

## SCHOOL FOR BIRDS

the last supper: an audience conversation

In the National Gallery of Victoria, Daniel Lammin, Anastasia Ryan and I sit at a table, eating dead men's meals and talking our way through Reckless Sleepers' THE LAST SUPPER. The ceiling is high. The table cloth is white. In front of us is a plate of chilli dogs and a jar of pickles.

FLEUR: Ana, what just happened?

ANASTASIA: Well, we just ate some last meals and heard some last words.

FLEUR: Daniel?

DANIEL: With his mouth full. Mmm! I'm eating someone's last meal. There's something very strange about the idea that this thing you're holding in your hand and putting in your mouth is essentially what someone requested as the last thing they would ever do. One of the actors offers us Champagne.

DANIEL: Oh no thank you.

FLEUR: Oh if I had a – Had a suitable, less red wine-y vessel, yeah!

ANA: You know what, I will have a little bit. I refused you the first time but I'm gonna have some now.

FLEUR: Thank you!

DANIEL: And I'll just keep eating the Last Chilli Dogs.

FLEUR: Were there last words that particularly got to you?

ANA: The Anastasia one got to me because that's my name. It was very odd.

FLEUR: The whole Russian Tsar's family really got to me because it was so violent and then there was the fact that the assassins left the room, had a moment to reflect and then came back and killed children.

ANA: I thought Hiroshima was the strongest moment. Because it was comical but then you had to step back and go "What would have happened?"

FLEUR: It was the suddenness of it.

DANIEL: And the banality of what they were saying.

ANA: And that the first one was "What have we done?" and then everything else was just normal things that you would have a conversation about.

FLEUR: "What have we done?" was very famously said by the pilot who dropped the bomb. He said, "My God, what have we done?"

ANA: And I guess the contrast between hearing that and then hearing all of these common-place, every day things that you would hear all the time... So many people at once.

DANIEL: We heard all these famous last words and then we would come to someone we had never heard of, a prisoner who was executed, and you don't know what their story is. You've never heard of them before and all of a sudden you're having their meal put in front of you and it's the full stop of a life and I don't know anything about that life.

FLEUR: I think it humanises people. Everyone has a last word and a last meal, whether they know it is their last or not. They will have that. They will say that.

One that I found particularly moving strangely was Eva Braun. I don't believe in 'evil'. I think that that word distances terrible human actions from humans. It tries to make the horror we are capable of something outside of our humanity but if anyone is evil, that's getting about as close to it as you can get. And that her last words were ones of love ("I do.") is an incredible thought.

DANIEL: A declaration of commitment to loving one man more than anyone else in the whole world, knowing you're going to die straight afterwards. Your last statement on this Earth is to say "I love this man and I want to spend whatever eternity I have with him forever."

FLEUR: What would your last meal be?

ANA: We were talking about this before... (With her mouth full of someone's last pickles) The man I was sitting with was a vegetarian. He wondered, would he order a steak for his last meal. I don't know. It is hard for someone in our position to imagine getting to the point where you know the exact moment where your life will end. I think until you're in that place it is almost impossible to know what you would do.

FLEUR: Daniel, a bowl of fruit was sat down in front of you. I think a peach is a nice way to go out. There's something about a peach that just says 'zest for life'.

DANIEL: The chilli dogs were the ones I was just like "Oh my god!" There is half of you going "Oh my God, I really want that" and half of you that's going "That belonged to someone. That was a decision that somebody made!"

To be honest – assuming she was still alive and if I ever got into the position – I'd probably ask for my grandmother's meatloaf. Something that actually meant something. I want something with significance. Something that means something.

FLEUR: Even the people who didn't get a meal, they were still sitting in front of an execution number. It gave this sense of these voiceless masses all around you. This is the most stupid sentence but so many people have died.

I was in the rehearsal room the other day and I'm working on this play that has quite a lot to do with death. There is a new bit of text about the time the government of India introduced flesh-eating turtles to a river because of "corpse overpopulation". It is an incredible term. "Corpse overpopulation." They are getting out of hand. They are taking over. There is this sense from The Last Supper that so, so many people have died and every one of those deaths has been a trauma to someone.

DANIEL: The numbers sitting in front of us represent a person who has been killed. Deliberately. Deliberately killed.

FLEUR: Yes! And I really got that. The work never comes out editorialises and says, "We're anti-Death penalty" but the fact that so many people have died and then so many of those have been killed deliberately and... thoughtfully... Enough people die because of the universe, because of how our bodies work and then some of them we go out of our way to end deliberately. It is a – It is a – Horror. Have you ever heard someone's last words?

DANIEL: No.

ANA: No. Maybe without meaning to.

DANIEL: Oh! Yes! Yes, I have. Well not heard them but I've read them. I was the last person that Stuart spoke to before he died. I got – as far as the police can tell – I got the last text message. So... Yeah. I mean, I don't know if he said anything himself but kind of. Yeah. I guess so. I've never thought of that. That's fucked.

FLEUR: Sorry.

DANIEL: No, that's alright!

FLEUR: I was there for my grandmother's last words in the middle of the night but I didn't realise they were her last so I didn't – I don't really know exactly what they were. It was just me and a nurse and her. I checking if she was in pain. I'm pretty sure the last time she was conscious I asked, "What's your pain out of ten?" and she couldn't answer. She was on too much morphine. Then I asked "Are you in pain?" I think her last words were "No pain." I think. It is strange to be like "Oh. They were the last ones and they passed me by."

DANIEL: Just because they aren't profound, does that mean that they are any less significant? In some ways the ones that are less profound are the ones that are more significant.

FLEUR: It is impossible for me to ask you what would you want your last words to be but what do you think you would want them to express?

ANA: I like the fun ones, to be honest. Humphrey Bogart's was my favourite. "I should have stuck to scotch instead of switching to martinis." I'd like to go with something sassy like that. Yep.

DANIEL: I'd want – I think I'd want to say "thank you". Something like that. "Thanks. That was great." I don't ever want to be reincarnated. I don't want to come back. I don't want to do this again. It was hard enough to begin with. I don't want to come back and do it all over again. Imagine, imagine, imagine coming back but losing all the memories of people and experiences and the things that you've done. Having to start all over again. No! So yes, kind of on the lines of "Thanks. That was really good." I hope. I hope it will be.

FLEUR: Any last thoughts on this experience tonight?

ANA: I found it really meditative. Less performative and more kind of a washing over. An impression. I enjoyed that a lot. I think it will bring up a lot of thoughts later. Maybe when I'm going to bed tonight I will think about something that they said tonight and be like "hmmm".

DANIEL: Yeah. I mean death is one of my favourite subjects to think about. Not in a kind of morbid way but I've always been fascinated by it. It is the inevitable thing. It is the one thing that is a given in every single person's life, that we are going to die. And the acceptance, how we accept that, how others accept that, how society accepts that, the idea that it is not necessarily a negative – it can be a positive. You can either be ripped from someone and taken way too soon or it can be the perfect full stop to somebody's life. The end of the story. Every good story has to come to an end. I always get frustrated with TV series and books that never fucking end. When you end I will know what you meant. I will know what you were doing. So that idea of an ending being kind of beautiful and necessary. Yeah. That's my wanky thing.

FLEUR: Are you going to eat that last corndog, Daniel?

DANIEL: I can't. I can't eat any more. I've already eaten a hamburger, half a peach and three chillidogs. I can't eat any more.

FLEUR: So many last meals. Thanks, guys.