

**Title: The Centre: a search for sanctuary**

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**Year: 2016**

## Research Background

Since 2001, the Australian government has detained over 2000 people in off-shore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island. In 2016, Amnesty reported that the Australian Government had 'designed a system of deliberate abuse' to deter people seeking safety who arrive by boat (Amnesty International 2016). Tragic theatre can be used to prevent or modify behaviours that impede personal freedoms and cause irrevocable harm (Felski 2008: 3).

## Research Contribution

How can the Ancient Greek tragic tradition be adapted to expose contemporary experiences of asylum seekers in detention? The Centre reimagines Ancient Greek tragic characters as modern-day asylum seekers detained in an offshore detention centre. The construction of the play blended the fictional character constructs of the Ancient Greek characters with factual testimonials from contemporary asylum seekers. The blending of the Ancient and the modern poetic forms, and the manipulation of the tragic form to challenge the concept of fate, serve to expose the atrocity, inhumanity, and trauma of refugee detention facilities.

## Research Significance

This portfolio combines two public readings of the play text. The first reading was a staged presentation by The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble, the resident company of the University of Queensland. This reading was the result of a 3 week creative development process with the company. The second reading was professionally filmed and published online as part of the 2017 USQ Script Writing Symposium. The development for this reading was the result of dramaturgical support from Peter Matheson, supported by Playlab (Brisbane); and a creative development with actors from a refugee background, supported by a Sunshine Coast Council RADF grant. The final script has been accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed journal *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*.

## References:

Amnesty International, 2016, 'Report 2 August 2016', Amnesty International Website, accessed 5/ 6/ 2017,

<https://www.amnesty.org.au/australian-governments-secretive-system-of-deliberate-abuse-on-nauru/>

Felski, Rita (2008), *Rethinking Tragedy*, The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.