

By David Swanson

From [War is a Crime](#) | Original Article

Brilliant and humane playwright Karen Malpede has produced another play that grabs this country by the lapels, shakes it, caresses its cheek, and kicks its ass. The play is called "Another Life" and the life it leaves me thinking about is the life of our dreams.

The play is not so much a national nightmare or a national fantasy as a surreal reproduction of the mixture of horrors and hopes that most dreaming is: the most gruesome and graphic and taboo of our collective fears without exactly the fear itself, the deepest of longings and desires in immediate and mundane form but recognizable as revelations upon awakened reflection.

I've read "Another Life" as military commissions have just been officially reinstated and the Pentagon has just defended forcing a lawlessly imprisoned young man to stand naked for review each day. The broken poetic dialogue of the half dozen characters of "Another Life" draw me in as they present what a decade ago would have been sick ravings and are today the understandable concerns lurking in the shadows of all of our minds: torture, terrorism, sadism, racism and religious bigotry, the sufferings of the victims and of the victimizers, mistaken identities, exposure, surveillance, humiliation. Scene 1 ends with these words, which make perfect sense when arrived at:

"And, now, he's going to talk. No more of this. Mr. Nice guy. Picked her up. We know who you are. We know what you did. You want to see your wife, again, your kids. You want your wife raped, just like that, blood on the floor, you want to watch. You want your daughter deflowered. You want your virgins in the sky. We'll have your eyeballs in highballs. We'll have your cock in plastic wrap. A stick up your arse. The gloves are coming off. I'll crush your balls in the palm of my hands. Eat them like olives. You'll give me what I need. Believe me. You'll tell us what we want to know."

This is a scene in a home, where foreign relations and family relations have merged, and things Dick Cheney or John Yoo once said have seeped into the air. An old man has become the

Global War of Terrorism and Erik Prince and Grandpa, while a young man is all things decent in public life going bad and possibly recovering and bearing a strong resemblance to Ali Soufan, and a young woman is the U.S. public becoming an accomplice and a whistleblower as well as a widow and a lover. Her tragic loss, the loss of 9-11, is depicted in scenes in which she speaks with her dead fiancé.

And as one reads this it begins to sink in that every single person complicit in and resisting the horrors of our age has personal pleasures and goals and losses and deep fears. Meanwhile a man in the coffee shop where I'm reading is ignoring a table full of toddlers, one of whom is screaming in fury, so that he can persuade a waitress who probably doesn't care that the United States needs to send the Marines into Libya.

A torture victim in "Another Life" mutates into an "illegal" in the Homeland and from there into a slave, traveling back through the history it seems of our national criminal record. Then real, named torture victims enter the drama: al Libi, perfectly named for the alibi he provides warmakers; Zubaydah; and Emad Khudayir Shahuth Al-Janabi. The dead fiance remains in the September 10th mentality, the straightman to our national mental health crisis. And the play looks both backward and forward, like a dream, as the men in this coffee shop talk a little too loudly about the failure of Alcoholics Anonymous to help them find jobs, and I wander outside.

And there's Thomas Jefferson staring at me from a statue, a guy who sent war ships to Tripoli when not enslaving human beings at his house on that hill, promoting the genocide of the native people of North America, or fighting wars for democracy. And there's not a single thing a president could do today that anyone would punish him for, the accountability groups of the Bad Illiterate President Era are down to about 8 active members nationwide, and Chris Hedges says we're all Easter Island on a course for catastrophe. But that's only if we fail to change course. And if feeling in our bones the course we are on will help us change it, we can be grateful that Karen Malpede keeps writing.

For more information on performances of this play, click [here](#) .