied upon today, O’Connor himself met a tragic. Read more about it here: https://www.watercorporation.com.au/home/education/students/the-golden-pipeline

Or LISTEN to this tale of C.Y O’Connor’s legacy spun here: https://www.cockburnlibraries.com.au/blog/podcast-cyoconnor-debunking-myth/

EXPLORE life in the Goldfields of Australia during the gold rush on this cool SBS interactive site: https://www.sbs.com.au/gold/

DEVELOP a short script with some peers about C. Y. O’Connor based on his tale and your explorations in the goldfields.

PLAY this online video game about striking it rich in the goldfields! https://www.nma.gov.au/av/goldrush/

Top Left: Goldfields Pipeline - laying the pipes across the Darling Ranges.
Top Right: Goldfields pipeline – official opening at Mt Charlotte Reservoir on 24 Jan 1903.
Left: Goldfield Pipeline – construction on the original scheme.
Photos courtesy of Water Corporation.
In small groups, write down the most memorable parts of the show on post-it notes and put them in chronological order of the show.

Use the following framework to assist in writing your review.

WRITE your ideas in note form at first, then fill them out into full sentences. Each heading should be a new paragraph.

Remember, the more specific details and examples you give, the easier it is for your reader to get a sense of your ideas.

- State the name of the play, playwright, theatre group, venue, date, director. Briefly give the background of any relevant person and lead actor/s.
- Succinct outline of the dramatic action in enough detail for the reader to understand the story, but brief enough to avoid rambling. Briefly explain the initial reaction and impact upon the audience at the start of the show.
- State the performers' names and the characters they played. Review the quality of each artist's performance (you don't have to talk about them all, choose the most noteworthy ones).
- Explain the use of stage design or scenography throughout the performance. Did the play include any set design and/or props? Was the stage space good or bad for the performers?
- Did the play use any lighting, sound/music, costume design or any other technical aspects which were worthy of mention?
- Dramatic Structure – did it follow a linear narrative? Were some acts/scenes more interesting than others?
- Were there any messages, or themes presented to the audience?
- What is your personal opinion about the play? Do you recommend people to see the play? Do you have any further comments to add to your review?

LR: Sam Longley, Geoff Kelso, Rob Johnson, Tony Cogin.
Image credit Philip Gostelow.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

Black Swan’s The Torrents is located in the Heath Ledger Theatre in State Theatre Centre of WA, and seating is reserved.

The State Theatre Centre of WA is located at 174 – 176 William St, Perth (cnr Roe St).

There are several City of Perth paid carparks nearby, or Perth Train Station is a three minute walk away.

There are pickup and drop off points on William St and Roe St.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

• Please make sure your mobile phone is switched off and stashed in your bag or pocket. Notifications and glowing screens are very distracting to both the audience and performers.

• Please don’t eat during the performance. It’s noisy and distracting for everyone.

• Please do clap and laugh and react like a human during the performance. Keep the chat until interval and after the show, though.

• Take heaps of selfies before and after the show. However, photos are not allowed to be taken during the show. Share your experience on social media! Post on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and tag:
  @BlackSwanSTC
  #blackswanstc
  #thetorrents
  #wheretheheartis

• Please make sure you’re on time, with plenty of extra time to go to the toilet beforehand and to find your seats.