

Circles Never Stop Themselves

A STUDY OF CLASSICAL RECEPTION IN 'THE DOLLS OF NEW ALBION'

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They had no idea just how right they were. Neither did I, at the time.

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Introduction

I'm really into the whole 'circles never stop themselves,' because I believe it.
I believe that describes humanity.
– Paul Shapera¹

The Dolls of New Albion, an opera written by Paul Shapera, came out in the spring of 2012. Composed in a style that matches the industrial age-inspired aesthetics of what pop-culture refers to as 'steampunk', the opera features a broad cast of characters divided over four acts, each of them narrated by an all-knowing narrator. Placed in the 19th century-esque fictional city-state of New Albion, *The Dolls of New Albion* tells the story of death-defying scientists, heartbroken and vengeful businessmen, uninhibited cultists and loving sacrifice.

While the operatic genre as a whole found its origins in an attempted revival of the tragic tradition of ancient Greece alongside much of the culture of Antiquity during the Renaissance, many operas over the centuries have strayed from these origins. Starting in the early days of this musical genre, operas have been telling stories that appear to have little to nothing to do with the mythological tragedies of the past alongside those operas that adapt these ancient tales for a modern stage.

At first glance, *The Dolls of New Albion* certainly appears to be such an opera. Its steampunk style and setting along with its cast will not soon strike the audience as explicitly 'Greek', even if the story is certain to be considered tragic—at least in its modern, emotion-based definition rather than the genre-specific one. The author, furthermore, when asked if he was actively keeping in mind the relation between opera and ancient Greek tragedy while writing this piece, answered with a resolute "no, definitely not."²

With no explicit references to the ancient Greek tragic tradition and no intention on the author's part to incorporate aspects of this ancient genre into his own work, it may seem a stretch to claim that *The Dolls of New Albion* can in fact be considered classical reception. Regardless, this is a claim I dare to make and venture to defend in this thesis.

Building on the foundation of the Masked Reception theory as described by Apostol and Bakogianni in their 2018 publication *Locating Classical Reception on Screen: Masks, Echoes, Shadows*, I strive to show that *The Dolls of New Albion*, even in the absence of authorial intent or indeed authorial *awareness*, can and should be considered worthy of research in the fast-growing field of Classical Reception Studies. Furthermore, this lack of authorial intent coupled with the interpretation of *Dolls* as full-fledged classical reception should serve as a strong argument in defence of the theory that classical reception in itself is a process found more strongly in the mind of the audience than that of the author.

First, I will further explain the Masked Reception theory that serves as the basis of this research as well as the methodology I will employ. The second chapter will then explore a brief history of opera and its ties to the ancient Greek tragic genre. Before delving deeper into the present case study of *The Dolls of New Albion*, I will give a summary of the story told in this opera. Next I will give an overview of broad structural, linguistic and thematic parallels this modern piece has to ancient Greek Tragedy. Finally I will zoom in on a number of characters

¹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

² Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

and the many similarities to their characters found in tragedy, paying special attention to members of the mythological House of Atreus.

By pointing out the multitude of parallels between *The Dolls of New Albion* and ancient Greek tragedy on these multiple levels, I hope to convince my readers of the value of Paul Shapera's steampunk opera in the field of Classical Reception Studies. Secondly, I aim to show that classical reception need not be based on explicit references and strong authorial intent to adapt ancient stories into modern work to be considered classical reception. Indeed, as implied in the theory of Masked Reception, we can find traces of Antiquity anywhere—even if we need to peek behind a mask to find it.

1. Masked Reception

As stated in the introduction, this research assumes the initial hypothesis that Paul Shapera was unaware of the extent of the classical reception in *The Dolls of New Albion* during the process of writing his steampunk opera. This hypothesis has since been confirmed by Shapera in an interview conducted for the purposes of this thesis. The author's limited awareness of the classical themes incorporated into his work does not, however, diminish the opera's status as a work of classical reception that has very strong ties to the Greek tragic tradition in particular, even though these may not be immediately apparent unless one knows where to look.

The idea that classical reception need not always be overt in order to be valid as such is brought forth in the theory of 'Masked Reception' coined by Apostol and Bakogianni (2018). They rightfully state that scholars have in the past put great focus on 'direct' reception through overt and mostly intentional allusions, thereby dismissing the more indirect and covert encounters with classical themes in modern media. They believe that these 'masked' instances of reception are no less valuable and equally deserving of the attention they have not properly received until recently, "because there is undeniably a subject who frames an encounter with an ancient object in any instance of genuine classical reception, namely the scholar who juxtaposes ancient and modern works in his/her essays."³

In the introduction chapter of their volume, Apostol and Bakogianni suggest various situations in which the modern author's use of classical themes may not have been an intentional or conscious process. One might have encountered the Classics at some point in their lives and have subconsciously incorporated themes from the works they read, for example.⁴

I will push this idea even further: not only was Paul Shapera unaware of the parallels one could draw between his *Dolls* and for example Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but it seems likely that he *could not* have been aware of the full extent of this. Kind enough to answer my questions for the purposes of this research, Shapera revealed that he had in fact done some minor research on ancient Greek Tragedy in the process of writing *The Dolls of New Albion*. This was done while he was keeping a daily blog to advertise his work leading up to its publication date.

So I have to fill a blog every day and I have to come up with new things every day and somewhere in the middle of the process, you know, one of the things in order to fill it—because it became obvious that I was writing a tragedy sort of thing, I thought oh, I should study tragedy! Let's! I spent the afternoon researching Greek tragedy. I had read *Medea* back in high school. But it was very instructive and informative. And it did help, you know, as long as you're doing a certain thing, to read about how it has been done and what kind of tropes are out there. And these are the tropes you're using and you don't realise you're using just because they're in the general—you know. In the media you consume, tropes just have existed down the ages.⁵

The blog post in question gives a basic overview of the ancient Greek tragic tradition as well as a summary of Sophocles' famous *Antigone*.⁶ Shapera furthermore stated to have read *Medea* in high school. Based on the above, it stands to reason that he would have read these two pieces at

³ Apostol & Bakogianni 2018, 3.

⁴ Apostol & Bakogianni 2018, 3.

⁵ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

⁶ Shapera, 21-03-2011.

various points in his life, which might explain how tropes and themes from *these particular tragedies* could have made their way into his writing—but they did not. If by Shapera’s own account it can be inferred that he has indeed read these two tragedies and spent ‘an afternoon’ looking into the Greek tragic tradition, that alone would not be sufficient to explain how his work bears such strong resemblance to multiple tragedies revolving around the House of Atreus written by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Certainly an afternoon’s research and limited reading of tragedies would not explain how these similarities are so strong, in fact, that certain words and phrases in *The Dolls of New Albion* are strongly reminiscent of ones found in these particular tragedies. After all, if an author has not read a certain work, how could it influence their own work so strongly, either consciously or subconsciously?

I would say, therefore, that Apostol and Bakogianni hit the nail on the head when they said that the “subject who frames an encounter with (...) genuine classical reception” is indeed “the scholar who juxtaposes ancient and modern works in his/her essays.”⁷ And, if not a scholar in an essay, it will be the general audience who frames such an encounter, be it publicly or privately, whenever they encounter a piece of art or writing that invokes in them memories of and associations with Classical literature and culture. In this instance and at this time, the subject framing *The Dolls of New Albion* as genuine classical reception is myself, and through reading this thesis, I can only hope that more people will find these echoes of a brilliant culture of the past in a brilliant piece of art from the modern age.

The idea that Classical Reception Studies have been focused too much on ‘traditional’ reception, sticking closely to what one might consider ‘high class’ art and culture (as opposed to something accessible to a broad audience, like film) has become ever more prevalent in recent years. Johanna Hannink in her *Eidolon* article also urges classicists to embrace a wider variety of popular culture (and to be more critical of any faults of the Classics in doing so):

Historically, Classics has been a standard bearer for elitism and a source of authorization for what the Association of Critical Heritage Studies calls “Western narratives of nation, class and science.” We know that those narratives are not inherent to the material we study, but it will take much effort and care to undo centuries of suggestions that they are.⁸

It seems prudent, then, to shift our focus to the less-obvious cases of classical reception in a wider array of modern media in order to reach and appeal to a wider audience. This in turn will help us finally break free of the ‘elitist’ image of Classics, reignite a broader interest in the ancient cultures we hold so dear and it will serve as a step in answering the question plaguing every classicist in modern times: why do the Classics still matter today, and why should we bother studying them?

Thus this thesis turns to the aforementioned Masked Reception: that which is deeply interwoven with the Classics without making this explicit to the audience—perhaps even to the author—through the use of cleverly hidden references and themes ingrained in art and culture since ancient times. The theory of Masked Reception, as Apostol and Bakogianni have also put it, pushes the boundaries of traditional Classical Reception Studies, employing a more interdisciplinary approach than is commonly found in studies of this nature. As their work and that of the contributors to their volume is focused heavily on reception in film, most of the case studies presented include such things as Adaptation Studies and Film Studies, approaches which

⁷ Cf. note 3, p.3 above.

⁸ Hannink, 2017.

will not play a role in this thesis. Owing in part to my lack of knowledge and experience with these as well as their limited relevance in regards to the present study, I will instead focus on a third and in this case more relevant discipline incorporated by Apostol and Bakogianni: Comparative Literature.

One example of a decent comparative study delving into Masked Reception is presented by Evans and Potter in the same volume, in which they compare four ‘heroines’, two from modern media and two from ancient tragedy. Through a series of keen observations made through a comparative approach, they juxtapose Iphigenia as presented in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Game of Thrones*’ Shireen Baratheon, as well as Euripides’ Alcestis from the tragedy of the same name and Buffy Summers from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The director responsible for the relevant scenes in *Game of Thrones* had in the past directed *Troy* (2004) and Evans and Potter point out his claims that he had wanted to incorporate the story of Iphigenia in that film, but had to cut it for various reasons. This could potentially explain the parallels with Iphigenia’s story found in that of Shireen Baratheon, Evans and Potter suggested. However, the connection between Alcestis and Buffy is of a more indirect nature and does not necessarily imply intentional allusions on the authors’ part. Whether the modern media was *intended* to allude to classical literature or not is of no great importance in the matter of studying these works as classical reception according to Evans and Potter, for “the parallels between Shireen and Iphigenia and Alcestis and Buffy are striking even if there was no conscious connection on the part of the series’ creators.”⁹

Of course it should be noted that Evans and Potter did not use a strictly *literary* comparative method, but rather also analysed the cinematic aspects of the modern media they discussed. I will employ a similar but exclusively literary comparative method in this thesis, drawing on parallels found solely in the source texts. This means I will look at the text of the tragedies as we have them and the lyrics of *The Dolls of New Albion*—thus ignoring staging, music and other factors of both media. This limitation is for the most part due to the limitation of the media themselves, as text is the only thing left to us from the ancient sources that is not based mainly on speculation. The steampunk opera is a strongly narrative piece itself thanks to its intricate lyrics, and even though the accompanying instrumentals will undoubtedly add another layer of interpretation to the entire piece, my own knowledge of musical theory leaves too much to be desired to properly incorporate it into the present research. Despite the heavy focus on the narrative in particular, some attention must also be given to the structure of both texts, the Attic tragic tradition and themes and tropes found in further classical literature in order to properly describe the intricate classical reception found in *The Dolls of New Albion*.

⁹ Evans & Potter 2018, 61.

2. Echoes of ancient Greek tragedy in opera

Though opinions on an exact date vary, it is safe to say that the genre of opera developed in the early 17th century, substantially based on an interpretation of the classic Attic tragic tradition held during that time.¹⁰ From the beginning, stories from Antiquity have served as a source of inspiration for practitioners of this artform, reviving ancient myths and tragedies onto the modern stage with titles such as *Euridice* (Rinuccini & Peri, 1600) and *Orfeo* (Monteverdi, 1607). Napolitano (2010), among others, has noted that while in theory Attic tragedies were the model for opera as we know it from the 17th century onward, in practice it was in fact pastoral drama that seems to have had a stronger influence on the genre.¹¹ Nevertheless, the theoretical basis behind opera was clearly intended to reproduce what people in the 17th century imagined Greek tragedy to have been like,¹² even though the more common subjects for their art were more often found elsewhere in classical literature, in epics and pastoral dramas, in mythology and historiography.

Aeschylean tragedy received very little reception in opera during the 17th and 18th centuries, Euripides being the more popular author to adapt into this form of musical theatre. It was in later centuries that Aeschylus's tragedies would leave a more significant mark on the operatic genre. The typical Aeschylean style and subject matter were simply too complex and unsuited for the 17th- and 18th-century audience's taste—who favoured more adventurous and romantic plots—and the first successful (direct) adaptation of Aeschylean tragedy came in 1895 in the form of Taneyev's *Oresteia*. Before this, the only influential operas receptive of Aeschylean tragedy were more loosely based on the source material than true and faithful adaptations¹³: *Les Danaïdes* by Salieri (1784) and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* by Wagner (1851–82).¹⁴ The latter, Ewans argues, is especially noteworthy because its subject matter is entirely unrelated to classical literature. Rather than reviving an ancient story, Wagner's *Ring* employs an Aeschylean structure and style.

Like Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Wagner's *Ring* is divided in four separate dramas (a tetralogy) of which there are three main dramas (the tragic trilogy) and each separate act “proceeds in an Aeschylean manner to one single climax.”¹⁵ Another echo of the *Oresteia* is found in the opening of the opera, which “begins like Aeschylus with a crime that generates the subsequent events of the whole trilogy.”¹⁶ Even with the lack of a classical source in terms of story, Ewans argues that Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is to be considered a reception of Aeschylus on the basis of its structural similarities to the *Oresteia*, by which Wagner himself claimed to have

¹⁰ Napolitano 2010, 31-2. For a more extensive discussion on the origins of the operatic genre, refer to this book chapter.

¹¹ Napolitano 2010, 33. To support this claim, Napolitano points out the titles and topics of early-day operas, which mostly featured such pastoral characters as Orpheus, Daphne and Amaryllis.

¹² “...the very origins of opera as a genre can be traced back to a set of theoretical formulations that, however misguided, established themselves as an attempt to recover the specific qualities of ancient Greek tragedy and music.” Napolitano 2010, 31.

¹³ By ‘true and faithful adaptations,’ I refer in agreement with Napolitano to such operas which are explicit retellings of specific Greek tragedies as opposed to operas which, “despite having at their centre the fortunes of one or more characters who were portrayed in tragedies, are not actually modelled on a tragedy.” Napolitano 2010, 32.

¹⁴ Ewans 2018, 206.

¹⁵ Ewans 2018, 212.

¹⁶ Ewans 2018, 212.

been inspired. Aside from these, Ewans also points out several comparisons between characters, themes and scenes between Wagner's *Ring* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

If Wagner's *Ring*, for these reasons, is to be considered a piece of classical reception, then the same should hold true for Paul Shapera's *The Dolls of New Albion* and indeed the subsequent *New Albion Tetralogy*, which is, after all, a series of dramas divided into a tetralogy, of which the three main dramas serve as a tragic trilogy and the fourth instalment is a shorter piece, adapting themes of the main trilogy into a new context, much like satyr plays in ancient times. *The Dolls of New Albion* is in itself divided into four acts, each of which constitutes a piece of the 'tragic tetralogy' found within this single opera, which therefore shows a slight deviation from the ancient model, should one choose to view the four acts as a true tetralogy in that sense. Each act of *Dolls*, like Wagner's *Ring* and like Aeschylean tragedy, moves toward a single climax following from the single tragic mistake made in Act 1, which is the source of every mistake made and every problem faced in subsequent acts.

In the spirit of Ewans' observations of Wagner's 19th century works, it should then follow that Shapera's *Dolls* can, and should, be considered Aeschylean reception based on its structure and themes, no less than Wagner's *Ring* for very much the same reasons. As the following chapters of this thesis will show, however, *The Dolls of New Albion*'s similarities to the ancient Greek tragic genre and Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (as well as other tragedies surrounding Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia and their family by various tragedians) in particular, go much deeper still. In what follows, I will first give a brief summary of the main events and characters of *The Dolls of New Albion*. Next I will give an overview of the broad structural and thematic parallels between *Dolls* and ancient Greek tragedy, before I zoom in on multiple characters individually to show even more fully the extent of the unintentional, Masked Reception in this 2012 opera.

3. *The Dolls of New Albion*: a brief summary

Years before a monk and gambler embarked
On a long trek right through the great lands of the north.
They had a debate about God, chance and fate
And agreed it be settled through just one card game.
Day after day they sat there and they played
As the days and the weeks and the months passed away.
Travellers came in just to watch or drink gin
And bet on which one would eventually win.

(*The Ballad of the Gambler and the Monk*, Act 4 S1)

The shelter in which the gambler and the monk played their eternal, philosophical card game drew an ever growing crowd. The shelter expanded, new buildings and streets were built in the surrounding area which in time gave rise to the city of New Albion. The game that lay at the core of the city's founding was never finished: the gambler, though seemingly winning near the end, died from a heart attack before the game was ever brought to its conclusion. Before he died, the gambler swore that he and the monk would come back and they would finish their game one day, finally settling their never ending debate.

This promise proved indicative of the fate of New Albion itself and that of her citizens. Destiny rolls onward, always repeating the sins of the past, and the entire history of New Albion could be summarised in a single sentence:

Circles never stop themselves.

(*The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

The tale recounted by the Narrator in *The Dolls of New Albion* begins several hundred years after the gambler and the monk played their game. The city is thriving from its elite upper class to its criminal underworld, of which the Narrator gives the audience a quick overview before turning our attention to “clever little Annabella with her clever head, oh, Annabel McAlistair who's raising up the dead.”¹⁷

Annabel McAlistair, a brilliant scientist, has been conducting research on life and death for a long time and at the start of the opera finally succeeds in resurrecting someone. The soul she brings back is that of Jasper, a man with whom she has been in love since their days in college but who, after going into an arranged marriage, died at an early age. A deceased body, however, could not be brought back to life the same way the soul could be called back from beyond, so Jasper was confined to a mechanical Doll Annabel had built for him. The afterlife, which Jasper refers to as ‘Elysium,’ is a peaceful existence from which Jasper never wanted to be torn away as he was. Struggling through the limitations of his restrictive, mechanical body, he eventually communicates to Annabel his desire to return to Elysium. Taking pity on him, Annabel destroys the Doll and kills Jasper. After this, she hides her research notes in the attic and, though heartbroken, continues to live her life.

Annabel eventually found a husband and had a son, Edgar, who loved his mother very much. She sadly passed away when the boy was only 10 years old. As Edgar grew up, he fell

¹⁷ *New Albion 1*, Act 1 S2. It should be noted that the Narrator occasionally refers to Annabel as ‘Annabella’, a choice which seems to be *metri causa* when it occurs.

in love with Fay, who is Jasper's daughter, and planned to propose to her at a restaurant. That same evening, Fay reveals that she fell in love with another and breaks up with him, leaving Edgar heartbroken. He ventures into the attic of his family house, where he discovers his mother's research notes. He recreates Annabel's experiments and likewise succeeds in resurrecting the dead. Unlike his mother, Edgar decides to exploit this newfound ability to gain power and wealth in order to win back Fay. Building a business empire out of commercial resurrection, Edgar becomes one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in all of New Albion. He eventually uses his power to destroy the livelihood of Fay's husband and resurrects Jasper for the second time, using both to coerce Fay into coming back to him. Fay agrees, but swears revenge.

A generation later, New Albion is filled with Dolls, all of whom as miserable as the first. Edgar and Fay's son, Byron McAlister, is part of a movement that has risen around the Dolls, cultists who call themselves Voodoo-punks. Harboring an impure love for the Doll Jasper, his grandfather, which is no less obsessive than that of his grandmother Annabel, Byron strives to have Jasper elected mayor of New Albion. By this time, Jasper has learnt to communicate more clearly through combining snippets of radio broadcasts into his own words. With this, he writes the song *Elysian Night*¹⁸ which he and every other Doll in the city broadcast day and night, expressing their wish to die again. Hearing this, Byron's friend and Voodoo-punk priestess Amelia is inspired to seek solace in death as well and commits suicide.

Amelia's suicide leads to outrage among the populace of New Albion, eventually culminating in riots during which the Dolls are all destroyed. To quell the riots, the state takes control through martial law.

Random searchings are the law, looking for remaining Dolls
And if found execution if immediate for all.
Any token of the dead, whether relative or friend
Is forbid and if found, you may or may not be seen again.

(*New Albion 4, Act 4 S2*)

Trying to escape the purges, Byron married and had a daughter in order to play by the rules and avoid capture, but to no avail: "the purges came for him one day."¹⁹

This left his daughter Priscilla McAlister to spend her life hiding inside the family house with only a single companion: Jasper, who had escaped the purges that took Byron and so many others, humans and Dolls. Sheltered and isolated from the outside world, the two passed their time with a game of cards with no end.

In time, Jasper managed to communicate his wish to die once more, this time to receptive ears. Priscilla decides to break the cycle and set him free; she calls the police to alert them of Jasper's existence, knowing that she will be executed as well.

During the execution, one man refused to shoot: Soldier 7285. Moved by the purity of Priscilla's love and her sacrifice for Jasper, he vows to one day overthrow the corrupt, totalitarian government. His rebellion incites a civil war, the tale of which is recounted in *The New Albion Radio Hour*.

¹⁸ Act 3, S5.

¹⁹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

4. Comparisons in Form and Language

As previously stated in relation to Ewans' comparison of Wagner's *Ring* and Aeschylean tragedy, *The Dolls of New Albion* and subsequent operas bear striking resemblance to the Greek tragic tradition in structure and form. Additionally, *Dolls* shows a number of linguistic traits commonly found in Greek tragedy. In this chapter I will point out similarities—as well as significant differences—between *Dolls* and the ancient tragic tradition on a broad structural and linguistic level. With these as well as the multitude of further comparisons to be made in subsequent chapters, I aim to show that *The Dolls of New Albion* is more than worthy to be considered an instance of (masked) classical reception.

Trilogies, tetralogies and limitations

Greek tragedies were traditionally composed and performed in tetralogies, consisting of a tragic trilogy and an additional satyr play. Such a tetralogy was in its entirety created by one author and performed consecutively at the Great Dionysia festival in Athens, where multiple authors over the span of several days would present their tetralogy to the Athenian public in a contest. These tragic trilogies (and, including the satyr play, tetralogies) in ancient times were not a unified storyline such as we generally define the term today. It seems unlikely that for each set, the four plays were distinctly related to one another in terms of story, though there is a level of uncertainty owing to the limited corpus passed down to us through the ages. Yet each apparent rule has its exceptions and we know that there were in fact unified tragic trilogies in antiquity. Aeschylus' *Oresteia* is a trilogy also in the modern sense of the word; three consecutive plays each telling a part of an interrelated, continual story. The related satyr play was entitled *Proteus*, suggesting its content to be a retelling of Menelaus' stay in Egypt on his way back from the Trojan War. The text itself is lost to history, leaving us to speculate.

The Dolls of New Albion is the first instalment of *The New Albion Tetralogy*, which, not unlike ancient traditions, is divided into three main operas (*The Dolls of New Albion*, *The New Albion Radio Hour* and *The New Albion Guide to Analogue Consciousness*) and a fourth, shorter spin-off (*The Room Beneath New Albion*.) The main body of the *Tetralogy* is a trilogy in the modern sense, each opera telling consecutive parts of a larger story. The events set in motion in *Dolls* lead to a civil war that is recounted in *Radio Hour*, the conclusion of which leads to the events narrated in *Guide to Analogue Consciousness*. Each of these operas have a runtime of roughly 1,5 – 2 hours. The spin-off, *Room Beneath*, tells in just under an hour the story of an albino princess and a mobster and how they relate to the larger narrative of the preceding trilogy, borrowing and further clarifying plot elements from each previous instalment.

Like Greek tragedy, *The Dolls of New Albion* as well as *The New Albion Tetralogy* in its entirety employs a limited number of actors.²⁰ Excluding the Narrator, who is best compared to the ancient chorus (a topic that shall be elaborated upon later in this chapter and in 'Kate: A One-Woman Chorus', p.21 below), the original album for *Dolls* features three actors divided

²⁰ This is the case at least in the cast album which is used as the basis for the present thesis as well as the Oval House production featuring Paul Shapera and most of the singers from this cast album. Later productions by independent theatre companies typically feature a larger cast.

over eight characters.²¹ While later instalments of the *Tetralogy* feature more actors (*The Room Beneath New Albion* being a notable exception, featuring only two actors), *Dolls* in this regard adheres to the rules regarding cast size as found in the ancient tradition, where by the end of the 5th century B.C. the cast had grown to a maximum of three (speaking) actors that could simultaneously be on stage, excluding the chorus and silent characters.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle insists multiple times on the importance of a unified plot in tragedy, meaning that a tragedy ‘should be a depiction of a complete and completed action of some magnitude.’²² In this respect too, *Dolls* is significantly different from (the apparent norm for) Greek tragedies. Certainly the storyline within this singular opera is unified in the sense that every event stems from a single, initial (tragic) mistake, yet with the storyline taking place over the course of four generations, when viewed in comparison to Greek tragedy, *Dolls* might be better interpreted as a miniature tetralogy-in-one while also being part of a greater tetralogy. Like the *Oresteia* as a whole, *Dolls* thus begins with a single mistake or crime (a murder and a revival respectively) and each subsequent event in the narrative—in the two latter parts of the *Oresteia* and the three latter acts of *Dolls*—are a direct result of this action as part of a cyclical family ‘curse’ that spans generations. In both stories, this cycle is finally broken at the very end of the (complete) narrative.

Language: descriptive and egocentric

Rutherford explains the highly descriptive nature of Greek tragedy as a necessity to convey to the audience the setting of the play. “The dramatist had few resources with which to set the scene before the audience’s eyes; in the absence of background sets and elaborate buildings, the words need to do a lot of work.”²³ The characters and chorus of the play had to be able to paint a picture with words in the minds of the audience. Though naturally the audience could see what was happening on stage, Rutherford assumes a lack of elaborate décor which would leave the audience wanting were it not compensated for by the extensive descriptions of location, persons and actions provided by the actors and chorus on stage. Similarly, *The Dolls of New Albion* and its successors is written so graphically that the audience need not see it performed on stage to *see* the story unfold in their mind.

By far the most descriptive ‘speaker’ in *Dolls* is Kate, known more commonly as the Narrator. In an interview in 2012, months after the publication of *Dolls*, Shapera talked about his love for using Narrators and how in *Dolls* “as [Kate] evolved she also took on some subtle Greek chorus aspects, occasionally commenting on the characters’ actions or motives, although they almost never hear her.”²⁴ These ‘subtle choral aspects’ of the Narrator (which I will argue are not as subtle as Shapera suggests) will be elaborated on in ‘Kate: A One-Woman Chorus’,

²¹ In this album, the female roles are all played by Lauren Osborn and the male roles by Jason Broderick, the exceptions being Jasper, who is portrayed by Paul Shapera, and The Narrator, whose parts are sung by Kayleigh McKnight. The four cast members all provide additional backing vocals. A similar trend of a limited cast is found in later instalments of *The New Albion Tetralogy*, with Osborn and Shapera being the only two actors performing in each of the four operas’ cast albums.

²² Ar. *Poet.* 1450b 23-25. καίται δὴ ἡμῖν τὴν τραγωδίαν τελείας καὶ ὅλης πράξεως εἶναι μίμησιν ἐχούσης τι μέγεθος· ἔστιν γὰρ ὅλον καὶ μηδὲν ἔχον μέγεθος. ‘We therefore concede that tragedy is the mimesis of a complete and whole action that has some magnitude; it is, after all, possible for something to be whole without having magnitude.’

²³ Rutherford 2012, 84.

²⁴ Lew, 2012.

p.21 below. In terms of the descriptive language that is characteristic of Greek tragedy, Shapera has stated that the Narrator, though a storytelling element he already harboured a fondness for prior to writing *Dolls*, was written with the express purpose of setting the scene to the audience in great detail.

The need for this Narrator became even more pronounced when the director wrote to me and asked if I could write the steampunk opera in a way that a blind audience could follow the story. This was more or less my intention anyway, but after that request I paid special attention to making the audio as complete as possible so that you can follow the show purely by listening. Ideally.²⁵

The illustrative nature of the language in *Dolls* is almost more pronounced than in most Greek tragedies, with characters frequently narrating their own actions and their immediate surroundings, leaving the narration on a larger scale to the Narrator. The distinction is not absolute: the two ‘narrative levels’, so to speak, do on occasion overlap with Kate narrating smaller actions and the characters talking about broader topics.

Rutherford points to a great focus on ‘self’ in the language of Greek tragedies, which he says “suits the claustrophobic world of Greek tragedy, in which so much harm is done to oneself and one’s own family, knowingly and sometimes willingly.”²⁶ This, too, holds true for *Dolls*, in which the characters all seem strikingly egocentric, in a sense, with only very few exceptions. Being more distant from the main narrative, the Narrator is the only character to never focus on herself in any measure, opting instead to speak of and to the main cast in third and second person.

Notable exceptions to this egocentric language are Byron McAlister and his daughter Priscilla, as well as Annabel in one of her songs. In *Annabel’s Lament*, however, Annabel is obviously still singing to and about herself despite mainly speaking in the second person. Byron, though less focused on the explicit use of ‘I’ and ‘me’ than most characters, is nevertheless distinctly self-centred in that his songs mostly address Jasper, with whom he is obsessed (and in doing so, he echoes his grandmother Annabel by reusing iconic lyrics)²⁷ and his audience in his political campaign to have Jasper elected mayor, all of which are feelings and aspirations not shared by Jasper himself. It is also made explicit that Byron is too absorbed in his obsession with Jasper to pay proper attention to his friend Amelia even when she is literally begging for him to notice her pain.²⁸ This leaves Priscilla as the only character who seems to genuinely focus more on other people than on herself and not for her own gain.

Paul Shapera has stated that all of these characters except Priscilla are, in fact, very much selfish people, further supporting the present claims that *Dolls* is as self-centred as Greek tragedy commonly was.

²⁵ Lew, 2012.

²⁶ Rutherford 2012, 72.

²⁷ “Can’t you speak with me? Won’t you speak with me? All the things we could share and conceive if you’d just speak with me.” Annabel McAlister in *Annabel Has a Doll* and Byron McAlister in *The Movement 1*. These lyrics are also used, with minor variations, by Annabel in *Annabel Raises the Dead* and Amelia in *The Movement 2*, the latter being the only instance where it does not address Jasper, being directed instead at Byron.

²⁸ *The Movement 2*.

The other three, each one was selfish—Annabel was selfish, Edgar was selfish, Byron was selfish. Priscilla’s choice is unselfish, and by being unselfish she breaks the downward spiral.²⁹

The Dolls of New Albion, then, shows a similar focus on the characters’ ‘self’ as found in many ancient tragedies. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, for *Dolls* tells of self-inflicted ruin and the cycle of misfortune perpetuated within a single family no less than is typically found in most Greek tragedies. It seems fitting that Priscilla, the one who finally breaks the cycle through an unselfish choice, also breaks the tradition of self-absorbed speech.

Of course, *The Dolls of New Albion* has numerous notable differences from traditional Greek tragedy as well. I have pointed out the similarities in the use of descriptive and self-centred language in this opera which are common traits of tragedy, but perhaps the most commonly cited trait found in the language of Greek tragedy is the elevated speech—something which is entirely absent in *Dolls*. Certainly the opera is skilfully composed and the lyrics are embellished with many artful stylistic choices employing such things as rhyme, alliteration and assonance, but the language is nevertheless of a register much closer to everyday speech than Greek tragedy. Rutherford says about the high register of tragic language that the “defamiliarisation of language enabled poetry to have its proper effect.”³⁰ I would argue that the language of *Dolls*, though not subject to any ‘defamiliarisation of language’, is still effective—and affective, using mostly everyday language and clever stylistic choices to set the mood and convey the speakers’ emotions no less powerfully than Greek tragedy. This elevated speech in Greek tragedy, furthermore, is in line with the status of the characters, who were generally of a high status. In *Dolls*, the language is similarly in line with the (lower, average) status of the characters. This difference in status between the opera and tragedies is something Shapera has stated to be a conscious choice:

One thing I do remember is that the Greeks had a thing that the tragic character had to be someone of an elevated status and that their fall had to go from really high to really low. They would not have done the sort of modern man, you know, an everyman, which is sort of the way they would do it now. You take an everyman and you crush him. For them it had to be as high as possible.³¹

Consequently, the choice for less elevated language was likely an equally conscious choice.

I have pointed out that *The Dolls of New Albion*, though differing from the common structure of Greek tragedy on multiple levels, nevertheless shows numerous similarities with the ancient genre as well. These will become all the more significant when seen next to the comparisons yet to be made between the narrative and characters of *Dolls* and (mainly) the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus.

²⁹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

³⁰ Rutherford 2012, 70.

³¹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

5. Tragic Themes in *The Dolls of New Albion*

Ghosts of life; ghosts of lives
I've watched fall and pass me by.
Ghosts of all the selfish, vain,
all the blindness, all the pain,
all the fools and petty games,
all the sadness, all the same.

(Jasper, *The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

The Dolls of New Albion is teeming with tragic themes that have existed since the dawn of the genre in ancient times. Love, betrayal, selfishness and selflessness, life and death stand at the centre of the opera.

An important theme we find in ancient Greek tragedy is that of human fallacy. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle tells us of the various types of plot and character that exist within the framework of Greek tragedy. Characters can be bad or good, their lives can be fortunate or unfortunate, and Aristotle points out that it is unsuitable for a bad character to have a happy ending or for a good character to have nothing but misfortune. Both, he says, are morally unappealing and will leave the audience unsatisfied in terms of the effects tragedy ought to have on the audience, namely to elicit fear or pity.

πρῶτον μὲν δῆλον ὅτι οὔτε τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρας δεῖ μεταβάλλοντας φαίνεσθαι ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἔλεινόν τοῦτο ἀλλὰ μαιρόν ἐστιν· οὔτε τοὺς μοχθηροὺς ἐξ ἀτυχίας εἰς εὐτυχίαν, ἀτραγωδότατον γὰρ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ πάντων, οὐδὲν γὰρ (1453a) ἔχει ὧν δεῖ, οὔτε γὰρ φιλόανθρωπον οὔτε ἔλεινόν οὔτε φοβερὸν ἐστὶν· οὐδ' αὖ τὸν σφόδρα πονηρὸν ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μεταπίπτειν· τὸ μὲν γὰρ φιλόανθρωπον ἔχει ἂν ἢ τοιαύτη σύστασις ἀλλ' οὔτε ἔλεον οὔτε φόβον, ὁ μὲν γὰρ περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιόν ἐστιν δυστυχοῦντα, ὁ δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον (ἔλεος μὲν περὶ τὸν ἀνάξιον, φόβος δὲ περὶ τὸν ὅμοιον), ὥστε οὔτε ἔλεινόν οὔτε φοβερὸν ἔσται τὸ συμβαῖνον. (Arist. *Poet.* 1452b 33–1453a 6.)

First it is clear that the characters who fall from fortune to misfortune ought not be decent people, for that would elicit neither fear nor pity, but only disdain. Neither should the reprehensible shift from misfortune into fortune, for that is the most untragic of all, for it has none of the things it ought to have; it is neither philanthropic, nor does it elicit fear or pity. Someone who suffers all too much should also not fall from fortune into misfortune; such a composition may be philanthropic, but it does not elicit pity or fear. The former, after all, is something you feel for someone who is undeservedly unlucky, while the latter presupposes someone who is like you (thus pity toward someone undeserving of their ill fortune, fear for someone like you.) As such, this event would elicit neither pity nor fear.

ὁ μεταξὺ ἄρα τούτων λοιπός. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη μήτε διὰ κακίαν καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλον εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι' (10) ἀμαρτίαν τινά, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία, οἷον Οἰδίπους καὶ Θυέστης καὶ οἱ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων γενῶν ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες.

(Arist. *Poet.* 1453a 6–11)

What remains, then, is the middle ground: this is someone who is not extraordinary in their virtue and justice and who does not fall into misfortune because of evil or wickedness, but because of a mistake; someone of both high status and good fortune, such as Oedipus or Thyestes and other notable men of their ilk.

This Aristotelian ideal for the tragic character is upheld in *The Dolls of New Albion*. None of the characters act out of malice or ill intent, but their actions have the worst consequences that condemn not only them and their present loved ones, but also subsequent generations of the McAlistair family and indeed all of New Albion to unending misfortune.

Regarding this adherence to Aristotelian ideals, it is one of only few instances where this similarity to the ancient tradition seems intentional. While writing *Dolls*, Shapera spent some small amount of time looking into the history of the tragic genre, including the Greek tradition. When asked if he was actively conscious of the prescriptions in Aristotle's *Poetics* during the writing process, Shapera responded:

I probably was on that day. I don't know *now*, but if you mentioned it I would probably know what you're talking about, but off the top of my head... One thing I do remember is that the Greeks had a thing that the tragic character had to be someone of an elevated status and that their fall had to go from really high to really low. They would not have done the sort of modern man, you know, an everyman, which is sort of the way they would do it now. You take an everyman and you crush him.³²

This also shows the main point of departure from these ancient traditions in *Dolls*: rather than making the main cast royalty or heroes or otherwise of high status as we would find in the plays performed in ancient Athens, Shapera opted for the more modern concept of the 'everyman' to centre his story around. Regardless of their status, however, the characters in *Dolls* all fit Aristotle's ideal of a tragic character who is neither flawlessly good nor evil and whose misfortune is the result of their own mistakes. This is all the more powerful *because* the characters are 'everyman' types, who are likely to be more relatable than kings and queens and mythical heroes. Being more 'alike' with the likely audience of the opera, rather than of elevated status as in ancient Greek tragedies, and because they do not quite deserve their misfortune as repercussions of their (non-existent) wickedness, the cast of *Dolls* would succeed in eliciting both pity and fear in their audience as Aristotle prescribed.

The mistakes made by the main cast of the opera all stem from a source that is directly related to one of the central themes of the story. By the author's own admission, every bad choice made by a member of the McAlistair family is made out of love, as is the final choice made by Priscilla McAlistair that eventually breaks the cycle. The difference between love leading to misfortune and love setting it right again, lies in the purity of the characters' feelings.

Every single character, their flawed choice is made out of love. There is a love component, and they make bad choices based on flawed love. (...) And thus the whole point is that every single choice that each generation makes keeps taking things lower and lower and lower and thus the only thing that can reverse the fall is a *pure* choice in the name of love.³³

As stated in the previous chapter on structural comparisons, the main characters in *The Dolls of New Albion* are almost all selfish to varying degrees, with Priscilla being the first to make

³² Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

³³ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

an unselfish choice. The previous chapter discussed how this egocentricity is typical for Greek tragedy. Selfishness being the leading cause behind the tragic mistakes the characters make is similarly common in the ancient tradition, with selflessness being the saving grace (if there is any by the end of the tragedy.) The characters of *The Dolls of New Albion*, then, in both their speech patterns and their development, are very much tragic characters as we understand them from Greek tragedy.

While love may be the driving force behind the decisions and actions undertaken by the main characters, a theme that is pervasive throughout the entire opera is death, resurrection and the afterlife.

The afterlife is first and primarily mentioned by Jasper from the moment he first speaks in the opera. Though he refers to it as Elysium, known to us as the equivalent of paradise of Heaven in Greek mythology (and part of a greater Underworld or Hades), the Elysium we hear about in *Dolls* seems to have little to do with the ancient Greek concept of it. Both the use of the name Elysium and the overall lack of similarity to the ancient concept were clear decisions made by the author, who said on this topic:

It didn't come with the baggage that something like the name 'Heaven' would have, and I really like it. It's a version of the name 'Heaven'—it's *Elysium*, a blank slate on which I can sort of paint, you know, what I want to paint.³⁴

The choice for the name 'Elysium' was thus purely made for it being widely known as the afterlife in Greek mythology, informing the audience that it is, indeed, the afterlife to which these characters refer, while trusting that to a general audience, details about the ancient concept of Elysium would be sufficiently unknown to serve as a blank slate. A general audience with only the most basic knowledge of Greek mythology would think of the afterlife when hearing Elysium, without necessarily thinking of such concepts as the Tartarus, Hades, the River Styx or the ferryman Charon. With this, the author would in most cases succeed in avoiding any such associations just as he hoped to avoid by not using a more commonly known—but also more loaded—term such as 'Heaven.'

While Shapera did not intend for there to be any obvious similarities to the ancient Greek Elysium aside from its name and status as the afterlife, this does not necessarily stop those who have a deeper familiarity with the concept from spotting further points of similarity that the author likely did not intend. While these are not necessarily specific to *Elysium* per se, they do connect to the broader concept of death and the afterlife in Greek mythology. For the discussion of these, I will need to step a little further away from Greek tragedy and look instead to its sibling, the epic genre.

In the song *Annabel Raises the Dead* (Act 1 S3), Annabel directly addresses the deceased Jasper and begs him to return to her in the living world. In doing so, she gives a vague description of what is at the very least her assumption of the afterlife from which she plans to retrieve Jasper:

Please come back from bowels of black,
From silent shores to me once more,
Through veils and gates and seas of slate
And blood-wet moors where I await ashore.

³⁴ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

(Annabel Raises the Dead, Act 1 S3)

In this plea, Annabel uses primarily aquatic terminology in relation to the afterlife. ‘Bowels of black,’ ‘silent shores’ and ‘seas of slate’ are each reminiscent of descriptions of various locations in the Underworld. Throughout antique literature, the Underworld itself is frequently described as dark, black or shadowy depths:

noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis;

(Verg. *Aeneid*, 6.127)³⁵

Night and day, the door of black Dis is opened.

*Quod si tantus amor menti, si tanta cupido est,
bis Stygios innare lacus, bis nigra videre
Tartara, et insano iuvat indulgere labori,
accipe, quae peragenda prius.*

135

(Verg. *Aeneid*, 6.133–136)

But if the passion of your mind is so great, if your desire is so strong
to sail twice upon the Stygian waters, to see twice the black
Tartarus, if it would please you to indulge in this insane undertaking,
then accept that which must be done first.

While the Underworld as a whole is thus described as black and dark, the ‘silent shores’ of which Annabel speaks is a description that well suits the banks of the Acheron, upon which the souls of the dead wait to be ferried across the rivers of the Underworld by Charon. This, too, is vividly described in the *Aeneid*, along with a description of the banks of the Styx as a swamp and the waters of the Cocytus as stagnant, connecting more closely to the words ‘seas of slate’:

*“Anchisa generate, deum certissima proles,
Cocyti stagna alta vides Stygiamque paludem,
di cuius iurare timent et fallere numen.*

*Haec omnis, quam cernis, inops inhumataque turba est:
portitor ille Charon; hi, quos vehit unda, sepulti.*

325

*Nec ripas datur horrendas et rauca fluenta
transportare prius quam sedibus ossa quierunt.*

*Centum errant annos volitantque haec litoras circum;
tum demum admissi stagna exoptata revisunt.”*

330

(Verg. *Aeneid*, 6.322–330)

“Son of Anchises, doubtless the son of gods,
what you see are the stagnant depths of the Cocytus and the Stygian swamp,
by whose divine will the gods fear to swear and lie.
All this that you see is a throng of the helpless and unburied:

³⁵ While the *Aeneid* is of course a Roman work, it is heavily based on Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and, like much of the Roman mythology and literary culture, borrows substantially from Greek traditions. The Underworld as depicted by Vergil therefore serves as an adequate reference for its depiction in the Greek tradition as well, though its non-Greek origins must be kept in mind.

the ferryman is Charon; those which he ferries across the waves are the interred.
To traverse these roaring streams to the fearful banks is not allowed
before their bones have sought their resting place.
For a hundred years they wander and fly about these shores;
only then are they allowed to revisit the stagnant waters they longed for.

‘Veils and gates’ as part of the Underworld is a concept similarly found in Vergil’s *Aeneid* on several occasions, most notably in the following lines:

*Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris;
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,* 895
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.

(Verg. *Aeneid*, 6.893–896)

There are two gates of Sleep, of which one is said to be
of horn, through which easy exit is granted to true shades;
the other is made entirely of gleaming white ivory,
but through it, the Shades send only false dreams forth to the heavens.

Finally—and returning to strictly Greek sources—the ‘blood-wet moors where I await ashore’ bring to mind a scene found in Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus stands upon the shore by two streams, both of which flow from the Styx and into the Acheron. Here he summons shades from the Underworld in order to speak to the deceased seer Teiresias. Odysseus was instructed by the witch Circe to dig a hole on the shore, by which he would then be required to leave offerings for the dead. Finally he would need to slaughter a goat above that hole, to let the blood attract the shades.³⁶ Later, when the hero had performed these tasks, the shade of Teiresias approached and drank from the sacrificial blood, then explained to Odysseus the following:

ῥῆϊδιόν τοι ἔπος ἐρέω καὶ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θήσω.
ὄν τινα μὲν κεν ἔῃς νεκύων κατατεθνηώτων
αἵματος ἄσπον ἴμεν, ὁ δέ τοι νημερτὲς ἐνίψει:
ᾧ δέ κ’ ἐπιφθονέης, ὁ δέ τοι πάλιν εἴσιν ὀπίσσω.

 150

(Hom. *Odyssey*, 11.147–150)

That which I tell you and place in your heart is simple.
Each shade that you allow to approach the sacrificial blood,
will be able to speak to you truthfully;
those you deny access, will once more turn away.

With this scene in mind, it is striking how Annabel uses terminology so similar to descriptions of the Underworld in Greek mythology despite a lack of authorial intent in that regard. That she even speaks of ‘blood-wet moors’ where she will await Jasper seems almost too clearly reminiscent of this particular scene in the *Odyssey* to be a coincidence—even considering, based on Shapera’s account, that is indeed a coincidence. This comparison, furthermore, can be even

³⁶ Hom. *Odyssey*, 10.504–540.

further strengthened when seeing Annabel's pleas for Jasper to return next to her frequently voiced wish for him to speak to her:

Please come speak to me.
Please come speak to me.
All the things we could share and conceive
If you'd come speak to me.

(*Annabel Raises the Dead*, Act 1 S3)

Teiresias makes it clear to Odysseus that the living can only speak to the dead once the shade has drunk from the sacrificial blood upon the shore. It is Annabel's greatest wish to just speak to Jasper—something she can only achieve, according to the mythological seer, through blood sacrifice. The 'blood-wet moors' where Annabel waits for a chance to speak to her deceased beloved can well be seen as a parallel to the blood sacrifice Odysseus required to give in order to speak to any shades as well.

Annabel's words are repeated in slightly altered form by Priscilla when she sacrifices her life for Jasper, further supporting the idea that we may safely compare this to Odysseus' blood sacrifice in order to speak to the dead. In Priscilla's timeline, it has been several generations since the resurrection of the dead into Dolls was commercialised, and the Narrator tells us that New Albion was teeming with Dolls just one generation before Priscilla, when her father Byron was a Voodoojunk:

After years and years of folks bringing back their dead ones,
Droves of Dolls fill the city in streets, slums and homes.
Yes, there's slums just full of dead; they don't walk or talk, instead
They're like blank slates on which their friends and relatives project.

(*New Albion 3*, Act 3 S1)

If we are to take this metaphorical blood sacrifice as an attempt to speak to the Dolls as it was in the *Odyssey*, then clearly the objective must have failed, since the Dolls do not actually speak. I would argue that this is not, however, the case: the Dolls *can* speak, though they are fully reliant on their streaming of radio broadcasts to do so. Furthermore, it is known that the Dolls all desired death, which might have left them disinclined to 'speak' to the living who brought them back. The main argument to support the idea that the Dolls could and *tried* to speak, and it was the living who did not listen well enough to understand, however, is based on Shapera's assessment of Jasper and Priscilla's relationship and the fact that they seem quite able to hold full conversations:

It's [like in] one of those classics. A girl has a grandfather and the grandfather ends up bedridden and cannot do anything but blink one eye. And yet, he knows morse code, so by blinking one eye he can communicate with the granddaughter who will sit right next to him and write down the most complicated trains of thought that he is communicating, using that one blinking eye. It's that sort of thing. If you have a person who is patient enough and willing enough to listen, you know—that was in my mind for that thing. They're able to communicate to as complex degrees as anyone else. It just takes patience, and [Priscilla and Jasper] had nothing but time.³⁷

³⁷ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

It takes time and effort, but communication with the Dolls is, in fact, entirely possible, when one is willing to listen. The blood sacrifice as a method of speaking to the dead, therefore, did not so much fail as it was not utilised to its full potential.

If we are to consider that every resurrection performed over the years would require another such metaphorical blood sacrifice, then by the time of Act 3, the ‘shore’ of which Annabel spoke would have been drenched in blood for the countless souls that were brought back to the living world. Of course between Act 3 and Act 4, the practice is outlawed, so no resurrections would have been performed—and no blood sacrifices would have been given—for a number of years by the time we get to Priscilla’s story. And this lack of new resurrections and new ‘blood’ would account for one important distinction between Annabel’s words and those of Priscilla, when Priscilla tells Jasper:

Please go back to berths of black,
To silent shores, from me once more,
Through veils and gates and seas of slate
and blood-red moors where I’ll see you once more.

(*The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

Priscilla does not speak of blood-*wet* moors. Instead, the moors are *red* like/with blood. In the years since the last resurrections, all the blood upon that metaphorical shore would have dried up, yet so many souls had by then been called back, so many blood sacrifices had been given upon that sand, that the colour of blood still remained even when it was already dry.

This comparison between the epic scene of Odysseus attempting to speak to the dead and the words of both Annabel and Priscilla regarding the resurrection and final death of Jasper is perhaps more speculative and far-fetched than most other comparisons I bring forward in this thesis. Nevertheless, it seems too significant to not deserve mention.

What we have, then, are parallels between *The Dolls of New Albion* and the ancient Greek mythological tradition (at least as portrayed in epics) in terms of death, the afterlife and communication with the dead, as well as solid comparisons between *Dolls*’ characters and the Greek tragic tradition in general. Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter X *Comparisons in Form and Language*, the misfortune the cast of *Dolls* suffers is part of a cycle plaguing a single family throughout generations. This ‘family curse’ is strongly reminiscent of the fate of the House of Atreus as found, among others, in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. When I next turn to a more detailed discussion of the cast of *The Dolls of New Albion*, the characters I discuss will therefore each be compared to a character in this mythological family as portrayed by various tragedians.

6. Kate: A One-Woman Chorus

*Actoris partis chorus officiumque virile
defendat, neu quid medios intercinat actus* 195
*quod non proposito conducat et haereat apte.
ille bonis faveatque et consilietur amice,
et regat iratos et amet peccare timentis;
ille dapes laudet mensae brevis, ille salubrem
iustitiam legesque et apertis otia portis;*
ille tegat commissa deosque precetur et oret 200
ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

Let the chorus boldly fulfil the role and duty of an actor,
and let it not sing anything between acts
that does not progress the plot and adhere to it properly.
Let it favour the good and offer friendly advice,
let it govern the irate and cherish those who fear to make mistakes.
Let it praise the feasts on a small table, let it praise
healthy justice and laws and peaceful days with open gates;
let it protect secrets and pray to the gods and beg
that fortune be returned to the miserable and desert the arrogant.

(Hor. *Ars Poetica*, 193–201)³⁸

Kate, the Narrator of *The Dolls of New Albion*, displays some characteristics usually found in the chorus of Greek tragedy. Some has already been said on this topic (‘Comparisons in Form and Language, p.10 above), yet ought to be elaborated upon. Likewise, the differences between Kate and the typical Greek chorus also deserve mention. Kate’s similarities to the Greek tragic chorus whilst not being a carbon copy of the concept, will prove a strong foundation for the claim that *The Dolls of New Albion* is a work of Masked Reception of ancient Greek tragedy.

Let us first look at the characteristics Horace prescribes for the tragic chorus (of which it should be noted that these are by no means genre rules that were set in stone nor specific to the Greek tragic tradition, but which nevertheless give us a good indication of what the tragic chorus *could* be):

First, the chorus should play an active role in the tragedy. Secondly, it should be on the side of good and it should try to guide other characters to good as well. The chorus should favour humility and righteousness over arrogance and *hybris*, and peace over war. Finally, the chorus should be pious and loyal, praying to the gods and keeping other characters’ secrets.

The Narrator in *Dolls* is not so much an active player in the story, though it is certainly not for a lack of trying. Between narrating the story, Kate repeatedly tries to get through to the characters, but with little success until she is finally heard by Priscilla McAlister in Act 4. “Until then, the Narrator is just sort of beating her head against the wall.”³⁹ Her attempts to

³⁸ Naturally, Horace describes the rules of tragedy and poetics as maintained in the Roman tradition. With its strong basis in the Greek tradition, however, as well as the fact that Roman tragedy is commonly the middleman in modern reception of Greek tragedy, it seems nevertheless fitting to look to this tradition as well.

³⁹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

communicate with the characters she narrates are all instances where Kate is trying desperately to give the friendly advice, steering others toward good, that Horace advocates is appropriate for the chorus. For Annabel and Edgar, she directly alludes to the fatal mistake, the ἀμαρτία, each of them has made.

She tries to tell Annabel that Jasper is unhappy with his resurrection:

What you hold may wish to go.
What you believe may not be so.
All that brings you peace of mind
May not stay for a long time.
What may please does not content.
All resolves but never ends.
All that comforts is not true
And all you love does not love you.

(*Annabel Has a Doll*, Act 1 S4)

She tries to warn Edgar about spiralling into revenge:

All your intentions take their toll.
All you hate enthrals your soul.
When you win, you sometimes lose
And all you love does not love you.

(*Edgar Builds a Business*, Act 2 S4)

And, finally, she tells Priscilla of the inevitability of fate and tries to guide her to the right course of action, which in this case means for Priscilla to sacrifice herself:

Circles never stop themselves.
Nothing that you've ever held
Were you promised or reneged
And sometimes when you lose,
You win.

(*The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

The Narrator's inactive role in *The Dolls of New Albion*, though not to the taste of Horace, is not actually uncommon in ancient Greek tragedy. While the chorus generally plays the part of groups of people (citizens, servants and the likes) who respond to what is happening on stage, their interruptions are not always remarked upon by the characters. A noteworthy example of the inactive chorus, in the sense that other characters do not acknowledge them for most of the play, is found in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The chorus in this tragedy frequently comments on the events happening on stage and the words and actions of the characters. Despite their attempts to respond to the characters and offer words of guidance, they are only minimally acknowledged throughout the play. At the beginning of the second act, they welcome Clytemnestra and her children, Iphigenia and Orestes, when they arrive at the war camp at Aulis. Clytemnestra briefly thanks them for their welcome, then promptly ignores the chorus for the remainder of the play. The only other and certainly the most notable interaction between an actor and the chorus happens near the end, when Iphigenia voluntarily heads to the altar to be sacrificed for the good of the Greek army. She directly acknowledges the chorus, here

consisting of women, and bids them follow her to the altar and perform the proper rites for Iphigenia's sacrifice. Singing together with Iphigenia, the chorus then repeats some of her own words back to her.

That the Narrator shows such notable similarities to the chorus in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in particular ties in to an even greater point of comparison between *The Dolls of New Albion* and various tragedies surrounding the House of Atreus: it is Iphigenia who has the only meaningful interaction with the chorus in *Iphigenia in Aulis*; indeed, she is the only character who even acknowledges their presence beyond Clytemnestra's brief words of gratitude for their welcome, and this happens only near the end of the tragedy. Likewise, Kate is only acknowledged by the characters of *Dolls* near the end of the opera in Act 4. The only person to have meaningful interaction with the Narrator is Priscilla McAlistair, who shows several more significant parallels to Iphigenia. This and other parallels between Iphigenia and Priscilla will be elaborated upon in Priscilla's own chapter, but for now serve as an important step in solidifying the comparisons between Kate the Narrator and the chorus in *Iphigenia in Aulis* in particular.

The chorus in *Iphigenia in Aulis* sings four choral odes between the acts of the tragedy. In the first (vv.164–302), they sing of the army gathered at Aulis in a manner reminiscent of the catalogues found in the *Iliad*, naming the most notable heroes residing in the army's encampment and speaking of their fleet. The second choral ode (vv.543–589) sings of love and lust and Helen, the woman for whom the Greek army is heading out to Troy and who is, in her absence, the cause of everything that takes place in this tragedy. The third (vv.1036–1097) sings of the war that is to come and the women who will play a part in it. In the fourth ode, the chorus tells the tale of Peleus' wedding, during which the goddess of conflict, Eris, gave the first incentive for what would become the Trojan War with her golden apple. Simultaneously, the tale of a wedding is drawn into parallel with the wedding Iphigenia was said to have as a ploy to lure her to Aulis to be sacrificed. This final ode, then, recounts the very beginning of the tale told in *Iphigenia in Aulis* while also connecting it to what is to take place in its final acts.

Kate, like this chorus, comments on the events of each act and responds to the characters as they go through their lines, yet also has more prominent songs in which she narrates the events leading up to and in between each act. These songs are most notably *New Albion 1* through *4*, sung as the first or second track of each respective act. Other such songs are *We Bid the 1st Generation Adieu* (Act 1 S6), sections of *The Bonfire of the Dolls* (Act 3 S7), *The Ballad of the Gambler and the Monk* (Act 4 S1) and the final song, *We Bid You All Adieu* (Act 4 S7). In Act 2, she also sings *The Old Trunk in the Attic* (S3) as a solo, though this song narrates a more immediate, brief action undertaken by Edgar rather than the stories on a larger scale and timeframe narrated in the others mentioned above.

Each song in the *New Albion* series feels similar at its core to the first choral ode in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, serving to set the scene to the audience and give vital information of what led to the present circumstances. In each one, Kate informs the audience of the state of New Albion as a whole, pointing out various factions in the city such as the Alchemist's Guild that meets at the lodge on Ashland Street or the maffia that is run by a one-eyed, red-haired dwarf.⁴⁰ After giving this general overview of the state of affairs in the city, she zooms in on the McAlistair family, recounting for each generation the most vital events that incite the events of their respective acts: Annabel McAlistair is trying to raise the dead, Edgar McAlistair plans to

⁴⁰ *New Albion 1*, Act 1 S2.

propose to his beloved Fay, Byron McAlister is a Voodoo-punk trying to have a Doll elected mayor and Priscilla McAlister hides away in the McAlister estate together with Jasper.

The second choral ode of the Greek tragedy has no clear parallel in *Dolls*, but the foretelling nature of the third ode, which looks forward to the events of the Trojan War, is echoed somewhat in *We Bid the 1st Generation Adieu* and *We Bid You All Adieu*, in which Kate wraps up the events of Act 1 and the entire opera respectively and alludes to future events, which are to be recounted in subsequent acts of *Dolls* and later in its sequel:

So we bid adieu to the first
Generation, but don't move;
We've three more acts to get through
So come, let's ensue.
The future beckons and won't wait,
The next generation's on its way.
Dead things and broken love stories
For us await.

(*We Bid the 1st Generation Adieu*, Act 1 S6)

The revolution that rises has
Stories for another time;
Our tale for this evening comes to a close.

(*We Bid You All Adieu*, Act 4 S7)

Again the most striking parallel between the Narrator and this particular Euripidean chorus is found near the end of the two plays. The opening song of Act 4, *The Ballad of the Gambler and the Monk*, looks back on the events that lay at the founding of the city of New Albion, telling of the titular Gambler and Monk who debated the nature of the divine, of chance and of fate. This debate, they agreed, was to be settled with a game of cards. The game went on forever and drew a crowd, who eventually settled in the area to continue watching the game. The buildings they erected became New Albion. Like the fourth choral ode, then, *The Ballad* looks back on the events that lay at the very beginning of the tale told in *The Dolls of New Albion*. In doing so, it also connects this origin story directly to the events of the opera as a whole and more explicitly with those of Act 4. Like the wedding of Peleus was used to comment on the falsely promised wedding of Iphigenia, the eternal game of cards played by the Gambler and the Monk connects the origin of New Albion to Priscilla and Jasper, of whom Kate tells us soon after:

They spend their days resigned
From the brutal world outside
And play a never-ending game of cards
To pass the time.

(*New Albion 4*, Act 4 S2)

Piety regarding the divine plays no noteworthy role in *The Dolls of New Albion*, as religion is entirely absent in the opera. The concept of Heaven is mentioned in one song by Annabel, in a context that is more blasphemous than pious.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Annabel Raises the Dead*, Act 1 S3. Cf. 'Annabel: A Reversed Clytemnestra', p.27 below.

It makes sense, therefore, that Kate does not fit Horace's description of a 'pious' chorus, a trait that is more characteristic of the Roman tradition than it is for the Greek tragic chorus. Her lack of piety therefore does not diminish Kate's choral nature according to the Greek tradition, which is after all the main focus of the present research. She is, however, shown to be loyal and a keeper of secrets. Despite her multiple attempts to communicate and reason with the characters, her numerous words of advice going unheard until the very end of the tale, Kate never once outright reveals other characters' secrets to them. Instead she opts for a more vague approach, sometimes through the use of metaphors. The lyrics cited above, directed at Annabel, Edgar and Priscilla, are excellent examples of this fact. She gently nudges Priscilla to see that the cycle of self-inflicted misery in her family will not end if no one takes action, she carefully warns Edgar that he is slipping further from his original intentions and that his apparent victory might not be what he hoped for. Even to Annabel, though it seems likely that Jasper would have welcomed her help in communicating his wish to die, Kate does not explicitly state this. Instead, she suggests to Annabel that Jasper *may* not wish to stay and that the love Annabel believes they share *may* not be real, though her words are barely even that explicit. Had the characters been able to hear her, Kate still would not have given up any secrets that were not hers to share.

She does not, however, wish for 'fortune to desert the arrogant,' as Horace put it. The most arrogant characters in *The Dolls of New Albion* are likely to be Edgar and Byron. Edgar overshadowed his mother's hybris in trying—and succeeding—to resurrect the dead by turning it into an industrialised process. The power and wealth this venture brought to him only strengthened his arrogance and he even used it to manipulate his ex into marrying him. Byron led a campaign for an unwilling Jasper to be elected mayor in a movement that feels almost like a desire for anarchy, as he specifically tells the people of New Albion that:

You don't need a master, no government who
Will take all you've earned, tell you what to do.
Our Doll will not lead you, he'll not bleed you dry,
Nor bribe, nor coerce you, nor fail you, nor lie.

(*The Movement 2, Act 3 S4*)

This selfish desire is so strong that Byron neglects his friend Amelia and, after her suicide stirs anti-Doll sentiments among the citizens of New Albion, even seems oblivious of or unbothered by these developments. His continued campaign drives New Albion over the edge into riots and, as a result, a state governed by Martial Law.

The Narrator does not seem to wish ill to befall even these two men, as she is seen to try to warn and guide Edgar with gentle advice, and though she offers no such guidance to Byron, she does not explicitly condemn his actions and even expresses pity when he faces the consequences:

Poor Byron, he runs to find Jasper, his love,
As the Dolls are torn limb from limb, torched and burnt up.
No one's left to listen to his speeches or cries;
He's fanned the flames that kill his dear Doll tonight.

(*The Bonfire of the Dolls, Act 3 S7*)

As mentioned in 'Comparisons in Form and Language' (p.11 above), Paul Shapera stated that the Narrator 'took on some subtle Greek chorus aspects'⁴² at some point during the writing process. Not everyone in Antiquity who wrote about the nature of the tragic chorus, be it in the Greek or the derivative Roman tradition, would have agreed with him. Certainly Horace would have had a few things to say about the execution of Kate's role as the Narrator and 'chorus' in *The Dolls of New Albion*. Nevertheless, seeing the numerous similarities between Kate and the specific chorus in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* combined with the fact that multiple points raised by Horace in his *Ars Poetica* do in fact apply to the Narrator, it seems safe to say that she is indeed the chorus of this opera. Her 'choral aspects', furthermore, are not nearly as subtle as Shapera seemed to suggest.

⁴² Lew, 2012.

7. Annabel McAlister: A Reversed Clytemnestra

Annabel McAlister is the star of the first act, a brilliant and reclusive scientist who has long since been experimenting with the dead in order to find a way to conquer death. She was obsessively enamoured with Jasper, a man she met in her youth and with whom she had shared a single romantic evening in the past before they fell out of touch with one another. Jasper, who had since ended up in an arranged marriage, died at a young age, leaving behind his unnamed spouse and young daughter Fay. His premature death made him the subject of Annabel's resurrection experiments. Her final success in these experiments marks the beginning of the opera.

As the deceased body cannot be reused, Annabel found a way to bind Jasper's soul to a mechanical Doll she had created to serve as his body; a stiff, restrictive construction that severely limits his movement and renders him unable to speak except through the radio broadcasts he is able to stream. Oblivious to his plight, Annabel focuses entirely on her joy at her success and her reunion with the man she has loved for years.

The story of a lonely, heartbroken scientist might at first glance not have anything to do with that of the scorned and vengeful murderess Clytemnestra, yet the two are noticeably parallels of one another, progressing their respective plots in similar manners even as their actions and motivations are polar opposites. Where the Narrator intentionally took on some choral aspects, the author has made it clear that he did not intend for other characters to have any similarities to Ancient Greek tragic characters, nor was he explicitly aware of any such connections. This makes Annabel the first of multiple examples of Masked Reception within *The Dolls of New Albion* without authorial intent that the audience can discern.

Both women are scorned lovers of a sort. Annabel was fully caught up in a one-sided love for a man who never quite thought of her the same way. On the 'relationship' between Annabel and Jasper, Shapera said the following:

They had a moment in college and they did share a kiss on one very nice, romantic night, and if you had asked him while he was alive, he would have been like 'oh, yeah, that was... I liked that girl. That was really nice.' But he did not fixate upon her like she did upon him. She was not in any way at the forefront in his thoughts.⁴³

Annabel's obsession with Jasper was a lonely thing and undoubtedly it was painful for her to know he married another. Contrary to Annabel, Clytemnestra was actually married to Agamemnon, who left for ten years to participate in the Trojan War after sacrificing their eldest daughter Iphigenia for this very purpose. Then after a decade, he came home with the Trojan priestess Cassandra in tow as his new lover. In Agamemnon's absence, Clytemnestra fostered a growing hatred for the man who had killed her eldest child and she also found a new lover: Agamemnon's cousin Aegisthus, with whom she plotted revenge against her husband.

Clytemnestra spends some time talking about her husband and the plight of a woman separated from her husband for so many years in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, before and after the titular character's return.⁴⁴ Certainly a case can be made for Clytemnestra averting any suspicion that she might be plotting to murder Agamemnon, yet no one seems to worry about this possibility until the deed is done, rendering such a diversion unnecessary. Even if this was

⁴³ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

⁴⁴ Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 587–612, 855–914.

the case, however, Clytemnestra's years of plotting Agamemnon's death and her words before his return all point to the fact that she, like Annabel, harboured some manner of obsession with Agamemnon. An obsession, furthermore, which was entirely one-sided.

Upon Agamemnon's return, Clytemnestra welcomes her unsuspecting husband with feigned warmth and pomp not suited to the behaviour of the ideal Greek wife. Despite her efforts and over-the-top welcome, Agamemnon completely dismisses his wife and even seems more focused on his prize from Troy, the priestess Cassandra whom he took as his mistress, whose presence Clytemnestra might well take as a slight toward herself, Agamemnon's rightful wife.

Clearly, then, both Annabel and Clytemnestra were obsessed with the man they later victimised. The consequence of this obsession and especially the emotions driving it, however, are on opposite sides of a spectrum: Clytemnestra's obsession was born out of hatred and a desire for vengeance, she *was* the wife and the 'new woman' was not (yet) in such a position (though, had Agamemnon and Cassandra lived, perhaps Cassandra could have been a total replacement of Clytemnestra) and these feelings drove Clytemnestra to commit murder. Contrarily, Annabel was obsessively in love with a man with whom she had gone on a single date in the past. Something might have blossomed between them, as the author said, but it did not. To Annabel, the 'new woman' or the 'Cassandra' was instead Jasper's eventual wife; another reversal of Clytemnestra's situation. Finally, Annabel was driven not to murder, but to unsolicited resurrection.

Some echoes of Clytemnestra can also be found in Annabel's words throughout the first act. During Clytemnestra's famous welcome speech in the third act of the *Agamemnon*, she speaks at length about the hardships she endured in his absence. Fear for her husband's wellbeing and loneliness plagued her and caused her sleepless nights. Now that Agamemnon has finally returned, Clytemnestra claims that she can finally put her pain and fear to rest. With her husband home, everything will be alright again.

ἔμοιγε μὲν δὴ κλαυμάτων ἐπίσσυτοι
πηγαὶ κατεσβήκασιν, οὐδ' ἔνι σταγῶν·
ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν δ' ὄμμασιν βλάβας ἔχω
τὰς ἄμφί σοι κλαίουσα λαμπτηρουχίας
ἀτημελήτους αἰέν·

890

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 887—891)

Concerning the tears that burst forth for me,
their fonts have all dried up, not a single droplet remains;
I have sores on my eyes from staying up all night,
crying about the vigils that were held for you,
which were always neglected.

This sentiment is one we can also find in *Annabel's Lament*, in which Annabel looks back on her life and all the pain and loneliness she has suffered. Science has always been her coping mechanism, yet science was also the source of her loneliness, as her parents pushed her from a young age to be an overachiever at the cost of having a social life. She, too, speaks of the many tears she has shed over this, and reiterates how she believed that Jasper could set her free from her loneliness.

Ghosts of dreams, ghosts of memory
That will not leave, or lay in quiet.
Ghosts that cry about the life
You let go by.

(...)

You could have been my angel, been my angel,
Been my angel and been with me.
You could have been my angel, been my angel,
My angel and rescued me.

(*Annabel's Lament*, Act 1 S5)

Textual similarities between the two women go deeper still, such as when Clytemnestra likens her apparent joy at Agamemnon's return to the coming of spring:

καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματῆτιν ἐστίαν,
θάλλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι σημαίνει μολόν·

(Aesch. *Agamemnon* 968–969)

And now that you have returned to our domestic hearth,
it is like the coming of warmth at the end of winter.

Similarly, Annabel expresses her own joy at her reunion with Jasper through the use of a spring-motif:

I have a Dolly,
It's like flowers in the spring.

(*Annabel Has a Doll*, Act 1 S4)

Where Clytemnestra's joy is an act, however, Annabel's is entirely genuine. Neither is unashamed to publicly display their love for their man, be it truthful or an act, despite these public displays going against the social norms. It is clear from the *Agamemnon* that Clytemnestra's elaborate welcome of her husband when he returns from Troy is inappropriate behaviour for a woman, even one of her station. She seems to be aware of this and even addresses the chorus, here consisting of male elders of Argos—the appropriate welcoming committee for the king—telling them that she is unashamed to act as she does:

ἄνδρες πολῖται, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε,
οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλόνορας τρόπους
λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

855

(Aesch. *Agamemnon* 855–857)

Gentlemen of the state, elders among the Argives,
I feel no shame to declare my husband-loving nature
openly in your presence.

For Clytemnestra, this behaviour is all part of her plan to murder her husband that very same evening. Contrarily, Annabel's public displays of affection for Jasper are, like her love for him

and her joy at their reunion, entirely truthful. Nevertheless, the fact that her beloved is a mechanical Doll—a novelty in New Albion at the time—instead of a regular human draws attention. One can infer from the following lines that Annabel, not unlike Clytemnestra, displayed behaviour that society deemed inappropriate, but continued to do so without hesitation:

I have a Dolly who can keep me company;
we go to shows, parades and cabarets,
though people stare at me.
But I've shown that I am brilliant
and I've conquered life and death.

(*Annabel Has A Doll*, Act 1 S4)

Treading upon the tapestry Clytemnestra laid out for him after receiving her welcome is an act of blasphemy that symbolically seals Agamemnon's fate. Clytemnestra invites and coerces her husband into hybris, while also displaying hybris herself when Agamemnon leaves her outside to go into the palace and she calls upon Zeus in a commanding tone:

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς ἐυχὰς τέλει
μέλοι δέ τοί σοι τῶνπερ ἄν μέλλῃς τελεῖν.

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 973–974)

Zeus, Zeus Who Fulfils, fulfil my pleas:
have regard for the things you are about to carry out.

In this version of the text, Clytemnestra does not merely pray to the King of Gods; she *commands* him by using the imperative τέλει. The mood of this verb varies throughout different editions of the *Agamemnon*, however, thereby diminishing the inherent blasphemy of the act to a degree. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that we can find an echo of Clytemnestra's apparent lack of regard for the divine in Annabel's words while she is still attempting to resurrect Jasper:

Please come back so we can have a life at last.
Please come back—I grab at Heaven's throat!
Please come back, I beckon, beg and cry and laugh.
Come to me; I'm summoning the ghost!

(*Annabel Raises the Dead*, Act 1 S3)

In their respective stories, the actions of these two women serve as the catalyst for all further issues: Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon directly leads to all subsequent actions taken in the *Oresteia*, including her own downfall and future misery for her family. After she and Aegisthus succeed in killing Agamemnon and seizing power, Clytemnestra spends some time revelling in her victory by her new lover's side, but fate eventually catches up to her. In *The Libation Bearers*, Clytemnestra's son Orestes returns to avenge his father, receiving aid from his sister Electra. Aegisthus is the first to fall, and Clytemnestra faces the corpse of her lover and her son's promise of revenge. In a moment of *anagnorisis* followed quickly by a definitive *peripeteia*, Clytemnestra recognises her fate, suffers the loss of all she thought she'd won through her crimes and is finally murdered by her own son.

Annabel's fate is different, though it is similarly self-inflicted and involves the loss of all she has achieved. After his resurrection, Jasper continually attempts to communicate his desire to die once more, a plea to which Annabel is deaf at first. It is a while before she finally sets aside her own self-absorbed joy at his return and listens, despite constantly lamenting the feeling that Jasper is not communicating with her. When she finally hears him, this prompts Annabel to look back on her life and Jasper's role in it similarly to how Clytemnestra reminisces about her life and Orestes before being killed by him. When Jasper's desire to die again finally got through to her, it felt to Annabel like her life had been a waste: she had spent her life working on this research, sacrificing much of her happiness along the way. She had achieved her goals, both the scientific one and the personal desire for human connection and love—and now it was all to be torn away from her. Annabel could not live with keeping Jasper unhappily imprisoned in the Doll, so with a heavy heart she destroyed the Doll, allowing Jasper to die a second time. In the process of setting him free, she also destroyed everything she had worked for.

Annabel McAlister, like Clytemnestra, committed a terrible crime against a (former) loved one. As a result, she enjoyed the fruits of her success for only a limited time before the consequences of her actions came back to haunt her, resulting in loss and death. But Annabel is like a mirror image of Clytemnestra, making the same mistakes and suffering a similarly devastating fate through opposite actions. Her choices were made not in hatred but in love, her crime was not murder but resurrection and her sad fate was not to be killed by a vengeful loved one; instead, Annabel was to be the merciful killer who ended up alone.

8. Edgar McAlistair: An Industrial Aegisthus

The next person we turn our attention to is Edgar McAlistair, Annabel's son. He, too, shows strong parallels to a tragic character from Antiquity, thus adding another level to the significance of *The Dolls of New Albion* as a piece of Masked Reception. In Edgar's character, we can find undeniable similarities to the murderous Aegisthus.

In the opening song of the second act, the Narrator informs the audience about this character. Edgar loved his mother dearly and was completely heartbroken when she passed away while he was still young. As a young adult, Edgar met Fay, who was Jasper's daughter, and fell in love with her.

So a generation's passed:
Annabel married at last
And she had a son she named Edgar,
But alas,
She died when he was ten.
His heart was broken, but since then
He's grown and found his darling Fay
With whom he wants to wed.

(*New Albion 2, Act 2 S1*)

This introduction of the second generation and its main players brings us to the start of Edgar's story in the second act of *Dolls*. When we first see him, Edgar is at a restaurant with Fay. While they are having dinner, Edgar remarks on how perfect the night is, until Fay takes him by surprise when she informs Edgar that she has fallen in love with someone else and is therefore leaving Edgar. When Fay leaves him at the restaurant, heartbroken once again, Edgar swears revenge.

Like the parallels between Annabel and Clytemnestra, it might at first seem a far-fetched idea to say that Edgar McAlistair is the counterpart of any individual in the myths and tragedies surrounding the House of Atreus, let alone of the vengeful murderer Aegisthus. Yet the very act of swearing revenge for what occurred over dinner is the first of numerous points of comparison between these two men.

Aegisthus, like Edgar, was bent on taking revenge for something that happened over dinner. Unlike Edgar, the crime for which Aegisthus seeks vengeance did not involve him personally. Instead, Aegisthus was groomed by his father Thyestes to avenge his older brothers and Thyestes himself; Atreus, Thyestes' brother and Agamemnon's father, was king and had Thyestes exiled to preserve his rule. Thyestes later returned as supplicant and Atreus welcomed him home. The tyrant soon betrayed his brother, however, by murdering and then serving the flesh of Thyestes' own sons (except for the infant Aegisthus) at dinner. When he realised what had taken place, Thyestes cursed the family (which already had a history of crime and even the serving of children's flesh at dinner) and fled.⁴⁵

Aegisthus recounts this tale to the audience upon his first appearance on stage in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, much like Edgar's first speaking appearance informs the audience of

⁴⁵ Aesch. *Agamemnon* 1583–1602.

Fay's betrayal when she leaves him for another man. Like Aegisthus, Edgar then spends years working on his revenge.

Like his ancient counterpart, who murdered Agamemnon together with Clytemnestra, Edgar is guilty of the same mistake made by his mother Annabel. After being dumped by Fay, Edgar spends some time at the family house wandering about miserably. During this time, he stumbles across Annabel's research notes in the attic and tries to recreate her resurrection technology. Naturally, Edgar succeeds, and uses this newfound ability to gain power and wealth with which he intends to win Fay back by any means necessary. Performing commercial resurrections for the masses, Edgar becomes one of the wealthiest, most influential people in New Albion.

Not unlike Aegisthus who, in murdering Agamemnon, not only achieved his vengeance in his father's name but also took out his mistress's husband, Edgar uses his power to have Silof, Fay's husband and the same man for whom she left Edgar, completely destroyed on a financial and social level.⁴⁶ Most notably, however, Edgar then also resurrects Fay's father Jasper just like Annabel had, an act which we have already established as being parallel to the murder of Agamemnon. Using the resurrected Jasper to blackmail Fay, Edgar manipulates her into marrying him.

Both Edgar and Aegisthus thus achieved their vengeful goals and spent the next years of their lives victorious, rich, powerful and married to the woman they (had once) loved. For Aegisthus, of course, this lover is Clytemnestra, which is naturally not the case for Edgar. That is, the character we have established as being Clytemnestra's counterpart in the opera is neither Edgar's lover nor his direct accomplice. Rather, this Aegisthus' 'Clytemnestra' is his mother and the post-mortem source of Edgars mistakes, when he uses Annabel's research notes. However, as stated before, Edgar harboured a deep love for Annabel, as did she for her son, meaning that though the love between the two characters is familial rather than romantic, there is still a deep, love-based connection between the 'Aegisthus' and 'Clytemnestra' of *The Dolls of New Albion*.

Love is one of the main themes in *The Dolls of New Albion* and especially the dichotomy between pure and impure love. The love Aegisthus and Clytemnestra share is built upon a foundation of adultery and murder and while their feelings for one another appear genuine enough, the crimes through which they secured their love leave little room to consider their love pure and good. Edgar's love for his mother appears a lot less problematic, though little is revealed about it in the opera proper. In meta discussions about Edgar, it has however been stated that Edgar "all but worshipped"⁴⁷ his mother, implying an unhealthy layer to what is otherwise genuine love, different from yet not unlike the genuine but flawed connection between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

By using Annabel's research notes to build his enterprise, Edgar's beloved late mother was as pivotal to his success and the enactment of his vengeance as Clytemnestra was to Aegisthus. Where Clytemnestra was a prize for Aegisthus, something he desired to win alongside his vengeance, getting Annabel back was explicitly *not* one of Edgar's objectives.

⁴⁶ *Edgar Builds a Business*, Act 2 S4.

⁴⁷ *Edgar McAlister* on the Shaperaverse wiki. It should be noted that while the information on this page is undoubtedly based on information supplied by Shapera either through his other works or in meta discussions, the editors of this website rarely cite their sources and the origin and validity of this statement is therefore difficult to trace.

Did Edgar love his mother Annabel? *Yes*, he did, very much so. If so, why didn't he bring Annabel back? And my answer is always: *because* he loved her. In the same way that his will stipulates that he is absolutely, positively *not* to be brought back into a Doll.⁴⁸

Rather than desiring the opera's 'Clytemnestra', Edgar's prize would be Fay. Regardless of Fay not being Clytemnestra's counterpart, Edgar took out his romantic rival much like Aegisthus had in order to have the woman he desired at his side, and he also 'murdered Agamemnon'—which is to say he resurrected Jasper—to achieve that same goal. Both Edgar and Aegisthus had successfully committed their crimes, their fatal flaws, and revelled in their success, never knowing how their fate would turn on them. For each action has consequences, and for both Edgar and Aegisthus, the price to pay for their victory would be their own life.

In the second instalment of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, *The Libation Bearers*, as well as two tragedies titled *Electra* by the tragedians Euripides and Sophocles, Aegisthus, along with Clytemnestra, is eventually killed by Agamemnon's children, Orestes and Electra, to avenge their father's death. In each iteration, Aegisthus is killed by Orestes after being deceived by Electra, who spent the years since her father's death practically held captive at home, growing exceptionally bitter toward her mother and Aegisthus over the years.

Edgar is also murdered by the daughter of this opera's 'Agamemnon', Jasper. Fay, having grown no less bitter and resentful than Electra had over the years, slowly poisons Edgar until he succumbs.⁴⁹ Indeed there is more to be said about the similarities between Fay and Electra, which will be expanded upon in 'Fay: A Faint Echo of Electra', p.39 below.

In no iteration of Aegisthus' death does the man get a moment of recognition, of ἀναγνώρισις, of his mistakes and the consequences he must therefore bear. This is easily explained by Aegisthus' status as a minor character in each of the relevant tragedies, in which he appears only near the end or not at all, and is instead only mentioned. Nowhere is Aegisthus truly the tragic character, so he does not follow the typical line of making his fatal mistake, recognising this too late and then suffering the consequences in the reversal of his fortune.

At least within the confines of *The Dolls of New Albion* proper, Edgar McAlister does not really fit the role of the 'tragic character' either, at least in the execution we know from Aristotle's *Poetics*.⁵⁰ Rather than suffering misfortune for a mistake he made, Edgar's story as told solely in *The Dolls of New Albion* leaves Edgar triumphant: he is rich, powerful and victorious at last. Only Fay's promise in the song *Fay Considers Edgar's Proposal*, Act 2 S5, where she swears that "one day you will learn, and you will burn like my heart burns", which is an exact repetition of the words with which Edgar previously swore revenge on Fay, hints at Edgar's future downfall. In this, his story as told in this specific opera ends in a similar manner to Aegisthus' in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where he is victorious in the end even as the chorus hints at the misfortune he has yet to suffer.⁵¹

None of the operas in *The New Albion Tetralogy* recount Edgar's ultimate downfall, though it is revealed in a side-story that he dies of poison administered by Fay.⁵² The same cannot be said for Aegisthus, of course, whose death is the subject of no fewer than three

⁴⁸ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022. Edgar knows at some point how the Dolls are unhappy and his love for his mother is such that he will not put her through that suffering (nor does he wish to experience it himself after his own passing).

⁴⁹ *Lost Fables From New Albion*, 'The Adventures of Pepper the Dog', 132.

⁵⁰ Cf. chapter 5, 'Tragic Themes in *The Dolls of New Albion*', p.14 above.

⁵¹ Aesch. *Agamemnon* 1667.

⁵² Cf. note 49 above.

different tragedies. Even with that, Aegisthus was never shown to have a moment of insight, as mentioned before, where he recognised his mistakes. This holds true also for Edgar; though the author has stated that he probably did recognise his mistakes eventually, or that he would have at some point, there is never any hint to this within *The Dolls of New Albion* or the rest of the *Tetralogy* (in which, after all, Edgar plays no part after his appearance in *Dolls*.) In ‘The Adventures of Pepper the Dog’, the short story in *Lost Fables From New Albion* which also confirms to the audience that Fay murdered Edgar, it is implied that Edgar realised that what he did was wrong at least to a degree:

His wife never talks to him and Edgar knows in his heart of hearts that he can't blame her. He has plenty of people who call him his friend but none that truly care about him and don't want something from him. All he has is Pepper. He hugs her and asks her who's a good girl. He tells her something. He tells her even though he's always told people he'd never bring his mother Annabel back, the truth is that he's been thinking of it lately. A lot. Come so close. He just wants to bring her back as a doll for 5 minutes. Just long enough to tell his mama how much he loves her. And then, he'll take an axe and destroy her again.

(‘The Adventures of Pepper The Dog’ in *Lost Fables From New Albion*, 132)

Edgar knows, deep down, that he has wronged Fay and he knows that the resurrected Dolls are unhappy; it is why he is resolved not to bring back Annabel no matter how much he may wish to speak to her once more. On the morality of Edgar, furthermore, Shapera has stated the following:

At some point, he knows. Like, he knows that it's not good. I would argue that when he starts out, he doesn't, he's just blindly going forward and he's bitter from the breakup and he's becoming wealthy, he's becoming famous, he's becoming powerful—it's irresistible. And obviously what he does to Fay comes along with all that. I absolutely think, but at some point he knows that it's not good but it's already done and he can't reverse it, it's not worth reversing.⁵³

The above almost perfectly describes the process of recognition or ἀναγνώρισις, therefore showing that Edgar *did* have such a moment—it just did not appear within the story as told in *The Dolls of New Albion*. Perhaps Aegisthus never had such insight. Perhaps this is where the two men differ. Regardless, neither Aegisthus nor Edgar ever openly recognises their mistakes for what they are in their tragedies or operas respectively.

Edgar's story is similar to that of Aegisthus in various ways, but like Annabel and Clytemnestra, the parallels appear even on the textual level. Compare for example the following lines:

One day you will learn,
And you will burn like my heart burns!

(*Edgar Gets His Heart Broken*, Act 2 S2)

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ δοκεῖς τάδ' ἔρδειν καὶ λέγειν, γνῶσει τάχα.

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 1649)

⁵³ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

But if you think to do and say such things, you will soon learn.

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ σ' ἐν ὑστέραισιν ἡμέραις μέτεμι' ἔτι.

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 1666)

But one day I will take my revenge on you.

Edgar here addresses Fay in her absence after she left him at the restaurant. Aegisthus in these verses does not speak to the object of his vengeance, for indeed Agamemnon is already dead at this point. Instead he speaks to the chorus, men who are loyal to Agamemnon and vehemently curse Aegisthus for his misdeeds. The way Edgar phrased his promise of revenge is strikingly similar to the way Aegisthus tells the chorus that they will come to regret their attitude sooner or later.

In a similar fashion, Edgar, after first discovering and successfully recreating his mother's resurrection experiments, also promises that he will prove his worth. The way he phrases this is deliberately reminiscent of when he vows to make Fay regret her choices and is likely addressed to her also.

One day you will see
That I can be someone you never thought I'd be.

(*Edgar Builds a Business*, Act 2 S4)

Here, too, we can see similarities with Aegisthus' words in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, though the parallels are not as direct as in the previous examples. Rather, the sentiment brought forth by Edgar seems to be implied in Aegisthus' words when he first enters the stage and informs the audience of Agamemnon's death and Aegisthus' own reasons for murdering him.

ἐκ τῶνδέ σοι πεσόντα τόνδ' ἰδεῖν πάρα·
κάγῳ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς·
τρίτον γὰρ ὄντα μ' ἑπὶ δέκ'† ἀθλίῳ πατρὶ
συνεξελαύνει τυτθὸν ὄντ' ἐν σπαργάνοις,
τραφέντα δ' αὔθις ἢ Δίκη κατήγαγεν,
καὶ τοῦδε τάνδρὸς ἠψάμην θυραῖος ὄν,
πᾶσαν ξυνάψας μηχανὴν δυσβουλίας.

1605

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 1603–1609)

The result is as you see here before you: he has fallen!
And I am the righteous perpetrator of this murder;
for [Atreus] banished me, as I was the third son,
along with my father while I was but a babe in diapers.
Yet now I am grown and Justice has brought me back here,
and I, who was an exile, have caught this man
by combining every trick of a reckless mind.

It seems clear that Aegisthus, since he was exiled as an infant, takes obvious pride in the fact that he has now returned to his ancestral home to right the wrongs of the past—and succeeded. While the previous comparison showed us nearly identical words from both Edgar and

Aegisthus, here it is the implied sense of inferiority that both men at some point in their lives vowed to prove wrong.

Finally, when the chorus continually challenges Aegisthus in their fury over Agamemnon's murder, we see Aegisthus plainly dismissing their allegations:

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὡς δὴ σύ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔση,
ὅς σὺκ, ἐπειδὴ τῶιδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον,
δρᾶσαι τόδ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως.

1635

ΑἴΓΙΣΘΟΣ

τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς,
ἐγὼ δ' ὕποπτος ἐχθρὸς ἦ παλαιγενής.

(Aesch. *Agamemnon*, 1633–1637)

CHORUS

As if you would ever be the ruler of Argos to me!
You who, after plotting [Agamemnon's] final fate,
could not even stand to perform the deed singlehandedly!

AEGISTHUS

Why, such deceit was naturally more suited to a woman,
and I was, after all, already suspect on account of the past.

When the chorus not very subtly tells Aegisthus that he is not only a murderer but also a coward and a weakling, Aegisthus is thus seen to respond by rationalising his actions: of course he did not murder Agamemnon on his own, because everyone would already be suspicious of him. Of course he sought the help of a woman, because the deceit necessary to lure Agamemnon to his death was obviously more suited to the nature of women than of a man. Aegisthus may be a murderer, but murdering Agamemnon was a just act of revenge, only natural after the injustice Aegisthus and his family had suffered at the hands of Agamemnon's father Atreus. He is trying to tell the chorus that *he* is not at fault here, and he is certainly not a coward as the chorus seems to think.

While such rationalising behaviour is not seen in Edgar in the opera proper, it is a trait the author has ascribed him:

Undoubtedly [Edgar] would do what everyone does: he was going to rationalise it, and has like, these rationalisations that allow him to live and believe that he is essentially the hero of his own story. He didn't wrong Fay, Fay wronged him, you know? And he's winning back his love. He's improving the economy.⁵⁴

In the end, we see in both Aegisthus and Edgar McAlister a man who set out to avenge the injustice they had suffered in the past by any means necessary. A man who toyed with life and death to rise to the top and succeeded. A man who, after years of enjoying his triumph with

⁵⁴ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 14-03-2022.

wealth, power and the woman he desired as his wife, still could not escape the inevitable fate of wrongdoers and was murdered for his crimes.

9. Fay: A Faint Echo of Electra

Fay: daughter of the twice-resurrected Jasper, unwilling wife of Edgar McAlistair, and dragged, against her will, into the McAlistair family drama. As the title of this chapter suggests, the parallels between Fay and Electra are perhaps more tenuous than those of other characters discussed before. Certainly they are more dependent on the established connections other characters in *Dolls* have with tragic characters from Antiquity, yet they are no less noteworthy in the grand scheme of *Dolls*' Masked Reception of the tragic House of Atreus.

Not much is known about Fay's past going by the text of *The Dolls of New Albion* alone, and the additional collection of short stories *Lost Fables From New Albion* does not give much additional information. By Jasper's own account, he loved his daughter dearly in life,⁵⁵ but little else is revealed about Fay's childhood or her relationship with her father. Jasper died when Fay was very young, a loss that was presumably heavy for the child to bear. The precise age at which Fay lost her father can only be guessed at, but working on assumptions regarding the timeline of Jasper's death, his first resurrection at the hands of Annabel McAlistair, Annabel's eventual marriage and the birth of Edgar, and finally the age difference between Fay and Edgar (which I speculate to be no greater than a decade, though there is no confirmation of this to my knowledge), one can safely assume Fay was likely not much older than five when she lost her father. It seems entirely possible that she was younger than this, leaving little room for Fay to have many clear memories of her beloved father by the time she reaches adulthood. Even based on the vague memories of early childhood, the fact that Edgar McAlistair was able to use the second resurrection of Jasper to manipulate Fay suggests that Fay loved her father dearly and had a strong sense of loyalty to him.

If we turn to Agamemnon's family with this in mind, one character stands out: Electra, princess of Mycenae and Agamemnon's daughter. Like Fay, Electra lost her father at a presumably very young age—referring not to Agamemnon's death, but rather his departure to Troy, where he waged war for a decade. Like Fay, no tragedy recounting Electra and her family's story states exactly how old Electra was when Agamemnon left for the war, though one can speculate based on the texts. What we know is that she was the middle child and that Iphigenia, the eldest sibling, was of a marriageable age when the Trojan War began. This, of course, does not place Iphigenia as much more than a young teenager at the time, keeping in mind the customs of Ancient Greece regarding marriage. The youngest child, Orestes, was still an infant.⁵⁶ We can therefore place Electra anywhere between and around the ages of 3 and 12 at the time when her father left for the war.

When Edgar financially and socially destroys Fay's husband Silof and resurrects Jasper, Fay looks back on her past relationship with Edgar. She remembers, briefly, the time when she was still smitten with Edgar, then:

When does intimacy become so cruel and petty?
Become a pit of loathing, disgust and hate?
One day you will learn,
And you will burn like my heart burns.

(*Fay Considers Edgar's Proposal*, Act 2 S5)

⁵⁵ *Priscilla and Jasper Play Cards*, Act 4 S3.

⁵⁶ Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 622.

Fay accepts Edgar's proposal but vows to take revenge, which, as shown in the previous chapter, she succeeds at many years later.

Electra's story after the murder of Agamemnon has seen many different tellings throughout the ages. In the Ancient Greek tragic tradition, all three tragedians whose works remain available to us today have told their own versions of the story, leaving us with plenty of material to consider in this comparison with Fay.

In Aeschylus' version, Electra makes her first appearance in the second instalment of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*. Electra is seen performing the appropriate funerary rituals at her father's grave, years after Agamemnon's death. The young woman laments the fate of her father, her family and herself, cursing her mother and Aegisthus for their crimes. When she is reunited with her brother Orestes against all her expectations, the two promise to avenge their father together and Electra prays that she may deliver a devastating blow to Aegisthus and walk out unpunished.

κάγω, πάτερ, τοιάνδε σου χρείαν ἔχω,
φυγεῖν μέγαν προσθεῖσαν Αἰγίσθῳ φθόρον.

(Aesch. *Libation Bearers*, 481–482)

And I, father, have need of a similar boon from you:
to escape after I've inflicted great suffering on Aegisthus.

However, her role in Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's deaths remains small in this version of the story and she makes no further appearance in the third part of Aeschylus' iteration, *Benevolent Spirits*.

In Sophocles' *Electra*, the titular character has more interaction with the fourth sibling, her sister Chrysothemis, who does not often play an active role in other versions of this myth. Chrysothemis has accepted their fate and argues with Electra that she ought to let go of her grudge as well, but Electra refuses. The chorus tries to console the grieving young woman, an effort which is similarly denied by Electra.⁵⁷

ὦ γενέθλα γενναίων,
ἤκετ' ἐμῶν καμάτων παραμύθιον.
οἶδά τε καὶ ξυνήμι τάδ', οὐ τί με
φυγγάνει, οὐδ' ἐθέλω προλιπεῖν τόδε,
μὴ οὐ τὸν ἐμὸν στενάχειν πατέρ' ἄθλιον.

130

(Soph. *Electra*, 129–133)

Oh you noble girls,
you have come to bring me solace in my troubles.
I know this and I understand, it does not escape me,
but neither do I want to let this go,
nor will I abandon my grief for my poor father.

She also fights with her mother before the eyes of the audience, claiming that Agamemnon's sacrifice of her eldest sister Iphigenia was justified (an opinion which is not shared with other

⁵⁷ Soph. *Electra*, 129–152.

tragedians' versions of the character) while all of Clytemnestra's actions afterward were not. This Electra plays a more active role in the murder of her mother and stepfather, standing guard outside while Clytemnestra is killed first and then luring Aegisthus inside to be murdered next. Sophocles' Electra is a more outwardly bitter and vengeful iteration of the young woman than Aeschylus' version was.

Finally in Euripides' *Electra*, we see Electra placed in a different situation than in the previously discussed versions. Here, Electra is not condemned to the life of little more than a servant like in Aeschylus, nor living with her mother, stepfather and sister like in Sophocles. Instead she is all but an exile, still confined to her ancestral lands but away from the palace, stuck in a loveless marriage to a farmer. Despite Electra's lack of love for her husband, her involuntary marriage, though reminiscent of Fay's situation, is in this regard noticeably better than what Fay suffered. Contrary to Edgar, Electra's husband is supportive of her in her bitter grief and even makes a point of not forcing her to do anything against her will; she even still remains a virgin.⁵⁸ The same can certainly not be said for Fay, who had a son by Edgar whose conception one can only assume happened under less than pleasant circumstances.

Euripides' Electra is the most active in her vengeance of all three versions: she suggests to lure Clytemnestra with the false information that Electra bore a son,⁵⁹ while Orestes will go to murder Aegisthus while the tyrant is sacrificing to the gods. When Orestes and his friend and comrade Pylades return to Electra with Aegisthus' corpse, she stands over his body and speaks to him one final time.⁶⁰

εἶέν: τίν' ἀρχὴν πρῶτά σ' ἐξείπω κακῶν,
 ποίας τελευτάς; τίνα μέσον τάξω λόγον;
 καὶ μὴν δι' ὄρθρων γ' οὔποτ' ἐξελίμπανον
 θρυλοῦσ' ἅ γ' εἶπεῖν ἤθελον κατ' ὄμμα σόν,
 εἰ δὴ γενοίμην δειμάτων ἐλευθέρα
 τῶν πρόσθε. νῦν οὖν ἐσμεν: ἀποδώσω δέ σοι
 ἐκεῖν' ἅ σε ζῶντ' ἤθελον λέξαι κακά.

910

(Eur. *Electra*, 907–913)

Now then: where shall I begin to tell of your evil deeds,
 how shall I end? What shall I place at the centre of my speech?
 And yet every morning I never wavered
 in speaking of what I wished I could say to your face,
 if ever I were freed from my old fears.
 Well, now I am; and I shall give to you
 all the condemnations I wished I could tell you when you were alive.

These final words to the corpse of Aegisthus, though nowhere bearing a direct parallel to anything Fay says in *The Dolls of New Albion*, are nevertheless reflected somewhat in Fay's song, *Fay Considers Edgar's Proposal* (Act 2 S5), cited above.

While Fay and Electra share some common ground, the two also differ from one another in more ways than the characters discussed previously. Fay is the daughter of this opera's

⁵⁸ Eur. *Electra*, 43–44.

⁵⁹ Eur. *Electra*, 651.

⁶⁰ Eur. *Electra*, 907–956.

‘Agamemnon’, but she has no ties to the ‘Clytemnestra’ of *Dolls*, Annabel, whereas for Electra the bitter relationship with her mother is of great significance to her character and her actions. Electra’s relationship with Clytemnestra is so significant, in fact, that her anger toward Aegisthus is frequently downplayed or even forgotten in modern, less faithful interpretations and adaptations of her tale. Furthermore, Fay’s relationship to Edgar is vastly different from the one Electra and Aegisthus have: both men murder/resurrect Agamemnon/Jasper and subsequently make Electra’s/Fay’s life miserable, but Electra and Aegisthus have no prior history of any kind, while Fay and Edgar had of course once been lovers. Aegisthus never once considered Electra in any capacity in his plans to murder Agamemnon and had little regard for her after the deed. In Euripides’ version of events, Aegisthus even planned to have Electra killed for fear that she might yet bear children that would overthrow him, before Clytemnestra convinced him to let her live.⁶¹ Fay on the other hand was the driving force behind Edgar’s actions, *especially* his resurrection of Jasper, and killing Fay was out of the question for him.

Even so, the similarities are indisputably there. Euripides’ version of Electra comes closest to Fay in terms of her situation, having lost her father at a young age and later wishing to take revenge for the injustice that was done to her as well as her father’s murder (as opposed to Jasper’s resurrection.) In terms of character traits, it is Sophocles’ Electra who resembles Fay more closely in her bitter grudge:

| | |
|---|-----|
| αἰσχύνομαι μὲν, ὧ̃ γυναῖκες, εἰ δοκῶ πολλοῖσι θρήνοις δυσφορεῖν ὑμῖν ἄγαν. | 255 |
| ἀλλ’ ἡ βία γὰρ ταῦτ’ ἀναγκάζει με δρᾶν, σύγγνωτε. πῶς γάρ, ἥτις εὐγενῆς γυνή, πατρῶ’ ὀρῶσα πῆματ’, οὐ δρώη τάδ’ ἄν, ἀγὼ κατ’ ἤμαρ καὶ κατ’ εὐφρόνην ἀεὶ θάλλοντα μᾶλλον ἢ καταφθίνονθ’ ὀρῶ; | 260 |

(Soph. *Electra*, 254–260)

I am ashamed then, women, if I seem
to you far too intolerant of my many woes.
However, because it is force that necessitates my acting thusly,
bear with me. For how should any woman of noble birth
not act in this way, when she is faced with the woes of her father’s house
such as I see them, day and night, always
growing ever stronger, never subsiding?

Electra defends her attitude by saying that there really is no other way she could feel or act in the situation she has been put in. Being forced to live with the mother and the man who murdered her father, having to face daily the consequences of their actions upon her family and herself, how can she not be filled with such unyielding hatred? Others may think she is taking her grudge too far, she freely admits this, but how can they judge her if they know not the anguish of her daily life?

This exact analysis, barring the details specific to Electra’s situation, could be applied to Fay as well, of whom Paul Shapera said the following:

⁶¹ Eur. *Electra*, 25–29.

OK, so, some people judge Fay, I feel, too harshly. I actually think, if you live long enough in bitter circumstances, you will become bitter. So by agreeing to [Edgar's proposal], it means that she's going to live every day of her life in resentment. And if you pile those days up through the weeks, months, years, you will become bitter enough to do very bitter things. Like poison your husband. I don't think she started out being capable of that, but, you know, her choices and then having to live with that eventually whittled her down to a moral level where she became capable of that. You will become a bitter old woman if you live enough years in bitterness. It's going to happen, even if you started out... Well, I wouldn't say she's flawless, she cheated on her boyfriend, but I mean, come on. That's not so heinous. People do that and go on to become decent people, especially if you're young and... Well, you know. Live with this sort of resentment and bitterness, and it will destroy you. It really will.

Like my brief analysis of (Sophocles') Electra's grudge above would require only minimal alteration to apply to Fay, so does Shapera's view on Fay's bitterness neatly fit Electra's situation, at the very least on the psychological level. Yet a single sentence in Shapera's appraisal of Fay shows us a final and major difference between her and Electra: in all the misfortune she suffered, Electra never had any real agency. Fay was blackmailed and manipulated, but ultimately her acceptance of Edgar's proposal was a choice she made. A single, flawed choice that sealed her and Edgar's fate: he was to die for his misdeeds and she was to live out the rest of her days in bitterness and misery.

Seen on her own, Fay may or may not resemble Electra strongly enough to be considered a modern reception of the ancient character, but looking at the whole of *The Dolls of New Albion* through the lens of Classical Reception Studies, it is clear that Fay and Electra share many similarities.

10. Jasper: A Resurrected Agamemnon

Elysium
The silent, sighed lost lullaby.
Elysian night.

(*Elysian Night*, Act 3 S5)

Jasper stands at the centre of *The Dolls of New Albion*. He is the only character aside from the Narrator to make an appearance in each of the four acts of the opera and each act revolves around him, even when he barely has a role in it like in Act 2. When other characters commit their fatal flaw, Jasper is oftentimes the victim.

It has been solidly established in previous chapters detailing other characters that Jasper bears a notable resemblance to Agamemnon, frequently though not exclusively as a reversal of the mythological king. Where Agamemnon is killed, Jasper is resurrected against his will. Jasper's two resurrectors are reflected in Agamemnon's two murderers, Jasper's vengeful daughter Fay shows parallels to Agamemnon's daughter Electra, and finally Agamemnon's eldest daughter Iphigenia has strong similarities to Jasper's great-granddaughter Priscilla. Like every comparison made thus far, none of this is explicit in the text of the opera and none, it seems, was intentional on the author's part. This makes Jasper but one of many on a list of reasons to consider *The Dolls of New Albion* a work of classical reception, and of Masked Reception at that. While Jasper has come up frequently thus far, there are still more parallels between him and Agamemnon to be made that will further solidify this claim.

Jasper and Agamemnon are similarly 'inactive' players for the most part, spending much of the stories that revolve around them playing a small role or even only getting mentioned by others. Of all the tragedies that put Agamemnon, his family and the story surrounding his death and the aftermath on the stage, Agamemnon's greatest active role is in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a story that has the strongest ties with *The Dolls of New Albion* Act 4 through the connections of Iphigenia <> Priscilla, Agamemnon <> Jasper and chorus <> Narrator (as well as a fourth, minor parallel that will be explored further in a later chapter.) Agamemnon's only other speaking role in the eight tragedies recounting this family's tragic tale of misfortune is in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, where he plays in one scene before he is murdered and never appears again outside of frequent mention.

For Jasper, this is not quite the same. He has a speaking role in 3 of the 4 acts of *The Dolls of New Albion*, though it is only in the fourth—the one closest to *Iphigenia in Aulis*—that this active role is anywhere close to the magnitude of other characters. In Act 1, with Annabel, he sings a few lines informing Annabel of his vehement wish to die and in Act 3 he gets a single song all to himself: *Elysian Night*, with which he hopes to convey this same desire and inspires other Dolls to broadcast his song with him so that they might all achieve the death they so long for. He has no speaking role at all in Act 2 and he is not even mentioned by name,⁶² only ever getting mentioned by Edgar to Fay as “your dear long-dead dad.”⁶³

⁶² In fact, Jasper is not mentioned by name until the opening song of Act 3, *New Albion 3*, when the Narrator informs the audience that “the Doll that Edgar brought back for Fay, well sure enough, he's Jasper, the same one that Annabel herself called up.”

⁶³ *Edgar Builds a Business*, Act 2 S4.

By comparison, Jasper's active role in the story is greater than that of Agamemnon, though if we were to limit ourselves to four 'acts' in the Ancient Greek tragedies as well—Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and all three parts of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*⁶⁴—the difference would be a lot less significant, with Agamemnon making an appearance in two of the four 'acts' (with only a single scene in one of them) and Jasper appearing in three (with only a single song in one and a few lines in another.)

This all shows that Jasper and Agamemnon show strong similarities in terms of their role in the narrative and their position in relation to other significant characters in their respective stories. Keeping this in mind, it bears repeating that Paul Shapera has stated to be mostly unfamiliar with these tragedies. Any similarities between Jasper and Agamemnon, as is the case with most of the comparisons drawn thus far, are therefore presumably unintentional. The author's unawareness of the strong connection his work has to these ancient works, again, connects perfectly to the theory of Masked Reception and furthermore supports the idea that the process of (masked) classical reception takes place more in the audience's perception than that of the author in certain cases.

Another commonality between the mythological Mycenaean king and the most unfortunate man of steampunk-era New Albion is that they both unintentionally and perhaps unknowingly inspire the deaths of others. While much can be said in this regard about the multitude of casualties of the Trojan War, the mass slaughter of Dolls and the New Albion Civil War, these three are only indirectly connected, to varying degrees, to Agamemnon and Jasper respectively. Instead, the deaths I am referring to are those of two young priestesses: Cassandra and Amelia.

Cassandra was Agamemnon's trophy taken from Troy after the Greek victory in the war. The Trojan princess, who doubled as a priestess to Apollo, gifted with the power of foresight while simultaneously cursed that none would ever believe her predictions, was brought to Mycenae as Agamemnon's mistress. There, thanks to her cursed gift, she immediately predicted Agamemnon's impending demise and her own subsequent death, which—naturally—no one took seriously until it was too late.

Cassandra was murdered alongside Agamemnon by a jealous Clytemnestra, who, despite already scheming her husband's murder, would not suffer the presence of a mistress who might gain Agamemnon's favour over his rightful wife. Agamemnon was by no means the direct cause of her death and he certainly did not intend for Cassandra to die—and indeed he would not have known of her demise, assuming that he was killed first—yet his role in her death is undeniable. Had Cassandra never been involved with Agamemnon, she would not have met her end in this manner. Though of course, this does not imply that she would not have met a premature death elsewhere, be it as another soldier's war trophy or at the fall of Troy.

Amelia is a character in Act 3 of *The Dolls of New Albion*, a Voodoo-punk alongside Byron McAlister and his implied friend. Amelia suffered much in her young life, living with

⁶⁴ Extending Aeschylus' *Oresteia* to also include interchangeability with *Electra* by both Sophocles and Euripides would not extend the timeline, as these tell of roughly the same events shown to us in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, and Euripides' *Orestes*, then, could also be interchangeable with Aeschylus' *Benevolent Spirits* in terms of the timeline. The outlier is Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, though neither this tragedy nor *Orestes* is quite as relevant to the present research as the others mentioned and thus need not be taken into account as such. Considering the nature of the classical reception presented here is unintentional Masked Reception, it would be a stretch to assume that each separate tragedy recounting part of Agamemnon and his family's tale, written by three different authors, would have had significant influence on *The Dolls of New Albion*.

an abusive father⁶⁵ and implied to be neglected in her friendship with Byron, whom she repeatedly asked for help and support, pleas to which Byron was never receptive.⁶⁶ When Jasper starts broadcasting *Elysian Night* and the other Dolls of New Albion join him, playing the song continuously, Amelia listens and begins to share the Dolls' longing for Elysium:

A place I cannot bear to be,
Where loneliness, brutality
And days of endless, dismal sky
Just go by and by and by.
Another place I never knew,
A distant, silent, sweet refuse;
With razor, rope and no lament
I go to where my sorrows end.
Elysium,
The silent sigh beyond this life.
Elysian night.
Elysium,
The girl who cries her last goodbye.
Elysian night.

(*The Suicide*, Act 3 S6)

It is Amelia's suicide, inspired by the Dolls and Jasper in particular, that subsequently incites the riots in which the vast majority of Dolls are destroyed⁶⁷ which then leads to the Martial Law by which New Albion is ruled in subsequent years.

Jasper would not have intended for anyone other than himself and the other Dolls to die as a result of his song. Furthermore, it seems likely that he did not have much of a connection to Amelia at all, though presumably the two would have met through Byron, particularly at the Voodoopunk ceremonies where Byron was too preoccupied with his obsessive love for Jasper to pay attention to Amelia. It is undeniable, however, that Jasper played a significant role in Amelia's death through his song. Though here too, it seems entirely possible that Amelia would have died at a later point without Jasper's influence. All the suffering and loneliness that inspired her suicide were already present, and Jasper and the Dolls' promise of a more peaceful afterlife was simply the final straw. Jasper's description of Elysium would have greatly appealed to one such as Amelia:

All the sorrow, guilt and shame,
Burdens borne and karma paid
In one soft breath like candlelight
Disperse in endless Elysian night.

(*Elysian Night*, Act 3 S5)

To say that Cassandra and Amelia are parallels to one another is a stretch and a claim I will therefore not attempt to make. The significance of this comparison is felt entirely in the parallel

⁶⁵ *The Suicide*, Act 3 S6.

⁶⁶ *The Movement 2*, Act 3 S4.

⁶⁷ *The Bonfire of the Dolls*, Act 3 S7.

characters of Jasper and Agamemnon, who were both the indirect and unintentional cause of a young priestess' death. Certainly Cassandra and Amelia, considering their situations, could have easily met their end elsewhere, but the fate they met is connected to Agamemnon and Jasper respectively.

The final piece connecting Jasper to Agamemnon are the aforementioned connections between Jasper's great-granddaughter Priscilla McAlister and Agamemnon's eldest daughter Iphigenia and these men's relationships to these girls. Rather than expand on that in the current chapter, this will be reserved for Priscilla's chapter.

Instead, it now seems prudent to stray away from Jasper's connection to Agamemnon and indeed to the tragedies revolving around the House of Atreus altogether. While these tragedies are the main focus of this research alongside *The Dolls of New Albion*, any strong parallels that can be made with other tragedies deserve mention as well.

For it is in Euripides' *Alcestis* that we find another character with similarities to Jasper. The titular character of this tragedy is a woman who sacrificed her life in exchange for that of her husband Admetos, who was fated to die but through schemes of the god Apollo could instead offer a life instead of his. Hearing this, Alcestis willingly volunteered.

While Alcestis' life and death have little similarity to that of Jasper, a comparison between these two characters becomes interesting at the very end of the tragedy, when Heracles, who had been a guest of Admetos and had then gone to battle Death, returns to his host with a resurrected Alcestis. Understandably overjoyed as well as confused at the return of his beloved wife, Admetos asks Heracles many questions regarding her return, among which the question why the resurrected Alcestis does not speak. To this, Heracles replies:

οὐπω θέμις σοι τῆσδε προσφωνημάτων
κλύειν, πρὶν ἂν θεοῖσι τοῖσι νεπτέροις
ἀφαγνίσηται καὶ τρίτον μόλη φάος.

1145

(Eur. *Alcestis*, 1144–1146)

You are not yet allowed to hear her speak
to you, not before she is considered purified
by the gods of the underworld when the third day dawns.

Like Jasper, Alcestis was unable to speak after being resurrected. In her case, this lasted for three days. Jasper remained unable to 'speak' throughout his entire resurrected life (both instances) and was instead able to communicate only through snippets of radio broadcasts, a method that took great effort on his part and great patience from his conversation partners—a level of patience many did not have. Both Annabel and Byron were seen begging Jasper to speak to them even as he tried to communicate in his limited capacity.

While this comparison is certainly not the strongest that has been made thus far, there is still one other parallel between Alcestis and Jasper: their lack of agency. For Jasper, this manifests itself within the story in his role as the perpetual victim of others' deeds: he had no say in either of his resurrections, he had no say in Byron's plans to have Jasper elected mayor and even at the very end, when Priscilla finally set him free, Jasper still was given no say in it. Priscilla called the police, Priscilla arranged her and Jasper's executions and Priscilla chose to die with Jasper—a choice Jasper vehemently protested, telling Priscilla that she still had a life to live.

For Alcestis, the lack of agency is more on a narrative level: after her death at the start of the play, she is not seen as an active character anymore. When she is returned from the dead, she cannot speak for herself. This aspect of Alcestis' character is discussed by Evans and Potter (2018) and they pose a question that Alcestis can never provide an answer to for the audience: "Did she want to return from the underworld?"⁶⁸

Alcestis may not have been able to tell the audience whether her resurrection was something she had agreed to, but Jasper's answer is a clear and vehement 'no.'

⁶⁸ Evans & Potter 2018, 60.

11. Priscilla McAlister: A Willing Iphigenia

The final generation of the McAlister family, the girl who sacrificed herself, Priscilla, is a clear parallel to Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon. This comparison can be drawn first and foremost because both girls end up dying for the good of their family. However, the connection, as has been hinted at multiple times over the course of this thesis, goes far deeper than this surface-level comparison and is in fact one of the strongest pillars supporting the claim that *The Dolls of New Albion* is a piece of Masked Reception worthy of consideration in the world of classical studies.

It has already been established that there are parallels between Agamemnon and Jasper as well as between the Narrator and the tragic chorus (most notably the one in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*.) These, too, are the most notable parallel characters we must keep in mind when discussing Priscilla and Iphigenia. It is particularly Iphigenia as she is portrayed by Euripides in *Iphigenia in Aulis* that we will take into consideration for this discussion.

Priscilla is obviously very close with Jasper, who is in fact her great-grandfather through Priscilla's paternal grandmother Fay. The closeness of their relationship is portrayed most clearly through the fact that Jasper holds full conversations with her, the first time he is shown to do this since the beginning of the opera. While Priscilla's love for Jasper is certainly familial, she does not quite love him as a father figure. Jasper, however, quite explicitly has a fatherly love for the girl:

Ghosts of Fay, the child I loved,
With eyes and a smile you remind me of.
In the years I've been trapped here,
Only you I've come to love.

(...)

Ghosts of love, of little girls you
Talked and watched as they grew up.
Ghosts of things and rings and gifts
You give to them so they might live.

(*Priscilla and Jasper Play Cards*, Act 4 S3)

Like Priscilla and Jasper, Iphigenia was said to have a very close bond with her father, and Agamemnon was incredibly fond of his eldest daughter. Clytemnestra stated that Iphigenia loved her father more than any of their children.

ἀλλ', ὦ τέκνον, χρή· φιλοπάτωρ δ' αἰεί ποτ' εἶ
μάλιστα παίδων τῶδ' ὅσους ἐγὼ ἔτεκον.

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 638–639)

Well, child, if you must; you have always loved your father most
of all the children I bore him.

Likewise, Agamemnon loved his daughter to the point he deeply regretted ever calling her to Aulis for sacrifice and tried to put a stop to the plot before she could ever arrive. When Iphigenia arrives at Aulis and sees her father again after a long time apart, she runs to greet him and

embrace him (vv. 633, 635-6.) Her joy does not leave her oblivious to her father's inner turmoil, and she soon asks him what troubles him so:

IΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

ἔα·

ὡς οὐ βλέπεις ἔκηλον ἄσμενός μ' ἰδών.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

πόλλ' ἀνδρὶ βασιλεῖ καὶ στρατηλάτῃ μέλει.

645

IΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

παρ' ἐμοὶ γενοῦ νῦν, μὴ 'πὶ φροντίδας τρέπου.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἀλλ' εἰμὶ παρὰ σοὶ νῦν ἅπας κοῦκ ἄλλοθι.

IΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

μέθες νυν ὄφρ' ὄμμα τ' ἔκτεινον φίλον.

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

ἰδοῦ, γέγηθά σ' ὡς γέγηθ' ὄρων, τέκνον.

IΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

κᾶπιτα λείβεις δάκρυ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων σέθεν;

650

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 644–650)

Iphigenia

What is this?

Why do you not calmly regard me, if you are indeed happy to see me?

Agamemnon

There is a lot to consider for a man, a king and commander.

Iphigenia

Be with me now, not with your concerns.

Agamemnon

Right now, I am completely with you and nowhere else.

Iphigenia

Relax your furrowed brow, then, and your dear face.

Agamemnon

Look, I am so happy to see you, child.

Iphigenia

And that is why there are tears in your eyes, then?

Priscilla similarly knows how Jasper truly feels through conversation and attentiveness. Jasper must have told her of his wishes directly, for in *Priscilla and Jasper Play Cards* (Act 4 S3) she responds directly by saying “you don't mean that; you just dream of death and wish to go” when Jasper claims that he is sacrificing his chance at death for her survival. Most notably, Priscilla,

like Iphigenia with Agamemnon, draws attention to the fact that Jasper is hiding his emotions and hiding his tears for her sake.

With one dear Doll who keeps you
From crying but cries too,
Silently inside.

(*Priscilla Contemplates*, Act 4 S4)

Priscilla seems to immediately accept that Jasper wishes to die, though she struggles to come to terms with his claim that he is alive for her sake.⁶⁹ In contrast, Iphigenia, when she learns of her father's unwilling plan to have her sacrificed, is understandably less open to the idea. Iphigenia has a change of heart only after begging her father to spare her life. The girl considers the situation and comes to the same conclusion her father did earlier: the whole of the Greek army assembled at Aulis will know of the oracle demanding Iphigenia's death through Odysseus before long, and as a result, if Iphigenia is not sacrificed as required, the army will take revenge upon her father and her entire family. Either she dies, or they all do.

Like most things surrounding the multiple resurrections and deaths of Jasper, Priscilla's decision seems a reverse of Iphigenia's: rather than follow in her family's footsteps and keep the Doll alive against his will, Priscilla loves Jasper enough to want to set him free once and for all. Her sacrifice is not to die so that her loved ones may live, but instead she gives her life so Jasper can die. Like her great-grandmother Annabel before her, she could have achieved this by killing Jasper with her own hands, but she could not bring herself to do it, and regretfully informs him of this.⁷⁰ Instead, Priscilla contemplates the situation and weighs her options. She ponders the multifaceted nature of love, a theme so integral to *The Dolls of New Albion*, and appears to summarize all the instances of flawed love the opera has presented until then:

Some speak about love in a sweet way.
Enchantment, romance and dizzy dream states.
And some just wait and pace their cage.
Some speak about love as a passion.
As rapture and cries and sighs and gasps and
Some resign to yearn inside.
(...)
Some speak about love in a kind way.
The friend that won't leave and makes your day sane
As you bide and cringe and hide.
(...)
Some speak of love and kindness
And clutch in blindness
And take and hoard and hide.
And some sacrifice anyway.
And some sacrifice it all away.
Ah, the fallen and the burdened

⁶⁹ "Ghosts of death; I wish to die, but sacrifice so you might live." *Priscilla and Jasper Play Cards*, Act 4 S3.

⁷⁰ "I'd help you to die if I could, but... I'd help you to die if I could, love." *The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5.

And the wreaths upon their graves;
When your broken, there's no assurance
You've made a better place.

(*Priscilla Contemplates*, Act 4 S4)

Priscilla speaks, amongst others, of selfish love, which she contrasts starkly with sacrifice in the name of love. Sacrifice, without knowing what to expect afterward. Sacrifice, without knowing if the results will be worth it, yet still knowing it is worth the try. The love shared between Priscilla and Jasper is pure indeed, leading to Priscilla's willingness to repay Jasper's sacrifice with one of her own. She is emotionally unable to kill him herself, so she calls the police to inform them of Jasper's presence, essentially arranging her own execution along with the Doll.

Like Priscilla, Iphigenia also directs her audience's attention to previous, impure iterations of love and desire by speaking of Helena. Iphigenia's aunt, whose lust-fuelled departure to Troy is the cause of so much misery now and yet to come, neatly fits what Priscilla describes as those who "speak about love as a passion" and who "speak of love and kindness, but clutch in blindness and take and hoard and hide." Priscilla immediately contrasts these kinds of people with those who "sacrifice anyway," and Iphigenia does this also:

λέγω τάδ' <οὐδέν οὐδέν' εὐλαβουμένη>.
ἢ Τυνδαρίς παῖς διὰ τὸ σῶμ' ἀρκεῖ μάχας
ἀνδρῶν τιθεῖσα καὶ φόνους· σὺ δ', ὦ ξένε,
μὴ θνήσκε δι' ἐμὲ μηδ' ἀποκτείνης τινά,
ἔα δὲ σῶσαί μ' Ἑλλάδ', ἣν δυνώμεθα.

1420

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1416–1420)

I say this without any fear.

That the daughter of Tyndareus causes battles and the murders of men
over her body is enough: as for you, stranger,
do not die and do not kill anyone because of me,
but let me save Hellas, if I am able to.

A significant difference in the reasons behind the girls' sacrifices, is that Iphigenia clearly has the greater good in mind beside her own family's wellbeing, whereas Priscilla has no such lofty goals and decides only that Jasper has suffered long enough. He must be set free, and Priscilla has no reason to live without him and no means to survive the outside world on her own. She could have had Jasper killed, his wishes fulfilled, and saved her own life, but she chose not to. Priscilla's sacrifice, then, is not forced on her as much as Iphigenia's is, either.

When Iphigenia has made up her mind to sacrifice herself, she herself calls the chorus of women who will guide her in a procession to the altar, ignoring the protests of her mother and Achilles and acknowledging that Agamemnon does not want this to happen, either, though he sees the necessity also. Similarly, it is Priscilla herself who calls the officers who will come to execute her and Jasper, in spite of Jasper's protests. It has been pointed out before that Priscilla echoes the Narrator in her final moments, repeating Kate's opening words to the song immediately before she is executed by the firing squad:

Circles never stop themselves.

Nothing that you've ever held
Were you promised or reneged
And sometimes when you lose, you win.

(*The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

As mentioned before, Priscilla is the only character in *The Dolls of New Albion* to truly hear the Narrator and heed her words. Likewise, it is Iphigenia who, at the end of the tragedy, has the first real (meaningful) contact with the chorus we see in the entire text. Before her, only her mother briefly acknowledges the chorus's words of welcome before they are once more ignored by everyone else.

Iphigenia directly addresses the chorus, the women of Aulis, and tells them to lead her to the altar for her sacrifice.

ὕμεῖς δ' ἐπευφημήσατ', ὦ νεάνιδες,
παιᾶνα τήμῃ συμφορᾷ Διὸς κόρην
Ἄρτεμιν·

(vv. 1467–1469)

As for you there, young women, sing
a paean for my fate to the daughter of Zeus,
Artemis.

ἰὼ ἰὼ νεάνιδες,
συνεπαείδεται Ἄρτεμιν

(vv. 1491–1492)

Hearken to me, young women,
and sing with me to Artemis.

While Priscilla acknowledges the Narrator's presence, or is at the very least able to hear her words of guidance like no one before her has been able to, Iphigenia interacts more directly with the chorus than her modern counterpart.

Priscilla echoed the Narrator's words precisely. Conversely, the chorus in *Iphigenia in Aulis* echoes Iphigenia's words in their procession to the altar. The repetition is not as exact as it is in *The Dolls of New Albion*, but still striking when seen in conjunction with Iphigenia's further interactions with the chorus.

ΙΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

[ἄγετέ με τὰν Ἰλίου
καὶ Φρυγῶν ἐλέπτολιν.
στέφρα περίβολα δίδοτε, φέρε-
τε—πλόκαμος ὅδε καταστέφειν—χερνίβων
τε παγᾶς.

1475

(vv. 1475–1479)

Lead me away, the conqueror
of Ilium and of Phrygians.

Give me wreaths⁷¹ about my head—here is my hair
for you to wreath—and water from the basins.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ ὦ· 1510
ἴδεσθε τὰν Ἰλίου
καὶ Φρυγῶν ἐλέπτολιν
στείχουσαν, ἐπὶ κάρᾳ στέφη
βαλουμένην χερνίβων τε παγᾶς...

(vv. 1510–1513)

Oh, oh! Look at her,
the conqueror of Ilium and of Phrygians,
as she goes; a wreath upon her head,
to be washed with the water from the basins...

Priscilla makes it clear that she does not know what her sacrifice will bring and what awaits her and Jasper on the other side (“Ah the fallen and the burdened (...) When you’re broken, there’s no assurance you’ve made a better place.”) Iphigenia’s final words similarly refer to the uncertainty of death and the afterlife, when she speaks of an unspecified ‘other life’ that she will face after her death.

ΙΦΙΓΕΝΕΙΑ

ὦ ὦ· 1505
λαμπαδοῦχος ἄμέρα
Διός τε φέγγος, ἕτερον αἰῶνα
καὶ μοῖραν οἰκήσομεν.
χαῖρέ μοι, φίλον φάος.]

(vv. 1505–1509)

Oh, oh.
Light-bringing daytime,
sunbeam of Zeus, I shall dwell in
another life and fate.
Goodbye, beloved light.

As a final, significant point of comparison, Iphigenia’s sacrifice famously allows for the start of the Trojan War, which is said to have lasted about 10 years. Priscilla’s sacrifice, though this was far from her intentions, inspired one of the officers tasked with her execution to launch a revolution that led to a civil war. This New Albion Civil War likewise lasted about 10 years and, like the *Iliad* tells us of the first days in the final year of the Trojan War, *The New Albion Radio Hour* starts by informing the audience that “for close to 10 years, a civil war has raged across New Albion,”⁷² therefore also recounting events from the final year of that war.

⁷¹ Note also how both Priscilla and Iphigenia bring up wreaths as part of the funerary traditions.

⁷² *New Albion 5*, *The New Albion Radio Hour*, Act 1 S2.

It seems clear that Priscilla McAlister shows strong parallels to Iphigenia, both in her willingness to sacrifice herself for her loved ones and the (unintentional) consequences her sacrifice will have on the world, leading into a 10-year war. Paul Shapera has made it clear that Priscilla is the only person in the McAlister family to make a pure choice. It seems fitting, then, that she shows such strong connections with “the only pure character”⁷³ in *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

⁷³ Koolschijn 2004, 18. “*Het enige zuivere karakter van het stuk is, zoals vaak bij Euripides, een kind (Iphigenia).*”

12. Soldier 7285: A Penitent Achilles

Why didn't you fire?
(*I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6)

The final character to be discussed is Soldier 7285, the third actor (Narrator notwithstanding) in the fourth act of *The Dolls of New Albion* and, as I aim to show in this final chapter, another reflection of a character in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, thereby solidifying *Dolls* Act 4 specifically as a strong example of Masked Reception of this particular tragedy. It is another soldier who is reflected in 7285: Achilles.

Soldier 7285 commences his role in Act 4 as an eager new recruit of the military police force now upholding the law in New Albion. His true name is never revealed within the opera and Soldier 7285 seems to fully identify by his role in the police force, accepting his recruit number as his only descriptor.

Soldier 7285
Is who I am,
It is my life.

(*I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6)

He seems content to shed his humanity in a way, instead identifying himself as a servant of the martial regime governing New Albion, a weapon to be wielded by the authorities with no questions asked.

This blind obedience is certainly not something Achilles exhibits in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, yet the development Soldier 7285 goes through in the short span of Act 4 puts him in a position similar to that of the mythological hero: of all the soldiers in the army, he is the sole defender of Priscilla/Iphigenia when all others (aside from her direct family)—including herself—are advocating for her death.

Soldier 7285 is one of the men sent to the McAlister estate when Priscilla calls to inform the police of Jasper's presence. Along with several others, he is to be one of the pair's executioners, a role with which he appears to have no qualms right up to the end of Priscilla and Jasper's lives:

And on the day we come it's over
And you will have your fate laid out and spun;
It's execution
And you may pray if you get comfort.
It's on this day your duty's done.
And on this day you've been caught guilty.
The sentence, citizen, is death.
It will be carried out this instant;
Say any prayers that you want said.

(*The Day They Come*, Act 4 S5)

Achilles is not this obedient from the start. When, prior to the events narrated in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the oracle foretells that Iphigenia must be sacrificed for the Greek armies to sail to Troy, the only ones present and in the know of this omen are Agamemnon, Menelaus, the seer Kalchas

and Odysseus.⁷⁴ Reluctantly, Agamemnon lures his eldest daughter and his wife to Aulis with the promise of marriage for Iphigenia, claiming she is to wed Achilles before the troops depart for the war. Achilles himself is unaware of this initially.⁷⁵ When he learns of his indirect involvement and Agamemnon and Menelaus' true intentions regarding Iphigenia, Achilles sides with Clytemnestra and declares that he will not accept being used in such deceit nor that Iphigenia be sacrificed.⁷⁶ Unlike Soldier 7285, Achilles does not wait for the deed to be done to voice his disdain for these plans, although his motivations are not entirely selfless: while he will not abide the sacrifice of a young maiden like Iphigenia under these circumstances, he simply does not want his name to be connected to the deed in this manner.

τοὔνομα γάρ, εἰ καὶ μὴ σίδηρον ἦρατο,
τοῦμὸν φονεύσει παῖδα σήν.

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 938–939)

For my name, even though it has not lifted a sword,
will have killed your daughter.

Achilles' objections with this treatment of Iphigenia are definitely rooted in his morality, at least in part, but his own reputation is undeniably an important factor in his decision to oppose this sacrifice—possibly more important than Iphigenia's life. Concern for his own reputation seems entirely nonexistent in Soldier 7285's rebellion after the execution of Priscilla, whose decision is rooted firmly in morality above all else.

Where, then, lie the similarities between these two soldiers? As stated before, they are both the only ones in the army to defend the girl who is to be sacrificed. Achilles promises his protection of Iphigenia as soon as he learns of the plans to have her killed, while Soldier 7285 makes no such attempt to save Priscilla's life. Instead, after we hear the gunshots of the firing squad at the end of *The Day They Come*, leading the audience to believe (almost correctly) that the firing squad has performed their duty, the next song in the opera immediately reveals that while the others definitely shot and killed Priscilla and Jasper, Soldier 7285 did not pull the trigger. Fellow soldiers ask him why he did not fire, and he is subsequently court-martialed for negligence of duty, all before we hear Soldier 7285 speak on the matter.⁷⁷ First he reveals why he did not shoot:

I saw her eyes, I've never faced
That kind of look, that haunted grace.
The way she died so willing just
To die for love, to die for love.

(*I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6)

Soldier 7285 was deeply touched by the way Priscilla willingly gave her life to grant Jasper the death he so longed for. Achilles is shown to be similarly humbled by Iphigenia's dignified

⁷⁴ Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 106–107.

⁷⁵ Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 128–132.

⁷⁶ Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 899.

⁷⁷ *I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6.

decision to willingly walk to the altar to be sacrificed, even as he continues to offer his aid to help save her life in case she changes her mind:

ὦ λήμ' ἄριστον, οὐκ ἔχω πρὸς τοῦτ' ἔτι
λέγειν, ἐπεὶ σοι τάδε δοκεῖ: γενναῖα γὰρ
φρονεῖς: τί γὰρ τάληθές οὐκ εἶποι τις ἄν;

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1421–1423)

Oh girl of mighty willpower, I have nothing more to say to that,
if that is how this all seems to you: verily your resolve is commendable.
Why not speak the truth about this?

Achilles promises that he would stand alone against the Greek armies who would see Iphigenia killed for their war and, outraged over his name being used to deceive Clytemnestra and Iphigenia without his consent, he voiced his discontent with the generals of the Greek troops:

νῦν δ' οὐδέν εἰμι, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς στρατελάταις
ἐν εὐμαρεῖ με δρᾶν τε καὶ μὴ δρᾶν κακῶς.

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 968–969)

Now I am nothing, and it matters not to the generals
whether they do well by me or ill.

As he ponders the loving sacrifice he witnessed, Soldier 7285 is shown to be similarly concerned with the indifference of the authorities (though once more, his objections have less to do with his own reputation and ego and all the more with his general perception of good and evil):

What kind of master must I serve,
That make this into such a world
Where one must break such beauty and
Bring this to pass with such cruel hands?

(*I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6)

As shown by Achilles' quotes above, this sense of morality that Soldier 7285 bases his decision on after witnessing Priscilla's death is something Achilles also begins to display only after hearing Iphigenia's willingness to die. Initially his concern is with the injustice done in no small part to himself, though he is also shown to be outraged at the injustice Iphigenia suffers. Thus, while Achilles promised his aid even before Iphigenia's sacrifice, it is only after Iphigenia speaks that Achilles seems more inclined to fight for her—and with her the greater good—than for his own honour.

Achilles vows to Iphigenia in the time between her initial decision to be sacrificed and her actual sacrifice that he would fight all the Greeks for her, that in fact it would shame him if he did not.

ἄχθομαι τ', ἴστω Θεέτις,
εἰ μὴ σε σώσω Δαναΐδαισι διὰ μάχης
ἐλθών.

1415

(Eur. *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1413–1415)

And I would be vexed, Thetis be my witness,
if I will not save you by entering in combat
with the Danaids.

While Achilles does not follow through on this promise—Iphigenia chooses to sacrifice herself, after all, rendering his efforts pointless if he were to fight for her survival—Soldier 7285, though too late to save Priscilla, does follow through. Like Achilles is inspired by the purity and courage of Iphigenia’s decision, so does Soldier 7285 vow to fight in Priscilla’s honour to oppose the government that ‘must break such beauty’ as the love he saw in her eyes.

But I perceive another place,
And it must be built upon your grave.
And I will bring you down.
I will bring you down.
I will bring you down.
And if I fall, someone will see
The way I went, just like she:
With eyes of love and heart of light.
They too will fight, they too will fight.
Today I say it will begin,
Today I will begin your end.
Today the wind that comes, portends,
Will be your end, will be your end.
And I will bring you down.

(*I Will Bring You Down*, Act 4 S6)

In Achilles and Soldier 7285, we have two soldiers who witnessed the purity of love and sacrifice in the willing death of a young girl. Two soldiers who saw that love in her eyes, as well as courage and nobility beyond what they could fathom. Two soldiers who could do naught but stand in awe of that girl as they swore to fight in her name against the injustice of the world that had driven them to their deaths.

And after the girl sacrificed her life in the name of love, both soldiers went to war. A ten-year war facilitated by her death. A war neither soldier lived to see the end of.

Conclusion

Masked Reception is the reception of classical literature and culture in the modern world without being explicit about the aim to serve as reception: a film that seems vaguely reminiscent of the *Odyssey* without any clear reference to the ancient epic, a book that puts its audience in mind of tales from Greek mythology without citing a single mythological deity or hero's name, or an opera that strikes the listener as a clever adaptation of ancient Greek tragedy all without mention of any character or story found in these classical plays.

The Dolls of New Albion is divided into four tragic acts, akin to the classical tragic tetralogies as we know them, though instead of three tragedies and a satyr play, each act is like a small tragedy in itself. The tragic tetralogy is nevertheless represented by the full *New Albion Tetralogy*, of which *Dolls* is but the first instalment and the fourth opera is much closer to our understanding of the genre of satyr plays.

Each act of *Dolls* is narrated by the all-knowing Narrator Kate, whose distance from the main narrative, even as she tries to communicate with the cast, is strongly reminiscent of Euripides' chorus, especially as seen in *Iphigenia in Aulis*. She adheres to many characteristics found in the typical Greek tragic chorus, though there are differences in their execution as well. It is most striking how the chorus of *Iphigenia in Aulis* manages to have meaningful communication with only one character, the young Iphigenia, who is echoed in Priscilla, the only person pure enough to hear the Narrator's attempted guidance.

The characters of *The Dolls of New Albion*, originally portrayed by a cast of three actors (+ chorus) in a manner similar to Greek tragedy, can almost all be considered reflections of characters in the classical tragedies about Agamemnon and his family. Annabel McAlister, the steampunk Clytemnestra, who acted not out of hatred and spite but out of love and loneliness, whose acts were equally opposite to Clytemnestra's vile deeds yet no less flawed. Her son Edgar, following in Annabel's footsteps like Aegisthus plotted together with Clytemnestra, committing the same crime as she did in the name of love and vengeance. Fay, who witnessed her father be subjected to injustice, whose loyalty to her father and bitterness over her own cruel fate led her to seek freedom through murder in a manner similar to Electra. Jasper, twice resurrected, suffering revival at the hands of Annabel and Edgar where Agamemnon found his death at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Jasper's great-granddaughter Priscilla, pure of heart, who sacrificed herself for Jasper like Iphigenia did for her father Agamemnon. And finally Soldier 7285, who could not save Priscilla's life but, deeply touched by the purity and nobility of the girl's sacrifice, vowed to fight for her honour like Achilles promised Iphigenia that he would defend the courageous young girl if she chose not to go to her death willingly.

With these and many more parallels in mind, it seems clear that *The Dolls of New Albion* can easily be considered a brilliant, elaborate piece of classical reception, borrowing general themes and motifs from Antiquity but focusing specifically on the tragic fate of the House of Atreus. Yet not a single mention of these tragic themes and characters is made throughout the opera, in fact the only Greek concept given explicit mention is that of Elysium, of which the author has stated that he intended only to borrow the name and little else associated with the Greek mythological afterlife.

Despite the use of Elysium being the only explicit reference to ancient Greek culture, I was prompted to consider the similarities between *Dolls* and ancient Greek tragedy and found a treasure trove of hidden parallels. There were so many, in fact, that it struck me as unlikely that these were unintentional, and yet I could find no indication that they were purposefully

incorporated. With the hypothesis that this apparent classical reception was, in fact, unintentional on the author's part, I reached out to Shapera, who helpfully supplied answers to my questions.

In the resulting interview, Shapera made it clear that aside from the name Elysium and what he (in a previous interview) called "subtle choral aspects"⁷⁸ in the character of the Narrator, he had no intention to reference or adapt any classical Greek concepts at all.⁷⁹ While it seems fully possible that Shapera came into contact with these themes, motifs, stories and characters in his life and subconsciously incorporated them into his work, by his own account the author claims to have little knowledge of ancient Greek tragedy at all, thus confirming my hypothesis: the classical reception in *The Dolls of New Albion* is unintentional.

Apostol and Bakogianni proposed that there can be instances of genuine classical reception without the author's explicit intention, that the subject framing these 'Masked Receptions' is in fact the audience or the scholar analysing the modern work in relation to the classical.⁸⁰ I propose that the Masked Reception in *The Dolls of New Albion* shows that not only can something be genuine classical reception without the author's intention, but in fact it can even be reception without the author's *knowledge*, either conscious or subconscious. So long as there is an audience who can identify parallels with classical literature in a modern work, there is genuine classical reception. Certainly classical reception is a process in the mind of the author who, consciously or subconsciously, incorporates classical themes in their work, but reception takes place primarily in the audience's perception.

In the absence of authorial intent or knowledge of their work's undeniable relation to Antiquity, I thus propose that we consider classical reception on a broader level than scholars have done thus far. Rather than restrict ourselves to explicit references to Antiquity, we should investigate every work that reminds us, however vaguely, of classical literature, for by digging deeper, we might uncover hidden gems. I started looking into *The Dolls of New Albion* from a classical reception standpoint out of curiosity and not only found more parallels than I could have hoped for, but also confirmation of my theory by the author himself.

Classical reception, like beauty in the old adage, is in the eye of the beholder.

⁷⁸ Lew 2012.

⁷⁹ Paul Shapera, personal communication, 13-04-2022.

⁸⁰ Apostol & Bakogianni 2018, 3.

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Appendix: Interview with Paul Shapera, 14-03-2022.⁸¹

So... recording has started.

OK.

We've talked about this a bit and you've also written on your blog the connection between opera and Greek tragedy and that you did some minor research about it. While writing *Dolls*, was that relation something you were actively conscious of?

No, definitely not. So, while making *Dolls*, I... In order to try to... Up until that point, I didn't have any fans, nobody listened to what I made, I just made albums for nobody. But I really liked doing it so I kept doing it. But I had had... A couple years before, I had broken my foot and to sit on a couch for two months and on that couch I started a blog and it was a dumb blog, but I found that if you just do a blog post every day, then eventually I, well, I had an average of about 700 people who would come back and sort of visit the page and I thought 'oh, you know, I could promote the thing this way.' So I had this thing that the very first day that I sat down to compose the very first note, I would make the very first blog post. And throughout the entire writing process, I would do a blog post a day. And it worked! It did exactly what it was supposed to do and by the time the album came out—by the time that the first Act demo came out—there was a following, you know. There was a following for the blog. So I have to fill a blog every day and I have to come up with new things every day and somewhere in the middle of the process, you know, one of the things in order to fill it—because it became obvious that I was writing a tragedy sort of thing, I thought oh, I should study tragedy! Let's! I spent the afternoon researching, you know, Greek tragedy. I had read *Medea* back in high school. But it was very instructive and informative. And it did help. You know, as long as you're doing a certain thing, to read about how it has been done and what kind of tropes are out there. And these are the tropes you're using and you don't realise you're using just because they're in the general—you know. In the media you consume, tropes just have existed down the ages. Absolutely they date back from the Greeks and in some cases before them. So it's interesting to see what you're using, what you're going against, how tragedy has changed over time from the Greeks to the modern age. It was extremely enlightening.

OK. So, during that research and the writing—are you aware of Aristotle's *Poetics* and his ideas about the tragic character?

I probably was on that day. Haha. I don't know *now*, but if you mentioned it I would probably know what you're talking about, but off the top of my head... One thing I do remember is that the Greeks had a thing that the tragic character had to be someone of an elevated status and that their fall had to go from really high to really low. They would not have done the sort of modern man, you know, an everyman, which is sort of the way they would do it now. You take an everyman and you crush him. For them it had to be as high as possible. That I remember and if that's what you're talking about, then that's my guess.

⁸¹ Italics are my own additions to signify stress on a word or sentence.

Yes. I was also talking about the three stages of a tragic character. They make a mistake at some point, which they later recognise but too late to reverse it. And then there is a reversal of their fortune. Which I think is common in modern theatre as well.

Yes. That I remember. That I took to heart. That is a thing that I was already doing and I really like that and have continued to do it. And in every case, I'm really into that. There has to be a fatal flaw in the character that causes their own downfall. Now the Greeks and the people after them also had this thing about, say, the gods, or in a more modern sense there had to be a twist of fate, but basically something higher than the person itself is also in play. I know that that often happens. That I don't always care about. I recognise that it's a thing, but I don't attach around it the way I attach around, you know. And that I recognise from Shakespeare, because all of Shakespeare's characters have a fatal flaw that is key in their own sad fate. Which is awesome. 'Cause I like the idea—I'm particularly interested in a choice that leads to unintended consequences. And it was a bad choice or a dumb choice or just a blind choice. But one wrong choice and, you know, you're screwed.

And who would you say, in *Dolls*, actually makes that first mistake?

Well, Annabel, obviously. She sets things in motion.

Yes, OK. I was thinking that maybe Annabel does make sense, of course, but maybe Edgar is the first to really push it through, but Annabel, yeah, that does make sense.

Well, it *is* Annabel, but because Annabel's choice was, uhm. OK. Every single character, their flawed choice is made out of love. There is a love component, and they make bad choices based on flawed love. So Annabel makes a choice based on flawed love but hers is not 'evil', it is not so bad. The consequences really only affect her—and I mean, the poor Jasper—so it's different. Edgar also makes a choice, also out of love. In this case because his love was spurned. And his choices made out of love are more horrific and therefore the consequences are more horrific. But Annabel is the one. She makes a bad choice. She shouldn't have brought the poor guy back and she should have, like, you know—he didn't love her, she didn't have any type of thing. Byron also makes a flawed choice out of flawed love. His love for the Doll is not good. And thus the whole point is that every single choice that each generation makes keeps taking things lower and lower and lower and thus the only thing that can reverse the fall is a *pure* choice in the name of love. So when we get to the fourth Act, Priscilla is able to stop the downward spiral because her choice is a pure choice made out of love. And the other three, each one was selfish—Annabel was selfish, Edgar was selfish, Byron was selfish. Priscilla's choice is unselfish, and by being unselfish she breaks the downward spiral.

OK, thank you. From here on I will be going more deeply into the characters in my questions. So for example, I was wondering: in the song *Annabel Has a Doll*, she eventually seems to listen to Jasper wanting to die again. Is it *just* Jasper that she's listening to, or is there also an aspect of her hearing the Narrator?

No, because the only character who really actually responds to the Narrator is Priscilla, and until then the Narrator is just sort of beating her head against the wall. Annabel *is* less flawed than those who come after, so she's more capable of sort of seeing the light. I know different productions sort of work with the Narrator a bit differently, but I mean, my intention is that it isn't until Priscilla that the Narrator actually gets through.

I think you mentioned quickly before: has Jasper, during his life, actually ever reciprocated Annabel's feelings, or was it entirely one-sided?

Well, to a small degree. They had a moment in college and they did share a kiss on one very nice, romantic night, and if you had asked him while he was alive, he would have been like 'oh, yeah, that was... I liked that girl. That was really nice.' But he did not fixate upon her like she did upon him. She was not in any way forefront in his thoughts. After the night came and went, you know, it's like—he had a nice night, something *could* have happened but it didn't and he moved on. And he actually ended up in an arranged marriage, but... Annabel was not to him like he was to her. It was very one-sided, but not—there *was* a spark, that was real. Annabel didn't build her whole thing off of nothing. It isn't like she saw a guy on the street and was like 'ahh, I'm gonna fixate on him!' There *was* an actual moment of real connection.

About Edgar. He clearly went a bit overboard, deciding that resurrection and all that would be a nice industrialised process. Is there any point where he recognises his deeds as wrong, both the resurrection and the manipulation of Fay? And if he does, does he care?

Well, uhm. Well, Edgar gets a lot of grief. Does he... Okay, this doesn't really help his case, but a question I often get asked is, okay, first off: did Edgar love his mother Annabel? *Yes*, he did, very much so. If so, why didn't he bring Annabel back? And my answer is always: because he loved her. In the same way that his will stipulates that he is absolutely, positively *not* to be brought back into a Doll. So... At some point, he knows. Like, he knows that it's not good. I would argue that when he starts out, he doesn't, he's just blindly going forward and he's bitter from the breakup and he's becoming wealthy, he's becoming famous, he's becoming powerful—it's irresistible. And obviously what he does to Fay comes along with all that. I absolutely think so, but at some point he knows that it's not good but it's already done and he can't reverse it, it's not worth reversing. And we don't have enough time in the Act to get into the, you know, how he lives with himself. Because undoubtedly he would do what everyone does: he was going to rationalise it, and has like, these rationalisations that allow him to live and believe that he is essentially the hero of his own story. He didn't wrong Fay, Fay wronged him, you know? And he's winning back his love. He's improving the economy. He's... you know. So he has rationalisations, but yeah. I mean, in the quiet, still moments, I mean, he... He knows this isn't so great. But, you know.

He is definitely a complicated character, which is very intriguing.

I mean, you know, in the States—I grew up in Pittsburgh, where we have Andrew Carnegie and, oh, that other guy whose name escapes me. Henry whatshisface. Anyway—these, the old titans of industry in the late 1800s, early 20th century, you had these American titans of industry. They become incredibly powerful, they do these incredible things for the momentum of society, but they spill blood. There is a huge moral hole in the way they go about their business, and I'd argue that you just can't get that big and that powerful without being willing to tread over those moral holes. And they do, they all do. And what happens when they hit a certain point in life, when they start to become older men—you know, they no longer have the gumption to keep the industrial fight up, they start to retire—even Bill Gates did the same thing. Bill Gates during the 90s was an awful human being, but then he retires and then they dedicate themselves to philanthropy. Andrew Carnegie builds hospitals, libraries—he does all

this stuff and they all do. Every one of them, as an older man, to sort of give back to the community. I really believe to ease their conscience. Edgar is that in a nutshell. But Edgar died before he could enter his philanthropy phase. And he would have. Like I said, Edgar would have followed the exact same track as all these guys, because I had this—Edgar is a commentary, obviously, on this exact thing. And the stories always follow the same arc. Always. Repeating circles; it never ends. So, you know, he would have become a philanthropist, say, in his 50s, 60s, 70s. But he never got that far.

That's... I never really thought of him as a commentary on such things. But then, I've never spent much time thinking about them. That's very interesting, actually.

I grew up in Pittsburgh and my mother spent her life as a librarian at Carnegie Library. And, you know, across the street were the steel mills—they're all gone now—but Pittsburgh was the steel town. They made the steel that laid the railroad tracks in the country and built all the great buildings in Chicago and everywhere, you know, North, West, East and South. So that legacy is something that I'm familiar with in a sort of... Definitely in the pool of inspiration. Jeff Bezos! I mean, there's always titans of industry, and in our day we have Jeff Bezos and Amazon. He has created an incredible—he has redefined the industry, he has created a whole new thing, he is rich beyond measure... And there is a moral pit at the bottom of it all. Much like the steel factories and everything, his workers, he treats them like shit because you can't become that rich... And after Bezos is dead and gone... And Bezos will retire one day and give to philanthropy like they all do, and 50 years from now there will be the new guy. They do tend to be male... for whatever reason. So my guess is, 50 years from now, the new guy will come and it'll be the same story repeating again and again.

Well, let's hope this is a cycle humanity can break as well, though I doubt it.

I... You know, you can take this back in history and... anyway. I mean, the Pharaohs who built the pyramids... The pyramids still stand, but they built them on the broken backs of tens of thousands of these poor Egyptian slobs who, in the off seasons when they're not farming, have to go and, you know, lug the stones and build the great death tombs of these egotistical, maniacal... And it's five thousand years later and we're still doing it. The details have changed, but the story's the same. I'm really into the whole, like, "circles never stop themselves." Because I believe it. I believe that it describes humanity.

It does, actually. History repeats itself in every way, just in altered form.

By Act 4, in Priscilla's timeline, Byron is already absent. Can we assume that he was one of the people 'taken away and never seen again'?

Yes. The purges came for him one day. He got married and had a kid very much in order to toe the line and sort of hide his past and try to look normal, like he was "I'm with the program now, you know, no need to worry about me; I'm playing by the rules." However, he would've been—he was too visible at one point in his youth, so one day they absolutely would have showed up and carted him away. Because that's what totalitarian states do.

Unfortunately, yes. Also in Act 4, something that I really only just thought of, about 2 hours ago—Jasper is consistently said to not be able to speak aside from finally being able to compose 'Elysian Night' based on radio broadcasts he streamed. But by Act 4, he actually speaks quite a bit. Is that done the same way as 'Elysian Night'?

You know, originally, I was going to have his speech be these snippets—it's like, you would be able to hear it as snippets of different songs stuck together. But that proved to be unrealistic to actually make that work, so I had to give that up. But that is more true to the actual reality. Obviously he got better and better with it over time, so that in Priscilla's time 1) he's much better at it, and 2) Priscilla actually listens for the first time in four generations. So Priscilla is in tune with him and simply capable of understanding him to a greater degree. So between those two things, his greater competency and her actual willingness to truly listen and understand, they are able to communicate to the degree expressed in Act 4. But, you know, I simply couldn't get into the subtleties of that. They have got to sing the songs and the melodies, so...

Of course. But then, partly the way Jasper speaks so clearly in Act 4 is actually the audience hearing him through Priscilla's interpretations?

Yes. What it is... I'm pretty sure it might be in *Les Miserables* but it might be—oh, it's one of those classics. A girl has a grandfather and the grandfather ends up bedridden and cannot do anything but blink one eye. And yet, he knows morse code, so by blinking one eye he can communicate with the granddaughter who will sit right next to him and write down the most complicated trains of thought that he is communicating, using that one blinking eye. It's that sort of thing. If you have a person who is patient enough and willing enough to listen, you know—that was in my mind for that thing. They're able to communicate to as complex degrees as anyone else. It just takes patience, and they had nothing but time.

It's obvious both from the story and everything you've said thus far that they have a really close relationship and Jasper also says explicitly that Priscilla reminds him of Fay. Is that apparent father-daughter relationship mutual, or does Priscilla see him differently?

No. First of all, I mean, their mutual love for each other is the only pure love in the whole thing, where both love each other in a respectful manner. It happens to be non-romantic, you know, their bond is in no way romantic whatsoever. His is daughter-like, and hers to him, I mean, I don't know if it's father-like exactly, but *familial*, you know? Definitely. Unencumbered by romantic troubles. Frankly romantic love is what got every other generation in trouble, so...

Why, exactly, does Priscilla choose to die with Jasper? She wants to set him free, obviously, but there was the option that she could have done it herself, like Annabel did, and not die in the process.

I don't think she can. I mean, she can't kill him herself. She can't bring herself to do it. She can make the phone call that brings in some other people to do it. And she has nowhere to go, so even if she made the phone call and fled, she had nowhere to flee to. She is sheltered, she is scared of the world outside, you know—she is OK with it. She is willing to die in order to free him. Hence, once again—purity of love instead of selfishness of love.

About the choice for the name 'Elysium'. That's of course the Greek mythological afterlife—

Well, you know, Heaven is—'Heaven.' I don't like 'Heaven.' 'Heaven' is dumb and you might as well get artsy about it, so—Elysium! It's right there. And it doesn't have the obvious

sort of connotations. If I think ‘Heaven,’ I think the modern-day Christians or evangelicals—which I don’t want to do. And *Elysium* is, well, you’re starting with a more interesting blank slate, as far as you and your listeners are concerned. There’s no Saint Peter and holy gates and Jesus and the whole thing associated with Heaven, but we still know we’re talking about an afterlife.

Yes, that makes absolute sense.

It was the only thing that came to mind that fit the bill.

So the choice for the name was *just* the name, or did you go a little deeper into the mythology of it?

No, it was literally just the name. It didn’t come with the baggage that something like the name ‘Heaven’ would have, and I really like it. It’s a version of the name ‘Heaven’—it’s *Elysium*, a blank slate on which I can sort of paint, you know, what I want to paint. And even that, I don’t want to paint, you know... *Elysian Night* is purposefully a very vague song. It’s supposed to be vague. You want to convey a sort of mystique, mysteriousness. You don’t want it to be concrete and make too much sense, otherwise there is no mysticalness to it.

So, about the Narrator again. With Priscilla being the obvious exception, do the characters just not hear her at all, or do they choose to ignore her?

No, they don’t hear her. And it’s definitely sort of like your state of enlightenment or awareness, they *could*, if they were just more enlightened—but they’re not. And Priscilla *is*. So Priscilla is, you know, it’s not that she *perceives* perceives the Narrator, but the Narrator is able to get through. So that’s what’s happening. And with the other characters, there’s no way. Annabel is too caught up in herself, Edgar is too caught up in himself, Byron is *all about* being too caught up in himself, so I mean, no one else stands a chance.

That is actually very interesting, seeing as in the parallels I’ve been able to find with a few classical tragedies, the Narrator in *Dolls* seems to be most like the chorus as written by Euripides. Not so much the other two authors we still have. And in one play, Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, is the only one who actually interacts with the chorus, and she has multiple parallels with Priscilla. So that’s really interesting.

That is interesting. Yeah, I mean... we all draw from the same well of tropes. So ultimately, I’m not surprised that that happens.

I’m personally a firm believer that there is no original story left to tell as such, just the way of telling it is different every time. But if you really boil it down to the essentials, every story has already been told. I mean, humanity has been telling stories for thousands of years; how can we come up with entirely new things? But the details that make a story recognisable, those are—usually—completely original, but the core aspects have probably already been depleted. I think.

I can see that. Because psychologically, we’re the same. Our psychological motivations remain consistent. Little more of this, little less of this... It’s like a bunch of faders, and the faders can be different, you know, certain things are higher or lower than others, but it’s still the same seven faders.

There was one more question about Fay. So, the opera alludes to her revenge on Edgar, which is of course not carried out in the opera itself but is described in *Lost Fables*. Now, she has many reasons to take revenge on Edgar, of course. Is there any one thing that is her main drive, or was it the culmination?

OK, so, some people judge Fay, I feel, too harshly. I actually think, if you live long enough in bitter circumstances, you will *become* bitter. So by agreeing to it, it means that she's going to live every day of her life in resentment. And if you pile those days up through the weeks, months, years, you will become bitter enough to do very bitter things. Like poison your husband. I don't think she started out being capable of that, but, you know, her choices and then having to live with that eventually whittled her down to a moral level where she *became* capable of that. You will become a bitter old woman if you live enough years in bitterness. It's going to happen, even if you started out... Well, I wouldn't say she's flawless, she cheated on her boyfriend, but I mean, *come on*. That's not *so* heinous. People do that and go on to become decent people, especially if you're young and... Well, you know. Live with this sort of resentment and bitterness, and it will destroy you. It really will.

Absolutely. I would say that what Fay got for cheating and later dumping Edgar, which—yeah, that was not the best thing to do, but what she got was way worse, I think, than it...

Yeah. Well, she is a tragic character. She is more tragic than Edgar herself, who also fell and... But I find—to me, Edgar is sympathetic up to a certain point. Obviously we take him down really far, but I still believe that he's sympathetic. You know, up until a certain point. As in Fay even more so.

Yeah. The way I see Edgar, is he... may not have had the *best* intentions, definitely not the worst, but eventually, I guess, there's just this point of no return and from there on you just double down.

Yeah. But I would argue that part of it was the power and the money—it was a necessary component in taking his fall past that point of no return. It definitely allowed him that extra, you know—he was looking to feel better about himself, and by the time you're *that* rich and *that* powerful, not only do you feel better about yourself, now you feel *too* good about yourself. You've gone too much up, and because you've gone too much up, you're now capable of going far further down. I don't think it would've happened if he hadn't had the money and the power.

Which, of course, is kind of the environment that Byron then grew up in; the money and the power. He is actually the character that I have not quite figured out, I think.

He's the least developed. Act 3... I've always wanted to rewrite—not rewrite, I wanted to *add* two songs to Act 3. If the show would ever go past this certain point, I would add the two songs. Byron and Amelia are both not fleshed out well enough. Act 3, a lot happens and it all goes by really fast and they're the least developed characters. And that's why you have the least amount to work with them. It's not you, it's a flaw in the piece itself. I recognise that, but, you know; it's out there.

I wouldn't say it's a flaw in the piece itself so much as Act 3 perhaps being more about the events itself than the characters.

Well, yeah...

As you said, a lot happens in Act 3, which is definitely a cornerstone not just for Act 4 but subsequent operas, also.

Still, though. Two songs. Add two songs, it'll really help.

If it ever happens, I'll definitely be interested.

It will one day. One day, I'll finally get to it.

Well, that was the end of my questions, so is there anything you want to add still?

I mean, not off the top of my head. I think I've been throwing out everything I could think of. I'm not, uhm... I wouldn't at all want you to think that I'm particularly well-versed in Shakespeare. I'm not. *But* I do know I am way more familiar with Shakespeare and draw a lot more from the little that I do know than, for instance, from the Greeks. Because with Shakespeare, I'm familiar enough that I can point out things like, I'm aware of this, and I'm aware of this, and I'm aware of that. That does affect my...

[Interruption]

No problem. So, uhm... Definitely more Shakespeare than further back with the Greeks. I think that's where we were.

Yeah. I have more of a familiarity with that.

Right. So, the theory I'm going to be working with is that the reception of older stories, so to say, happens more in the audience than in the author's intention.

Possibly.

It is a theory that—well, not consciously basing anything on Greek tragedy, in this case...

Still produces a Greek tragedy.

Exactly. Just because those tropes and story structures and everything has been passed down for centuries. So I'd wager a lot of people to some degree reproduce stories that were already told in Antiquity, without even realising it or intending to.

I 100% agree. Totally agree. You know, I think you can... I can point to *Breaking Bad*, or, you know, these pop-culture juggernauts, and if you'd want, you could trace these clear lines that go straight back to Shakespeare and then to the Greeks and, you know... That's just the way it is.

Yes. Now, I've not actually watched the show, but I've read in an article someone similar research to what I'm doing, that something in *Game of Thrones* was very reminiscent of a certain Greek tragedy, which... sure! And *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* which—

laughs

—I’ve also not seen, but apparently there are things there. Anyway, that’s basically what I’m trying to do. Connect two things that are absolutely not connected, but they are if you put in the work.

Well, no, I like it. I actually agree with you. Even the author admits he’s an unoriginal hack! He’s the ten-thousandth monkey regurgitating the work of, of... whoever you said before.

Well, as I said, in my art ‘philosophy’, no one is original these days, and I wonder how far back we’d have to go to find anything that is original. Probably nothing that we still have left over. We’ll probably never know.

Who knows? Sumeria... The stories from the Old Testament, we can trace back to the Sumerian, uh... You know, think of *Gilgamesh*.

Yes, and the, uh, the flood. That’s something that happens in many mythologies around the world, actually. But it is a very well-known story in Greek mythology as well.

The Sumerians invented everything. We got the wheel, the axel, the uh... It was all the Sumerians. Though, probably not—they just wrote it down. They were the first capable of writing it down. And, what, two-thousand years before that, we’d been gathering around the fire and, you know, the bard, the storyteller of the band concocts their legends and mythologies and epics.

Yeah, take for example Homer. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*. Most people seem to agree that it was originally an oral tradition and every bard put their own spin on it. Tried to learn the lines as much as they could, but, well... It would take about 24 hours to recite the whole thing, so that would be impressive, if they memorised it all. And the versions that we have today, those are just the ones that someone at some point deemed worthy of writing down, but the stories are probably centuries older than the first written versions that we know of.

I’ve heard that too. I also find it interesting because the Greeks, they... You know, you had the heyday of the Mycenaean empire and then you just have this dark age. And then you have the rise of the Classical Greeks, who look back across the dark age to a romanticised cultural memory of heightened days that had gone before, which by now are half cultural memory, half invention. And you know, I wonder how much survives down there and how much of it is sort of looking back on these fabled ‘old days,’ in which the Gods were present. Which... even the Battle of Troy itself comes from. Sort of this... two-hundred, three-hundred-year remnant.

Storytelling is probably one of the most interesting things humanity has ever come up with.

It defines us. No one else does it.