

Sally Rodwell Memorial Speech

By Ruby Brunton

The moon is set
And the Pleides
Night is half over
And I lie here alone

Those words from the great poet Sappho were some of mum's favourites. We used them in the last show, The Antigone Project, in which, among other things, Isaac played Socrates, Ksenija played Sappho, Jeff played King Creon, Peter played Sophocles, and mum played Haemon. Some more of Sappho's words she loved were:

It is clear now
Neither the honey
Nor the honeybee
Is to be mine... again.

Thank you for being here to celebrate the life and work of my mother, Sally Rodwell. I feel I have now lost the two greatest teachers and parents anyone could ask for. We were a very close family unit and we loved each other very much. My parents were amazing, for my first ten years, then I had a brief patch of about five years where they were the most embarrassing thing that could ever happen to me, then they went back to being amazing. Four years ago my father passed away and our unit fell apart. I stayed close to mum but the past four years have been hard, the hardest I have ever experienced. Dealing with my own sadness has been hard enough, but seeing my beautiful mother lose her sense of self, her belief in the good in the world, and most of all her feeling of hope, was at times almost too much to bear. I need to make it clear however that even during those dark times mum was still truly amazing. Over the past four years, despite her incredible sadness at losing dad, she achieved so many good things. She helped me to develop as a performer and writer when I decided to join her theatre company Roadworks. I worked with her closely on four shows and I was blown away by her ability to coax a performance out of you even when you were feeling completely run down and unable to contribute anything worthwhile to a

rehearsal or show. Mum also supported me through a BA in philosophy and Spanish, and her total belief in my academic abilities – even when I felt my performance was not up to scratch – was the reason I decided to continue with my studies and am at present inches away from completing an Honours degree in philosophy. I would like to acknowledge mum's role in my Honour's degree which was extremely important. She cooked for me, drove me to and from university and proof-read my essays during the extremely trying three weeks leading up to my final due-date. Mum and dad always treated me as an equal, for as long as I can remember I was included in their political debates and encouraged to develop my own opinions about issues that have a profound effect on our lives and the lives of those around us. I remember as early as primary school asking my classmates for their opinions on apartheid, nuclear weapons testing and genetic modification. I could feel the attraction of both dad's anti-authoritarian anarchism and mum's community centred socialism, and in all their discussions I could sense an intense compassion for their fellow human beings. This I believe has shaped my own interest in political theory which I hope to do my Master's in. Mum and I continued to engage each other in political discussion right up until last weekend when I can recall a very heated exchange about the capitalist system and anti-depressant medication. One of our main areas of disagreement was over Euthanasia, both our emotions running high, as mum attempted to articulate her pain and suffering and I tried to make her understand how much I love and need her. I know mum touched an enormous number of people, many of whom are here, so I would like to take this opportunity to share what I feel she would have wanted. Firstly, a discourse about depression needs to be opened up. She truly wanted people to understand that depression is not just a phase, and that conventional treatments do not work for everyone. She wanted people to really try to comprehend the monster that is depression and thankfully she even left some suggestions on what practical steps may be taken. This was part of her radio project with Peter Winter of Radio Free Aotearoa, 107.5 FM, who can share more about that with you if you would like. Secondly, the taboo surrounding euthanasia must be lifted. She always described her desire for release to me in terms of euthanasia, not suicide. She was extremely interested in the idea and read many books on it. I like to think in terms of prevention and so I want to look towards a world where conditions are such that people do not have to suffer extreme depression, and developing this idea is one of my projects for the next little while. At the same time it is important to try to understand the concept

of euthanasia and to become more comfortable talking about it, although, believe me I know, it is incredibly difficult to be philosophical when you have lost someone you love very deeply. Thirdly she would have wanted people to keep the romance alive. For me, this means remembering all the ways she and dad influenced us, continuing their legacy of spontaneous, passionate performance, remembering the poetry and theatre scripts and the joy that can come from helping, teaching, learning from and caring for others.

Mum felt my final research essays displayed an enormous amount of hope, and she recognised the importance of believing that another world is possible. Despite her extreme depression and the negative image it drew of her own future, she was surprisingly optimistic about the future of the world. Even when all my research had me believing the world was messed up beyond repair, she would assure me that in my lifetime I would see major changes in the way people think, the spaces they create for themselves to live in and their feelings of solidarity with one another. Part of my role, she said, was to read and research and write and above all to stimulate discussion among people about the state of the world today and how we might imagine the world of the future. I would like now to share some of my recent research with you on this exact subject. I have taken out the exact references for the sake of simplicity but I can provide you with them if you wish. I must also add that the research, ideas, thinking I wish to put forward are by no means perfect. I have been thinking a lot this year about there being a multiplicity of truths, subjective versus objective perceptions and above all opening myself up to the idea that there are no conclusions, at least not definitive ones.

Modernity was brought about by sweeping changes, changes that many believe separate it from previous systems. It was born out of rhetoric of progress, human rights and individual liberty. I believe that the focus on the individual, individual rights, the advancement of individual aims has led to an increasing number of people suffering from depression and the general sense of despair in the world. I am not advocating communism or any utopian ideal – indeed Noel is quick to remind me not to adopt political monikers (or political monkeyers as I call them). I want merely to point out that Modernity has a dark side, indeed there is too much suffering and avoidable pain in the world for Modernity to be viewed as the perfect system.

However the beauty of the world we live in, and the ways in which we are able to come together as human beings means that transformation is possible. Dreaming and imagining alternatives and possibly changing the world order is something we can do through the media of art, conversation, theatre, music, protest, increasing people's knowledge about the world. Mum and I discussed terms a lot, I felt the term "debate" was too confrontational, in the way that it pits two opponents against each other, the idea that the best argument should win meaning the other points made would be lost. I proposed to mum, and she agreed, that perhaps "dialogue" was a better term. Really a large part of our relationship was listening to each other and I feel that if any change is to be imagined or enacted in the world today listening must play a central role.

Listening to others and allowing individual voices to be heard is necessary to achieve Albert Camus' conditions of revolution, that solidarity plays a central role but must not be allowed to overcome the individual voice. Individuals should not be subsumed into a wider ideological goal, and criticism of the current system should always be welcomed. The Frankfurt School propose a concept of critique that is subjective, in which the individual recognises her role in the society she is critiquing. Both the Frankfurt School thinkers and Michel Foucault recognise that this is one of the most difficult things an individual can do, but if we do not turn the critical eye upon ourselves we become part of our own domination. We must be aware of our own role in the society we live in and how our actions will impact on those around us as well as the future generations. Mum was an ardent environmentalist who strongly believed those in the West had to accept a change to their lifestyle so that our precious resources are protected for our children and grandchildren. Here I am reminded of the Maori word *whenua*, which refers to both the land and the placenta. As the placenta provides for us in the womb, the land provides for us after we have left the womb. The land and the placenta both refer to our mother too, mother earth, or *papatuanuku*, and our biological mother. I spoke to Dale today after we had scattered the ashes, about how the process is like returning my mother back to our mother, and this is one of the reasons why I feel so strongly that we must protect the land that we inhabit.

Learning about the conceptual differences between languages and the belief systems of other people helps us to dream and imagine. If we open our ears and our minds to what may be difficult conceptually our potential to imagine will increase dramatically.

The more I read about non-Western societies, Indigenous societies, ancient societies and even the imagined societies of science fiction and feminist cyberpunk, the more I can imagine new, different, alternative ways of living and being in the world. I choose not to reject things that may be conceptually difficult for me at first and I believe mum and dad were the same. Dad's writing is full of references to other belief systems, other political and social structures, other ways of constructing your sense of self. Every time I read one of his poems or one of the Red Mole scripts I find a multiplicity of perceptions are presented and the ways of viewing the world expand in my mind. The writing and the performance invite a multiplicity of interpretations and allow room to move. Mum and I talked a lot about interpretation of art and we agreed it should be a feeling rather than a state of complete comprehension. The Frankfurt School believe that art not only reflects current social and political trends, it also represents the realm in which to explore alternatives to the present society we live in. Art can be seen as a way to subvert dominant societal structures, by being free of linguistic or logical constraints art is able to invent and employ new means of communication and argument. Mum and dad created new linguistic structures both in their poetry and performance. They encouraged me to think less literally and to free my thoughts from traditional linguistic confines. Art in its pure form is both necessary and useful to human life, according to Theodor Adorno. Art was certainly both necessary and useful to my parent's lives and I feel that in order to keep the romance alive we must create art or let ourselves be influenced by art that is both necessary and useful to all our lives.

One of my favourite poems to perform is called 'Drowning', it was written by dad for a show called *Darkness Not Asleep*, and was originally performed by Ksenija. But we were constantly finding ways to rejuvenate the text and it was a constant and exciting challenge to find new ways of performing the pieces. Mum and I discovered together a completely different way of performing this poem and I would like to finish by sharing it with you now.

Watch over you, my friend. Watch over me.

I have been there. I have been as far away. As anyone can go.

I left everything behind. And set out on a boat.

Love came into my arms. In the middle of the stormy sea.

The waves came up around me. I was floating on the ocean.

Trying to get to shore. But something drags me back.

Something has a hold on me. It could be love.

I think it's something I don't know. I run through the ship. As it sinks into the water.

Save me, save me, save me.

I want more than this

I want to live, I want to live a little bit

I want to live. I thought everything would be alright

I believe in happiness. I believe in a place

The ship goes down. Into an icy sea.

Taking me, taking me.

Something has a hold on me.

I don't think it's love.

It's something I don't know. Something has a hold on me.

The ship goes down. Into an icy sea

Taking me, taking me.

Something has a hold on me.

I don't think it's love.

It's something I don't know. Something has a hold on me.

The ship goes down. Into an icy sea

The ship goes down. Beneath a full moon. The moon is yellow.