



Angus Cerini is a writer, performer and theatre-maker from Melbourne. In 2014 he won the Griffin Award for New Australian Playwriting for *The Bleeding Tree*. His work has been presented by companies including Sydney Theatre Company, Malthouse Theatre and Arena Theatre Company, and been awarded prizes including the Patrick White Playwrights' Award and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award. His self-produced work has toured locally and internationally.



Shari Sebbens, Airlie Dodds and Paula Arundell in Griffin Theatre Company's 2015 production. (Photo: Brett Boardman)

**THE
BLEEDING
TREE**

ANGUS CERINI



Currency Press, Sydney

CURRENCY PLAYS

First published in 2015

by Currency Press Pty Ltd,

PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia

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www.currency.com.au

in association with Griffin Theatre Company

This revised edition first published in 2017.

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Cataloguing-in-publication data for this title is available from the National Library of Australia website: www.nla.gov.au

Cover design by Studio Emma for Currency Press.

Typeset by Dean Nottle for Currency Press.

Printed by Finline Print and Copy Services, St Peters, NSW.

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Paula Arundell in Griffin Theatre Company's 2015 production. (Photo: Brett Boardman)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Bleeding Tree was developed with the support of Playwriting Australia and the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney as part of the National Script Workshops 2014. It was further developed with the support of the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria in 2015. Immense thanks to Amanda Macri, Alice Poujois-Enari and Playwriting Australia, Dr Laura Ginters (and students) at the University of Sydney and all of the artists involved with the developments: Jeanette Cronin, Susie Dee, Lucy Goleby, Aimee Horne, Jenni Medway, Tim Roseman, Kate Sherman, Iain Sinclair, Sarah Snook and Nicci Wilks. And to the entire creative team of the first production led by Lee Lewis, to all at Griffin, the Griffin Award and the sponsors that make this production possible—an especially enormous thank you.

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

It was enormously enjoyable writing *The Bleeding Tree*. To revel in the downfall of someone who preys on others and to envisage a community joining in on that destruction.

The first few words for this play came out very quickly, and simply as a few jotted pages responding to a call from my friend Susie Dee—who was working with Kate Sherman and Nicci Wilks on a creative development in Albury Wodonga at the time—exploring the idea of ‘the scars women carry’.

I had no idea those few pages would bug me sufficiently to become a full and actual play. I had no way of knowing that Playwriting Australia, Sydney University and Creative Victoria would all provide assistance in its development, or that this little play about women fighting back would win the Griffin Prize and that Lee Lewis would jump on board and guide it with such care and sensitivity to the stage. And in so doing introduce me to the charms and powers of that tiny but mighty powerhouse that is Griffin Theatre Company. And to that Griffin team of Renee, Verity, Steve, Edwina, Paula, Shari and Airlie making my heart almost burst with pride with each performance. And even less an idea that our production would have a return season at the Sydney Theatre Company. I mean they say from little things big things grow, but this is surely taking that to extremes!

Perhaps the enjoyment I’ve had writing *The Bleeding Tree* comes back to the fact that lots of small but powerful moments and individuals have combined to bring this play to life. And perhaps societal changes are likewise brought about the same way. And if we can do it with a piece of theatre, then there’s really no excuse why we can’t do it to eradicate crimes of violence against the vulnerable.

I hope you enjoy this experience of *The Bleeding Tree*.

A note on the script

In choosing to present this script without lines allocated to particular characters I am hoping the reader will engage with the work more as a poem, or a stream of consciousness. While a version of the script exists with character names allocated (and is used in production), I tend to think such practicalities get in the way of the thrust of the piece. Least of all by giving these characters names.

AC, 2017

The Bleeding Tree was first produced by Griffin Theatre Company at the SBW Stables Theatre, Sydney, on 31 July 2015, with the following cast:

Paula Arundell

Airlie Dodds

Shari Sebbens

Director, Lee Lewis

Designer, Renée Mulder

Lighting Designer, Verity Hampson

Composer, Steve Toulmin

CHARACTERS

Three women play a mother and her two daughters.

SETTING

The action occurs in a farmhouse some distance from a rural town.

I

- With a bullet hole through your neck, that numbskull of yours never looked so fine.
- Rest in peace Daddy numbskull.
- Ta ta Daddy ya sick bundle of shit.
- Bye bye Daddy you misery heap of shit.

- Lookit him there all on the floor.
- Still.
- Prick's not moving no more.
- How's them tricks you played now so sick and strange old man?
- Rest in peace how's that treating ya?
- Your stuffed-up river of broken skin and knitting bones.
- And with dead eyes staring back from the floor.
- Dead eyes and you inside them never coming back no more.
- Rest in peace Daddy numbskull.
- Eat sick in hell.

- Mum wipes her cheek absent like, looks at her flowers spilt on the floor.
- Mum.
- Looks up absent like.
- Mum?
- Yes girls.
- Where's Dad gone Mum?
- Gone the way that bird went gone girls.
- That dead one never come back that one?
- That's the one.
- Off back beyond the never-never is he Mum?

- Out back beyond the black stump is he Mum?
- Gone looking for trouble somewhere is he Mum?
- Couldn't tell ya girls, can only tell you what I know.
- What you know then Mum?
- Yeah what you know?
- Black panther seen sometimes in the hills, never prove it.
- Lurking in a lake maybe, like that?
- Yeah like that one maybe, like that one.

- The stink of him lies flat like a tack.
- Dead hands lying flat by your side, not much use now are they arse-hat?
- Loving like yours old man like a canker in the throat.
- Absently holds her chin.
- Holds a hand against the bit of blood.
- Holds her face firm, looks down at him.
- Where's he gone you say Mum?
- Couldn't tell you girls.

- Quiet.
- Creaking of the old dump he wouldn't do a scrap of fixing.
- His mud boots, coat and hat by the door.
- Petals caught in her hair.
- He's not getting up.
- Don't think so love.
- Shouldn't have tried it eh Mum?
- Don't think that neither love.

- Same old story, heard it a thousand times before, too many times to mention.
- Same old story, know it good, this time pushed too far.

- The screen door bangs, standing there, hulking like something you know to fear.
- Dinner, where's his dinner the man?
- Out the back ya sap of a man.
- Don't say it can hear inside your head.
- Knows anything he decides to know.
- You say what you say what you say?
- Said ya dinner's out back ya half-baked shred of a man.
- Bright stinking face sways what you say?
- Said ya dinner's out back where the pigs slop feed.
- Too much lip I take that face and wipe it off you got that?
- Yeah and we had a picnic we did Dad.
- Picnic without ya curse on a house.
- Picnic without your dad?
- Picnic out back cos it's her birthday.
- Birthday? Whose birthday?
- Looks dumbfounded.
- Stupid lump of shit.
- Not nobody birthday, a trap for you ya ugly stupid prick.
- Birthday is it eh girl day of the sun? Like when you was just a glimmer in me eye.
- Took her didn't say yes, just claimed her isn't that right ya son of a gun?
- Like a man pretending he's not a dog.
- Woman speak.
- Instructs again.
- Woman man say speak.
- Snarls again.
- Going the way of the dodo if can we help it.
- That's for sure.
- Try to smile at his sick head.

- The sight of it makes us all sick.
- We got cake out there for you too old prick.
- All made out with your name written in stink.
- Picnic old dad, out back.
- Picnic out back where the animals feed.
- Place for you in amongst their shit.
- Fit right in you useless drunk prick.
- Got the apeshit on him now, mottled angry and red.
- Would youse take a look at that.
- Ya don't scare us.
- Useless no-hoper you poor excuse for a dad.
- Lookit him you lot, what a useless fuck-head.
- Roars with rage.
- Come here ya whore.
- Whack, dodge the drunk prick.
- Nice one old loser, got any more?
- And bang just like that I gets him, buckles to his knees.
- Just like that like that to his knees.
- Buckle him down, whack with me trick.
- The old broom handles tied together like one solid thick stick.
- Spins with surprise looks at his legs.
- Collapsing beneath him, nice bloody trick!
- Losing the strength to hold him, his pegs they do fail, and she moves up close to conk him on the head.
- Whack!
- Down she blows.
- Whack to his legs.
- Easy he falls like lead.
- And whack to his head.
- Hate you we do.
- Hate you.

- And he's not sure what's happening.
- Drunk mind is racing.
- But like birthday girl with all her wishes come true she rises up, gun in her hand.
- He's flat on his face twelve-gauge on his neck.
- And slow so slow he turns.
- Turns right over.
- Stares right up.
- Standing there above him the three Lady Luck.
- And he sees our faces, hatred at him yuk.
- And he sees our sweet faces turned loathing and muck.
- And he sees the three ladies, woman and her girls.
- And the fear in his eyes spreads like piss on his legs.
- But no chance for pleading cos with that she pulls down and blows.
- And just like that.
- He's got no neck.
- And with that he's lying there dead.
- Shotgun still pressed against his neck.
- And with that he's stopped doing anything more.
- Thank Christ the prick is dead.
- Thank Christ the prick is dead.
- Girls, I think your father's dead.
- I knocked his knees out.
- I conked his head.
- I shot that house-clown in the neck.

- Silence.
- Whoa.
- Did him Mum.
- Lookit him spread.
- Geez, he's really really dead.