

PANIC

**A ONE-HANDER BY
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About the Play

PANIC features the character Thando Molepo, a young man in his late twenties, facing and attempting to deal with a number of internal, domestic, relational and macro conflicts, all of them related in some way, or having some bearing on each other. These conflicts range from dynamics within his family and expectations of his father that he will join the family business to his growing awareness of climate change and how the family business relates to, and profits from it. The play title refers to the intense moral and intellectual battles that he faces in dealing with the contradictions posed by the micro-expectations of him domestically on the one hand, and his global awareness on the other. His family, and happenings within his family, mirror or serve as a metaphor for the exploitation of, and conflicts within the world.

The Headlines breaking the piece up into seven days follows the biblical story of the creation of the world in six days after which God rested on the seventh day. Thando tells his story – which is essentially about the destruction of the world, and his world/s – in a metaphorical seven days.

The piece starts with the Third Day, then reverts to the First and Second Days, with a brief repeat of elements of the Third Day before proceeding to the final four days, each of them following a particular theme.

This is a piece of “Word Art”; it is less a play than a poetic monologue reflecting the personal and the political and the attendant conflicts, particularly as they relate to climate change.

However, the piece also seeks to point to the links between climate changes, exploitation of mineral resources, wars and armed conflicts, the abuse of human rights and inequality within the world.

Consideration should be given to the use of images on screen to supplement or comment on the words being performed.

There should also be consideration of the use of small props for particular scenes with the actor manipulating these to illustrate/texture particular parts e.g. the use of a small aeroplane, a parachute, etc.

Banner headline on screen:

ON THE THIRD DAY....

Lights come up on Thando, sleeping. He sits up with a jerk, breathing fast, looks around him as if unsure of where he is. He has had a nightmare.

Thando

To sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream
Ay, there's the rub
For dreams may preface nightmares
And nightmares invade once-peaceful sleep
With dreams of waves
Of wetsuits
Surf

(faster, angrier)

Ruptured by an arrogant jetski
Riding a tsunami oil spill
Mitt Romney at the helm
With a smile as broad as a hundred dollar bill
(shielding his eyes)
His white teeth glistening against the black gold backdrop
Laughing his way to hell
Our hell

Whales, sharks, dolphins, penguins, surfers
Colliding in mutual terror on the
Height of a terrorist wave
That rides all the way to the Karoo
Where rig-drilled oil
Meets fracking oil

Reflectively

Even the Karoo has its Shell-by date

(Sits or stands more upright, rubs his eyes, then looks to see if he's seeing things)

Oh my God!
Polar bears!
In the Karoo!

The tipping point of an iceberg
An upside-down world
Unleashed by our
Now "normal" world

Where once were forests
Deserts grow

Where once bloomed flowers
A cactus rules

He checks his phone.

No message from Lucy

Three-forty-seven a.m. in Cape Town.
Nine-forty-seven p.m. in New York.
Eleven-forty-seven a.m. in Sydney

Time moves on
Five minutes to midnight

FX: Tick tock of a clock

(He yawns)
To sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream

He counts
One polar bear
Two polar bears
Three polar bears

Begins to fade.
He falls asleep and the lights fade as the Tracy Chapman song "Rape of the World" plays in, with the lyrics on screen. The tick tock stops when the song starts.

Four polar bears
Five polar...
Six....

The song plays - with lyrics projected onto a screen – up to the following:

*Mother of us all
Place of our birth
How can we stand aside
And watch the rape of the world
This is the beginning of the end
This is the most heinous of crimes
This the deadliest of sins
The greatest violation of all time
Mother of us all
Place of our birth
We all are witness
To the rape of the world*

Thando lies peacefully. Song fades out. Alarm goes off on phone.

Thando sits up. He stretches. He breathes in deeply.

Air
Fresh
Deep breath
The smell of the sea

Still unlittered by
Fertiliser fumes
Fossil fuels
Factory faeces

Ah, to bottle morning air
For feasting upon later in the day

(ironically) Now *there's* a World Bank idea!

Checks phone
No Lucy
No sms
No email
No what's app
No bbm
No call
No Lucy

reflectively
Because I said I don't want kids?

Alarm goes off again
Time to start the day

back to audience, over his shoulder
Number one
Half-flush
Two litres of water to escort my 200 mils!

faces audience, squats
Number two
as if being asked "beef or chicken?"
One ply or two?
stands
Twenty-seven thousand trees
Slaughtered daily
Three or four wipes to clean our arses

One bum rap for Mother Earth

FX: Toilet flushes

(takes out a toothbrush, brushes his teeth, stops, then pulls out the bristles – or makes as if he’s doing so, throwing each one over alternate shoulders)

Lucy

pulls out first bristle, throws it over left shoulder

She loves me

pulls out second bristle, throws it over right shoulder

She loves me not

proceeds as above, with one shoulder being “loves me” and the other being “not”

She loves me not

She loves me

She loves me

She loves me

She loves me not

sighs deeply, throws the brush over behind him, over his head

There are plenty of fish in the sea

Beat, suddenly has a thought

Except...Bluefin tuna

And cod

And swordfish

Trawlers trawling

Nets netting

Dredges dredging

To think

The seas could be fishless

In my lifetime

Ghost oceans

So much water

So much...desert

Alarm sounds

Time to eat

Breakfast

The most important meal of the day

Cereal;

Recyclable packaging

Check

Milk:

Plastic bottle?

Cereal killer!

Free range eggs: check.

Fair trade coffee: check

Toaster: not made by 12-year-olds in a Vietnamese sweat shop

Check

Wholegrain bread

No butter

No fat
No fizzy drinks
No nicotine
No drugs
Alcohol...
In moderation

Look after the body
And the body will look after you

Alarm sounds
Time for exercise

He puts in earphones (not linked to anything) and performs a gym routine to loud gym music, the whole routine performed as close to a dance as possible, and no longer than 2 minutes in total.

*He begins with stretches.
Runs on a treadmill
He does more stretches in anticipation of weight training
He does a series of weights
Arms, Chest, Shoulders
He does press ups and sit ups
He finishes with more stretches*

Gym music stops.

Take care of your body
And your body will take care of you.

Alarm sounds
Time to shower
Left for hot, right for cold
Water running
Clean water washing
Water warming
Water cooling
Water flushing
The miracle of H₂O

The curse of CO₂
Melting glaciers
Arctic ice thawing
Rising sea-water
Flooding coasts
Salting freshwater
Unpeople-ing towns
Famining farms
Refugee-ing thousands

One tap, many families

Looks around him and counts

Twelve taps, just for me?

I hung up my clubs

The watered, green oases of golf courses

Stand accused by the barren surrounds

What would Father say?

Beat

(Dismissively) I know what he'd say!

Alarm sounds

Put-out-rubbish day

The council bin rolls out on two wheels to the pavement outside

Within seconds the trolleys arrive

Assumes racing commentator voice

Homeless Hamilton backed by team Pick 'n Pay

Shorty Schumacher driving a 2007 vintage Checkers trolley

Varicose Vettel steering his three-wheel Shoprite drive

Normal voice

My rubbish bin the winning post

Scavenging for food

Sale-able cardboard

Bottles

Broken appliances

From which to eke out their daily miserable existence

Not unlike poor countries

Buzzing like flies around dog turds

Importing the waste of industrialised countries

Their nuclear and electronic rubbish dumped

In the name of free trade

The rich want the benefits but not the fallout

Not in our backyard in

America, Europe, Canada

So ship it to Somalia

Dump it in Djibouti

Trade it with Togo

Exporting radiation

Contaminating water supplies

Burying toxic metals in earth

Killing agriculture

Polluting breath

Sickening bodies

Willing, ignorant buyer
Very willing, cynical seller
Garbage imperialism

Alarm sounds

Time to dress
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
Who's the fairest of us all?

Wardrobe! Speak to me!
T-shirt? Yes!
100% cotton.
Planted by which woman's hands?
Harvested by what child's fingers?
Transformed by which underpaid worker
In Bangladesh?
100% cotton
1000% profit

And which pair of jeans?
Owned and branded in the North
Cut and stitched in the East
Shipped and sold in the south
With profits repatriated to the West

And what of the shoes?
Where does the leather come from?
Who laced the laces?
Who sold the soles?
Who heals the heel-maker?

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
Who dresses the fairest of us all?

Alarm sounds

Time to face the morning traffic
What shall it be?
The always-late train?
Thanks to copper-wire thieves who meet the metal-hunger of the east
The polluting bus?
The taxing taxi?
The weaving Harley?
Or will it be one-person, one vehicle
All paying our greenhouse tolls

I am an African
I owe my being to beef not broccoli
To lamb not lentils

To steak not spaghetti
I hate gays
I oppress women
I vote for dictators
I cannot be a vegetarian
Right?

Herds and herds of cattle
Farting greenhouse gas
To feed my dietary needs

Whose view of the world shall I take in today
From my satellite news bouquet
Al Jazeera
Russia Today
CNN
Chinese TV
BBC
Indian television

The African Channel noticed by its absence

Where shall I fill my tank
Oil-spill BP
Friggin' fracking Shell
SASOL
South Africa's second biggest emitter of greenhouse gases?

After Eskom
Producing 45% of South Africa's CO₂
Turn off the pool pump
Switch off the cylinder
Put off the lights
Shed a load
But not an Eskom boss bonus
Shed a load
But not an Eskom boss
Shed a load
But not Eskom

And so the day passes
Posing constant globalised challenges
To individual consciences
What to eat
What to drink
What to wear
How to spend
Where to play
How to ride
What to read

What to watch
That does not compromise someone
Somewhere
Either now
Or in the future

And so closes the day
At five minutes to midnight

Lighting change, music interlude. THE FIRST DAY comes up on the screen.

THE FIRST DAY

This was the day
The day we'd been waiting for
The day we thought would never come
This was miracle day
A day of rainbows
Anthems
Flags
A feel-good day
The-world-is-our-oyster day
A day where only the sky was the limit

Ah, but your land, this land, our land is beautiful!
Having been forty years in the wilderness
And then forty more
Till seven times forty had passed

The climate changed
The cold war front dissipated
The sun began to shine
A discontented winter gave way to a tentative spring
Storms of protest receded
Clouds grew silver linings
A flood of goodwill erupted
The rainbow made its first appearance
And bowed

The land of promise
Was upon us
We had the keys to the doors
Marked Milk, marked Honey

We walked down the street of hope
We danced along the highway of dreams
We crossed the bridge over River Misery
And unfurled our banners in Freedom Square

It was a day of noble speeches

When strangers became friends
Old people lost twenty years
And the young were relieved of their parents' past

Fear was banished
Inferiority tortured till it confessed to equality
Hate speech imprisoned for life
Degrading laws destroyed
With racism detained indefinitely

As Despair went into exile
We welcomed returning Laughter
Hopelessness was censored
And once-suppressed Expectation sang freely from the people's lips

Vision was redeployed
The peoples' interests promoted to senior positions

Desire was given licence

From this day forth
It was *our* turn to eat

Option: photos of family on screen
And so it was in the beginning
In the beginning was the father
His first son
And the second born
Me
And the mother of my father's sons

Beat
Someday, my son, all this will be yours

Beat
My father
Who art in business
Hallowed be his name
For he was in The Struggle
Which he joined
So that we would not be poor

The poor shall always be with us
But we will not always be with them

Option: flashing slides of tall skyscrapers
Someday, my son, all this will be yours
As he whisked me past twenty-two floors
The company
The office

The staff
The view

The connections
The status
The wealth
Our due

Now that the kingdom had come

Father had sowed the Struggle
And we were reaping our whirlwind inheritance

*Option: recites the below refrains and dances a waltz
This is performed with panache and a smile*

We moved to leafy suburbs
We built four metre walls
We ate at sushi restaurants
And shopped in flashy malls

We schooled with ministers' sons
We drove in cabinet cars
We braai'ed at the President's house
And hung with political stars

We climbed the Eiffel Tower
And played in Disneyland
We ski'ed in Switz'land snow
And danced to Ron Scott bands

We featured in society pages
Got invites to VIP (*pronounced as VIP rather than V.I.P.*) events
Were on first-name terms with Bono
Spoke English with no accents

My father, the struggle hero
And me, his born-free clone
My father gives to charity
And charity begins...at home

I drive a G.T.I.
I also have a bike
A Harley with mag wheels
A wardrobe that girls like

Different rhythm
So on Mondays there's Sue
On Tuesdays it's two
Tebogo and Candice
Wednesday is boys-will-be-boys-night

Getting up to all kinds of shite
Thursday's back on the wagon with Sharon
Friday is sowing oats with wild Lerato
Saturday is sports day
Whoever-you-can-pick-up day
And Sunday
Sunday is a day of the rest
Karabo
Kate
Keisha
Kgomotso
Kim...

Living the dream

So...I swim
I'm no Chad le Clos
No Van der Berg Cameron
No Roeland Schoeman
But
Gives impressions of various surfing tricks
Can they barrel and boost
Can they fade and flare
Can they gouge and gash
And acid drop
Barrel roll
Cutback
Drop
Tube

Beat, with a touch of arrogance...
Just saying...

In slow motion
I feel like a gladiator
Putting on that wet suit
The eyes of the people on me
As I strut into the wide mouth of the dragon
Spewing white foam at me
My trusted steed under my arm
Ignoring the cold spit of the dragon's mouth
Biting my ankles
I ride towards its snorting nostrils
Her eyes mocking
She spits a one, two metre wave at me
I duck, I dive and still I ride
Unscathed
Heading to where her real snorters rise

And then, it leaps, right up at me

I turn, my steady steed, rocks and rolls
And runs in fear away from me
The white foam swallowing me

Round one to the beast

And so it goes
Round after round after round
The ultra-ultra-heavyweight in the blue corner
Insignificant me in the red corner
Until I stand aloft on my battered steed
In temporary conquest of the watery beast
My new love

And now the blue sky beckons
One thousand metres
Two thousand metres
Three thousand metres

The unseen monster
Striking fear
How terrible is the visage of...Nothing
Hands sweating
Head spinning
Mouth drying
Eyes wat'ring

And then
Jump
Into the clutches of...Nothing
Gravity calls
Free falls
Heart pounds

Until
Parachute soars

In slow motion
Gently floating
Distant hills make their slow approach
Unfocused shapes begin to clarify themselves
Vast expanses of open space narrow their ambition
Boxes refine into houses
Pencil thin lines morph into highways
Herds of specks
Become herds of sheep

As Mother Earth welcomes my trembling knees
I kiss the ground

And then
Again
One thousand metres
Two thousand metres
Three thousand metres
Jump

And again
Again
And again
Until the Nothing Monster holds no fear

And I can add the Sky to my polygamous harem

I'd never been before
But since that first day
That anthem, flag day
We made our pilgrimage to tame The Wild
Elephants evaded us
Leopards chose new hiding spots
Even the jungle kings shied away

The oil baron and me
Rifles at the ready
Silent assassins
Hunting
Shooting
Killing
The thrill of man against beast
And man winning
Again
Again
And again!

Stuffed trophies adorn passage walls
An avenue of horns

Some day, my son, all this will be yours

His son, the second born
Not the first born son
Who had busied himself with the Greens
"White stuff"
That's what my Father said
"Green stuff is white stuff"

But I too loved the greens
And so did Father
The greens and fairways and links and tees

We learned new languages
On that first day
Of bunkers and hazards
Of drives and putts
Of woods and irons
Of swings and strokes
And nineteenth holes

Where we learned and practised another language
The language of Merlot and Sauvignon
Chardonnay and Riesling
Pinot Noir and Cabernet
The pairing of wine with fish
What wine to marry with meat
Even which wines would date a pizza
We learned of cellars and markets

Indeed, we did a crash course in market language
With stocks and shares
With bonds and banks
With risks and returns
With dividends
Investments
Yields

We listened to Verdi, Mozart, Beethoven
We view Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Picasso
We read Hemingway, Shakespeare and Tolstoy
Even Brink, Gordimer, Coetzee
We watch movies from Iran
Series from HBO
National Geographic documentaries

And soon we were able to hold our own
No longer country hicks
We could mix with the rich
Eat with the famous
Talk with the studied
Patronise those who once lorded over us
Giving as good we got with the pretentious

Speaking our foreign languages
We had arrived

Come run with me along the beach
With my two Labradors
Money and Sex
Man's best friends
The wet, white sand like streets of gold
Rainbow people stopping to greet

Meet other rainbow dog people

Walk with me along the mountain paths
The alien trees donating their shade
In exchange for asylum
Good morning, good afternoon, good evening
City strangers
Unfriendly neighbours
Now common citizens of Country Mountain
With our dogs as passports

All this, my son, will be yours one day.

This is the day
The First Day
The day when it all began
And for this day we give thanks

Our dreams once crucified
Now resurrected

So we worship at the altar of Aphrodite
Offering sacrifices of virgins and lesser virgins
We pray to Dionysus
So that Chardonnay and Merlot may long be our companions
We genuflect to Athena
To grant us wisdom at each art auction
We kneel before Apollo
So that this day may last forever

We walk in the light of flashing cameras
On the narrow path of red carpets

This is the day
The First Day
The day when it all began
The first day of our new world
And for this day we give thanks

And so it comes to a close
With a late-setting sun
Sex-on-the-beach
And other cocktails
With a starter of Hope
A main of Fulfilment
And Satiation dessert

With the promise of a new day
And a new day after that
To revel in our inheritance

To build on it afresh
For our children
And for theirs

This is the Day
The first Day
Of many more

Thank you Father.

Music interlude. Music to indicate a change of mood. Lighting change.

On screen: ON THE SECOND DAY

On this day
The snake enters the garden
Mortality rears its grim reaper head
The electric fence around Paradise is breached

Mother is struck by a stroke
I.C.U. admits she's there
She does not move
She does not hear
She does not see

She who gave me life now lives
At the end of a drip
She who sustained family life
Is now sustained by pipes
She who nurtured
Nursed and nourished
Is now supported by machines

Nature has deserted her
Science has staged a hollow coup

Some said it was the Struggle
Now finally taking its human toll
But this couldn't be
For the Struggle was noble

Some whispered it was her husband's abuse
Now finally her wearing her down
But this couldn't be
For her husband was a hero of the people

Some thought she had difficulty with Paradise
Unable to live there while millions
Could only find shade in its shadow

Some thought her brain broke
After her heart broke
When her family broke

There is nothing more that we can do
The man in the white coat hummed
Nothing more can be done
Everything that can be done
That could be done
Has been done

Now look at her
She's nearly done

All that stands between her and eternal separation
Is a decision
It's your decision, Father says
You say when, he indulges
Money is no consideration

Someday, my son
All this will be yours

I decide, she *will* live
There *will* be a miracle
She will wake
She will walk
She *will* be my mother again!

I hope against history
I deny and mock science
I choose the future I wish to believe
For with her gone
Paradise will be halved

Three-quarters Paradise now hangs by a pipe
Three-quarters since my brother
My father's elder son
My mother's first-born
Jumped

Not from three thousand
Two thousand
One thousand metres
With a parachute
But from the twenty-second floor office
Of his Father, the struggle hero

His generous spirit escaping
As his warm body thuds into cold tarmac

His blood donated to parked cars
His deboned body just a crumpled heap
Of wasted principles
The ultimate protest against his struggle hero father
Now turned oil baron
Sourcing oil from wherever he could
Raiding
Stockpiling
Busting sanctions
To secure the bottomless energy needs of
State departments
Public enterprises
Parastatals

To oil political clichés
To grow the economy
To boost development
To stabilise government
To defend the Constitution
To sustain national security

Someday, my son, all this will be yours
For *you* understand
You are like me

Your brother
Let's just say
Your brother
Is more like your mother
Sensitive

And besides
He's not very good with figures

My brother?
Not good with figures?
He who knew that one billion people live in poverty
That 50% of Africans live on one dollar, twenty five per day
That one in seven humans go to bed hungry at night
That nine million children die every year of hunger-related causes
That 900 million people can't access to clean water
That 37% of the world's population don't have toilets
That we spend billions each day on weapons
That South Africa is the thirtieth driest country in the world
That CO₂ emissions are heating the earth
That temperatures are rising
Sea levels are rising
Deserts are rising

And so, he jumped!

Was it despair?
Was it anger?
Was it hopelessness?

Did he jump
Or was he pushed?

What shall I rail against?
Who shall I blame?
Where shall I vent my anger?
Who is responsible for the loss
Of my brotherly flesh and blood?

Is it the greed of the rich
The lust of the few
The system that devours on their behalf?

Shall I blame knowledge?
Was it knowledge that made him do it?
Is it better to live in ignorance
With the burden of knowledge too great to bear?

Or what of his father
Shall I blame the oil baron
Whose source of wealth pumps noxious gases into the atmosphere
Wreaking havoc
Who dismissed his own son saying
“Green issues are white concerns”
“We are committed to development”
“Development needs energy, coal, oil”
“People who bleat on about climate change want to keep us underdeveloped”
The voice of the struggle hero booming
To the applause of ignorance and denial

I try to suppress my anger at my prodigal brother
Why?
How dare you?
Your life is not yours to take!
Those you defend, the poor, *they* persevere
Daily just to live
And you, you give up your life
Throw it away
Is this not the ultimate sign of privilege?

But what of me?
Am I to blame
For not taking him seriously
For preferring the fleshpots of Paradise
For standing by quietly while the oil baron berated him

Rest in peace, prodigal brother
Rest in peace
At least until they find oil beneath your resting place
Or a shopping mall decides you have to move

Music interlude

As I walk from my brother's resting place
I see other grieving families
Rows and rows of open graves
Like the mouths of greedy goldfish
Waiting to be fed

I cannot help but see the mounds of hundreds
Of thousands of paupers' graves
I shield my eyes
But the tombstones bemoaning the premature fate of
Those who lie beneath
Shout at me!

Here lie children
Their short lives aborted by diarrhoea and cholera
Trojan horses in sick water
Here, forever rest mothers who perished even as they gave life
Graves welcome young fathers, their lungs filled with toxic gases
Old people succumb to heat
Malaria spreads its deadly wings to virgin places
Flash floods flush out crops and life
Hunger and Malnutrition march alongside the poor singing
Dust to dust
Ashes to ashes

I hear the rumblings of bulldozers
Front-end loaders
Chain saws
Cutting down trees
Clearing more and more land
Not for houses or new settlements or even new altars to the gods of consumerism
But for more and more graves

This was not
Is not supposed to be
This is Paradise!

I am afraid to visit Mother
For I shall need walk down hospital corridors flanked by
Guards of dishonour
Disease
Disability

Disadvantage
Previous
Current
Future!

Good evening, my name is Thando Molepo
And I'm a recovering griever
I wept for a brother who took his own life
He has gone too soon

He left no note and yet he spoke
We are doing it
We humans
We are committing suicide

Grieve not for him
Grieve rather for ourselves
And for what we are doing to ourselves
And to those who will come after us
And after them
And for those who may not come after them

It is not only the climate
Or development
Or human rights
Or democracy
Or freedoms
Or equity
It's about all of these
And more
At the same time
That's what he said
That's what the elder son of Father and Mother said

Dear Father, I write
I am your son
But I am also the son of my mother
And the brother of your once-elder son
The sensitive ones

I cannot be what you want me to be
Not anymore
I have heard my dead brother
I have listened to my dying mother
I need to turn around

But the Oil Baron cannot
Does not hear me

My Father, the struggle hero

Finds a new lover
Life goes on

Done with Earth
He now move on to Mars

Falling in love
I don't know what that is
Unless it's like walking on a dog turd
Not expecting it
Not seeing it coming
But then it happens
And the smell lingers

And so it was with Lucy and me
Walking our dogs
Our dogs met on the mountain
We stepped back
I trod on a dog turd
And fell in love with Lucy
She said she fell in love with me

Was it a rebound
Was it my need
Was it that Paradise was closing down
Whatever it was
It felt...good.

And so ends the second day
Robbed of a brother
A mother mugged
But gifted the parole of love
Lucy and I
She surrounded by dogs
Me surrounded by the books of my mother's first son
Lapping up the knowledge therein

*Music. Lighting change. **THE THIRD DAY***

Some of the Third Day which opened the play is repeated.

To sleep, to sleep, perchance to dream
Ay, there's the rub
For dreams may preface nightmares
And nightmares invade once-peaceful sleep
With dreams of waves
Of wetsuits
Surf

He checks his phone.

No message from Lucy

Three-forty-seven a.m. in Cape Town.
Nine-forty-seven p.m. in New York.
Eleven-forty-seven a.m. in Sydney

Time moves on
Five minutes to midnight

FX: Tick tock of a clock

Air
Fresh
Deep breath
The smell of the sea

Checks phone
No Lucy
No sms
No email
No what's app
No bbm
No call
No Lucy

reflectively
Because I said I don't want kids?

There are plenty of fish in the sea.

Trawlers trawling
Nets netting
Dredges dredging

Free range eggs: check.
Fair trade coffee: check
Toaster: not made by 12-year-olds in a Vietnamese sweat shop
Check

The miracle of H₂O
The curse of CO₂
Melting glaciers
Arctic ice thawing
Rising sea-water
Flooding coasts
Salting freshwater
Unpeople-ing towns
Famining farms
Refugee-ing thousands

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
Who dresses the fairest of us all?

I am an African
I owe my being to beef not broccoli
To lamb not lentils
To steak not spaghetti

And so the day passes
Posing constant globalised challenges
To individual consciences

Someday, my son, all this will be yours
So he keeps telling me
But not at what cost

I decide
Once and for all
I cannot be my Father's son
I decide
To relinquish the title
Oil Baron Junior

Father shakes his head
Smiles his wry smile
I know what you're feeling, he soothes
Don't be rash
Don't make decisions with your heart
His business-speak irritates

Take some time
Take this money
Travel
See the world
Sow your wild oats
And then
Speak to me

I'll be away for a while
In Angola
Equatorial Guinea
The DRC
When I'm back
Give me your final answer

My Father, the struggle hero
Gives me money
Lots of it

It feels dirty
Like the noxious gases
Like the polluted sky
Like the carbon-filled breath of those who live next to refineries

The day closes
No Lucy
She needs her space
At five minutes to midnight
I shower

Music. Lighting change. On screen:

AND ON THE FOURTH DAY

On screen, pictures/video of warzones and conflicts all over the world

I wake to the sound of guns
The alarm is a cluster of bombs
There are wars
And rumours of war
While unheralded conflicts rage below the headlines

I hear the gunfire in my cellphone
The canons in my MP3 Player
Did my laptop support a bazooka today

I've come to the DRC
Unknown to the oil baron
To see for myself where he works
What he does
How he prints money

The Democratic Republic of Congo
The once-playground of Belgian kings
And African dictators

In the womb of Mother Africa
Where there are no embedded journalists
No television cameras

So you won't see the graves where lie five million people
And counting
These are the expendables
Once-upon-a-time slaves
Now collateral statistics in a world war for
Tin
Tungsten
Timber
Not three thousand Americans

Not yet six million Jews
Not in Europe's backyard
But it is from here
That Europe derives wealth
That America recovers its riches
That China's economy grows
That South African companies grow fat

Militia
Security companies
Child soldiers
Government troops
Warlords
Conscripted to battle for mines
Hired guns to protect mines
No attempt to win hearts and minds

For here the sword is mighty
And only the dollar is mightier

Our appetite for electronic goods feeding the war
Mining conflict
So that we can have cellphones
Laptops
M23 gives us
MP3 players

I hear the screams
I see the tears
I taste the pain

Of women
Teenagers
Children

Raped

Hundreds
Thousands
Tens of thousands

Violated

With their families forced to watch
As first marauding militia
Then marauding troops
The marauding militia
Then marauding troops intimidate village after village again and again

Where forced entry is not enough

But they must pour melted rubber
Or chemicals
Into the genitals of their already-shamed victims
Infecting them forever

Raped by Tin
Gang-raped by Coltan
Mass-raped by Tungsten
These daughters
Sisters
Mothers of Africa

Tell the story of Mother Earth
Of her forceful rape
While we stand by and watch

See her stripped naked
Acres and acres of forests being slaughtered in
Madagascar
Liberia
Cameroon
Ghana
Trees shipped off like slaves to feed the glutton factories of the east

Made in China
By African timber
Where once trod Europe's hungry feet
China's footprints now loom large

Denuded of forests
Mother Earth's temperature rises

And still with feverish fervour
We drill deep into her bowels
On land
In the oceans
Exposing her intestines
Pursuing our insatiable desire for gold
Black gold
Wider
Deeper
Further
Till she vomits barrels and barrels of crude dollars

Angola
Equatorial Guinea
Nigeria
Gabon
Congo

All vomiting oil
While their people bleed

Iraq
Afghanistan
Libya
Syria
Sudan
Devastated
For oil

We take with guns
We defend with tanks
We keep with missiles
We protect with drones

To get it
To keep it
To make sure it flows
More and more arms are made
More and more money is spent on death
More and more sophisticated weapons of mass destruction create jobs

And Mother Earth continues to be violated
Her legs ripped apart
Testing, testing
Nuclear missiles penetrate deep into her
Ejaculating poisonous radiation that will forever stain her
Blemish her soil
Kill her crops

The ecology of life for a few
Fed by the ecology of death of many

What wars yet await us?
After the wars for diamonds to adorn the rich?
Wars for water?
Wars for food?

My heart beats faster
My head spins
My neck grows stiff
My hands are bleeding
My cock hurts
My eyes are tearing
My brow sweats

I look into the dull eyes of
These women
Teenagers

Children
And I see reflected across my forehead
Thief!
Rapist!
Warlord!
Murderer!

I run this way
I run that way
I hide

And all the time
I am stalked
By hollow
Dull eyes
Accusing me

Me?
What have I done?
What have I *not* done?

I run
I know not where
I run
Out of breath
And still I run
Panic leads me
Panic inhabits me
Panic drives me
Panic attacks me
My mind
My heart
My soul
My being
Surrounded

Help!
My brother has dead ears.
Help!
My mother does not move
Help!
My father is too busy
Help!
Lucy!
Help!

Music interlude. Lighting change. Screen:

THEN ON THE FIFTH DAY

Mother Earth too long abused
Her temperature rising
Her intestines laid bare in the aftermath of her
Systematic rape
Fights back
Visiting all manner of plagues
Upon those whom she would rather nurture

She fire rages across vast continents

She sends her furies

Tsunamis drown whole towns
Swallow huge cities
Flash floods displace millions
Destroying crops and livestock
Cyclones and their sister hurricane winds
Rip up houses, buildings, bridges
She wreaks avalanches
Commands land to slip and slide away

And then she holds back
With unbearable heat
Causing deserts and famine

Before sending in her drones
Mosquitoes
Tsetse flies
Ticks
Sand flies

To wreak their havoc of diseases

And all the time it is the poor
The vulnerable
Who suffer most

I needs must make my peace with Mother
It is enough

Steeled by remorse
Spurred by guilt
I make my way to Father's office

Someday, my son, all this shall be yours

No more, Father
I write
I do not

I cannot
I will not
Be what you want me to be
From this day forth
From this day forth
From this day forth

The letter is in my hand
My Father is not in his office
He's striking a new deal in New Guinea
He's extending an old deal in the DRC
He's exploring a future deal in Angola

I peer through the window
Of the twenty second floor

My brother beckons from below
He looks so peaceful
He smiles
Opens wide his arms
He'll catch me
He says
I haltingly step on the balcony

I look up and see the amazing views
Someday, all this will be yours my son
I look below and see my brother's wistful smile
I look behind but cannot see beyond the walls
And what they hide
The drudge
The misery
The despair

What to do
To sit behind my father's desk?
To jump and put my arm around my brother's shoulders?
To shut my eyes and sit upon my hands?

It is then that Lucy calls

I leave still clutching my "Dear Father" missive.

Music and lighting change. Screen:

THE SIXTH DAY

On the sixth day
On this day
Humankind seeks to make peace with Mother Earth
But it is a hollow peace

For even as they talk
Write Conventions
Construct Protocols
Define Agreements
Develop Memorandums of Understanding
In mangled legalese

The drilling continues
The disembowelment persists
The rape is sustained

At an ever-increasing pace.

As they talked
And made their contribution to hot air rising
Global emissions in air-conditioned rooms
Travelling hundreds of thousands of miles
In planes
Heating the atmosphere
With their CO₂
Achieving little other than an agreement on the date for the next meeting
At which to talk hot air
Burn more fuel
Decide on another meeting

For the Conference of Parties
Or the parties at conferences
Gorging
Gluttoning
Gratifying themselves on
Seafood
Meat
Poultry
The best wine
Swine!

Congratulating themselves on
Postponing what must be done
To allow the rape to continue

Assumes elitist accent
What's past is past
We must all do our bit
Now that we have developed
We hope that the developing world will learn from our mistakes
And cut down on their use of fossil fuels
Etcetera
Etcetera
Etcetera

Now that the rich have emitted, the poor should not
Now that the rich have permanent seats at the UN, the poor should not
Now that the rich have nuclear weapons, the poor should not

This is the way of the world

Disconnected

Yet never have we been so connected

Facebook
What's app
BBM
Twitter
Email
You Tube
Linked in
Groupme
Flickr
Instagram
Twitvid

United
By economies
By media
By fear

But never more divided
Rich and poor
Muslim, Jew
East and West
Woman, Man
Gay and straight
Strong and weak
Black and white
Humans, Planet

We care so little for each other
That share the same life as we do
How can we care for
Mammals
Trees
Plants
Seas
Earth
Which give life

I leave the City
For a rural weekend retreat
With Lucy
To talk

Negotiate our future
Find each other
Compromise
So we can live together
Forever
Or at least till parted by death

Far from electricity
With a rainwater tank
No hot water

Bliss

Bliss I say to the woman villager
She smiles at me
No electricity?
No running water?
No flush loo?
No hot water?
Yes, I say

Bliss

I'll happily exchange this for your city house

She smiles
As she makes her way to the communal tap

My romance
Someone else's daily hardship

I ride down the unpaved street on my mountain bike
Not something I do in the urban jungle
An old man rides in the opposite direction
How much for your car, he asks

You don't want it, I say
Bikes are good for your health
For the earth

Maybe, he says
But here, bikes are a symbol of poverty
How much for your car?

The cycle of desire
And resource rape
Rising temperatures
Military interventions
Abuse of humans

Can it
Will it
Do we want it to
Be broken?

I fall asleep in Lucy's arms
She falls asleep in mine

Loud cellphone ring
I wake with a start
It is the oil baron
He wants to talk
What have I decided?
What of my mother?
What have I decided?
What of my future?

I am all he has, he says
His elder son is no more
His wife is breathing
Yet has no life
We need each other, he bleats
We must stand together
Blood of my blood
Flesh of my flesh
The future is ours, he gently whispers

His hollow words
Bounce off my hardened heart
His remorseless tongue
Fails to pierce my unhearing ears

Dear Father
From this day forth
Our ways must part
For your ways are not my ways
And mine not yours

He turns away
He does not look back.

Music, lights. Screen:

ON THE SEVENTH DAY

Today is a big day
Today we turn off the pipes
Today, my mother passes on
She who gave me birth
Will be no more

The oil baron has had enough
It is your choice, he once intoned
But now he is set to re-marry
Eat, drink and re-marry
And tomorrow, we braai!

To breed again
To give birth
To new heirs
Some day, all this will be his sons'

The deserts
The rising seas
The hollowed out earth

What of my son
What inheritance shall I
Shall we bestow upon Lucy's son
What world will our daughter have
And what of their children's
Children's
Children?

I hold my mother's hand
And tell of the choices before me

I could choose to deny
No, it's not happening
And if it is
I don't want to know
What matters is now
What matters is the
Treadmill of my job
My family
My house
My children's education
My debts
I'm not hurting anyone
I'm a good citizen
I pay my taxes
Stop at stop signs
All I have is three score and ten years
Perhaps ten years more
So do not speak to me of such things
What I'm ignorant about
I cannot be accountable for

Still lies my mother's hand
It does not move

It is not warm
It is not cold

I could choose not to deny
Even to know
But to accept that I can do nothing about it
The forces are too great
I am too little
Those who desire a better world are too weak
Too unresourced
Too disparate

So I could live responsibly
Eat fair trade food
Wear fair trade clothes
Drive fair trade cars
Drink fair trade wines
See out my three score and twenty years
Plus whatever my fair trade medical aid can cover
Die in my fair trade bed
Be put to rest in my fair trade coffin

She does not respond
And so I tempt her further

I could choose the path of my brother
What's the point
Why bother
Why live
Is living itself not a compromise
Am I complicit just by breathing
Is the moral position
To leave
Not to be here
At least there will be one less person
Trespassing
Pillaging
Violating

Come now, son
Do the deed
You know what must be done
So do it
The impatient oil baron
Shares his thoughts in a loud stage whisper

I could choose
To try to change the world
Green House
Green Party

Green Peace

Try to convince
Everyone
Or maybe just most
Or even a few
Or perhaps just the oil baron

To take off their suicide vests

Pause

Still my mother's body does not respond
She does not hear
She does not feel
She does not smell

Lucy sees
Lucy feels
Lucy smells
Lucy hears
Lucy tastes
I delay the death deed

To walk with Lucy
In humility along the mighty sea
With respect along mountain paths
In awe as the sky gazes upon us
Recognising
Accepting
Reconciling

I return to Mother
I look upon her face
I squeeze her hand one last time

Pause

It is finished
Rest in peace
Life-giver
Rest in peace

Stands up

On this seventh day
There is no time to rest

Lights fade. Music.