STUDY GUIDE

CURRENCY PRESS
The performing arts publisher
www.currency.com.au

THE FUTURE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Aboriginality in Recent Australian Drama

Katharine Brisbane, AM, Hon.D.Litt. UNSW

1. Aboriginal playwrights ● 2. Aboriginality and the white playwright ● 3. Bibliography

1. Aboriginal playwrights

> There's nothing I would rather be
> Than to be an Aborigine
> and watch you take my precious land away.
> For nothing gives me greater joy
> than to watch you fill each girl and boy
> with superficial existential shit.
> Now you may think I'm cheeky
> But I'd be satisfied
> to rebuild your convict ships
> and sail them on the tide.
> I love the way you give me God
> and of course the mining board,
> for this of course I thank the Lord each day.
> I'm glad you say that land rights wrong.
> Then you should go where you belong
> and leave me to just keep on keeping on.

This is one of the songs from *Bran Nue Dae*, a musical which emerged in 1989 from one of the most remote parts of Australia: the port of Broome on the North-West coast. The song itself has become an anthem for Aboriginal people: a rare unifying force for empowerment. Its quality has appealed equally to white Australians: its tune is infectious and celebratory, creating a tension with the words, which expresses both defiance of their situation as a colonised people; and an ironic self-accusation for accepting it.

Irony may not be a significant force in every nation's humour but it is the key to an understanding of the Australian character. Irony is both accusatory and conciliatory and the barbs in this song stab our consciences and at the same time make us laugh.

In the contemporary world, *Bran Nue Dae* is a significant expression of that historical irony of Australian race relations by which families were split apart and tribes deracinated in the name of self-improvement. It has also been the most uniting force in the beginnings of common understanding.

The author is Jimmy Chi, a musician of mixed blood, including Aboriginal, Chinese and Japanese; and the stage show evolved from the songs created by his band, the Kuckles, one of dozens of bands which play in the pubs in Broome.

The story is as silly as that of any grand opera. What audiences respond to is the way the play invites them in to share the joy, the outlook and the resilient humour; through the music, which is a felicitous conflation of every style ever heard on a transistor radio in the bungalows of Broome. Today Broome is a prosperous resort town with an international airport. But once it was the centre of Australia's pearl fishing industry, attracting Asian divers and fishermen and a good proportion of remittance men and other colourful characters. Its history probably contained a greater ethnic mixture than anywhere else in Australia until the mass immigration of the last half of this century. Jimmi Chi has celebrated the darker side of this history in his second musical, *Corrugation Road* (1996), which gathers the Aboriginal experience of drug-taking, child abuse and unsympathetic hospital care into a kaleidoscope of his own schizophrenic imagination.

Bran Nue Dae in 1989 was a turning point in the short history of Aboriginal writing for the theatre. Twenty years of evolution: in writers, political activists, actors, dancers, singers and song-writers, preceded it. It was, surprisingly, only in the 1960s that Aboriginal writers began to be published in numbers which could be recognised as a body of work. This occurred as part of a gathering force of activism by a politically aware

post-war generation of Aborigines and of white young people, particularly university students. In 1961 Aborigines had finally been given the vote. In 1965 Northern Territory Aboriginal pastoral workers were awarded equal pay with whites; in 1966 the first major land-rights strike took place; and in 1967 a national referendum overwhelmingly voted in favour of transferring judicial responsibility for Aboriginal welfare from the States to the Commonwealth Government. Isolated protests over local issues, mainly of living conditions on reserves, became by degrees an organised civil rights movement which gained confidence from the parallel movement in the United States. Co-ordinated protest had so far been impeded by traditional tribal rivalries and the diversity of languages. Skirmishes, massacres and protests had been rural and isolated; and many of them shamefully buried in a conspiracy of silence. What we had from the 1960s, by contrast, was a modern, open campaign led by urban leaders and using the weapons of politics and the mass media.

Encouraged by the the public statements, individual voices began to be heard. Poetry and song came first; drama followed. Within Aboriginal communities dance, song and story-telling are traditional and Aborigines are by nature much more graceful performers than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. The civil rights movement coincided— or rather shared the same roots as— the anti-British, anti-American, anti-Vietnam War nationalism that changed the politics of Australia in the late 1960s and brought into existence, as a by-product, the Australian Council for the Arts, now the Australia Council. Its Aboriginal Arts Board has been an important source of funds for indigenous arts groups and for the development of individual talent. And the Board has been influential through its existence in plotting the direction of modern art and performance.

Now, after thirty years of growing confidence, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have reached the forefront of our arts. Thirty years ago few urban white Australians had ever seen a traditional Aboriginal painting— had rarely even seen an Aborigine. Few whites knew anything of the Aboriginal way of life, with its complex social order and spirituality, its practical jokes, its ingenious survival skills and its talent for parody. We were not even aware of our own ignorance— until it was exposed by the revelations on stage and on television. Today Aboriginal drama is, at least in my view, the most important new Australian voice and one which will, in due course, be the most widely heard in other countries. Today Aboriginal painters exhibit in New York and Venice; didgeridoo teachers are in high demand in Germany. Our Aboriginal and Islander dancers, traditional, modern and classically-trained, perform regularly around the world. The band Yothu Yindi is now only one with an international reputation and its hit song 'Treaty' has become another anthem inciting action. We still await enough actors with the skills and the aspiration to put across the drama to foreign audiences the way they have done for Australians; but they are fast arriving and receiving the attention they deserve in such functions as the pre-Olympic Festival of the Dreaming in Sydney in 1997.

The earliest play from this contemporary movement was Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers*, the first half of which was first seen at a private performance in Sydney in 1971. It was the opening sequence I vividly recall. Centre stage was a large, jolly black woman sitting on an upturned tub. As she chatted, the tub gave sporadic jumps and exuded muffled thumps and whines. In due course a child was released from the tub. She had been punished for some misdemeanour. The dialogue was good-hearted and good-humoured and the subject matter, small community affairs. I was suddenly overawed at being allowed into the domestic life of a people whose privacy had, for so long and for such good reason, been guarded from white eyes. The play was later performed in Melbourne by the Nindethana Theatre, the first of the black companies. Kevin Gilbert had at that time just been released from gaol where he had served a term for the manslaughter of his wife. He became a leading figure in the civil rights movement; uncompromising in his ethics and a poet of distinction. He died in 1992, mourned by both blacks and whites.

Other works followed. The political revue *Basically Black* was performed in 1972 at the Nimrod Street Theatre, with a cast including Bob Maza, Gary Foley and Zac Martin, now well-known figures in their fields. The revue was a response

to a High Court ruling against a traditional claim to land ownership; and the participants were instigators of the Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra—a tent bearing the Aboriginal banner which had been pitched, as a demand for recognition, on the lawn outside Parliament House in Canberra. (The tent embassy still survives after twenty years and the site, recognised as an Aboriginal traditional ground, has now been listed by the Heritage Commission.) Out of that group grew the Black Theatre in Redfern, Sydney. Among the plays I saw in that crumbling warehouse was *Here Comes the Nigger* (1976), a contemporary tragedy by Gerry Bostock which featured a youthful Bryan Brown among others. Another was Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*, the first speaking portrait of life in an Aboriginal reservation.

The Cake Man is a simple story about a Bible-loving mother and an alcoholic father, and how a small boy's innocent faith transforms the life of a white Scrooge. But the identification with the characters which the cast immediately made gave the performed work a compelling emotional drive. *The Cake Man* was the first Aboriginal play to enter the repertoire of the white theatre and in 1982 it was received with acclaim at an international festival in Denver, Colorado.

Its progress owed much to the pioneering actors Justine Saunders and Brian Syron, playing the suffering Ruby and the drunken Sweet William; and they became major forces in the black theatre movement. Syron had escaped from an abused childhood to New York in the late 1950s, where he became a star pupil at the Stella Adler studio, set for a promising career in Hollywood. But in 1968 he was drawn back to his Australian roots: called home, so he said, by the apparition of a tribal elder. He was the first Aboriginal to have had that kind of extensive theatre training and his school in Sydney became a centre for actors, both black and white, who sought a more daring and indigenous style of expression. He died in 1993, aged only 53.

Meanwhile, in 1979, the nudging of a few consciences over the Western Australian sesquicentenary provided circumstances in which our major black playwright, Jack Davis, could make his mark. Davis found himself writing *Kullark*, for the theatre-in-education troupe of the National Theatre in Perth. Through a number of metamorphoses a team of actors and dancers emerged in Perth to give a wholly new status to performance by Aboriginal artists. Of national reputation are the actor Ernie Dingo, who made his debut in *Kullark*, and dancer and writer Richard Walley and Steve 'Baamba' Albert. Others, like Kelton Pell, are beginning to become nationally familiar. But whites have contributed too, notably the director Andrew Ross, in partnership with whom most of Davis' plays have evolved. Ross founded the Black Swan Theatre Company as a multi-ethnic performance group in Perth in 1991 and it now has an affiliated Aboriginal drance training school led by the dancer Michael Leslie. The W.A. Academcy of the Performing Arts also encourages Aboriginal enrolment. Western Australia, isolated from the rest of the country and with one of the harshest histories of race relations, has been a major force in the development of black actors of stature.

In recent times several new writers have emerged from Western Australia, notably Sally Morgan, whose play *Sistergirl* has had two national tours. Like Davis' *The Dreamers*, it deals with the dying, who are visited by the spirit of the past: in this case an old black woman sharing an alcoholic's ward with a disreputable Irishwoman. The play has humour and dignity and it is a reflection of the close familial relationship between life and art in the Aboriginal theatre that the death of a cast member during the 1995 revival has resulted in the work being suppressed. Richard Walley's *Coordah* (1987), which depicts urban Aborigines in conflict with alcohol and the law, has also been widely seen.

Roger Bennett's *Funerals and Circuses* comes from the Northern Territory but was first performed at the Adelaide Festival in 1992. This is an ambulatory musical play, with songs by Paul Kelly, which deals powerfully with the consequences of a mixed marriage in a country town, mixing violence and comedy, and dealing even-handedly with the uglier side of both black and white characters. His earlier play about his father's life as a boxer, *Up the Ladder* (1990) has been in the repertoire of the Melbourne Workers' Theatre since 1995. Bennett died in 1997.

The struggle for self-expression has not been easy. Writing itself, Jack Davis has said, is a political act, a splitting of the mind between one's

own thought and the demands of black politics. In consequence some of the early plays are didactic, and anxious in their choice of language. They deal again and again with the State *Aboriginal Protection Acts* of the early part of the century which denied advancement, forced blacks into white-governed rural ghettos and ordered that children be taken away from their parents and taught assimilation. Other common themes are job discrimination, land rights and the high incidence of black deaths in police custody, a phenomenon about which there was an extensive, heated and finally fairly fruitless judicial inquiry. The deaths continue unabated.

Besides the political constraints are those of language and education. Performers generally demonstrate a remarkable natural dramatic sense and confidence; and convey a great sense of liberation; but for many, English is a second language. The language of the theatre is also foreign: its forms, and its definitions and its disciplines. It is a courageous path these artists have chosen to follow. It has required of them great patience in dealing with the stereotypes of some parts of the white-controlled industry and the good intentions of others. The fact that we have world-class young actors today like Bradley Byquar, David Ngoombujarra, Ningali Lawford, Rachel Maza, Deborah Mailman, Lydia Miller and Lafe Charlton; and outstanding dancers and choreogaphers like Kim Walker, Raymond Blanco and Steven Page working with major companies, is an important witness to the rate at which we are putting aside the imitative skills of the past in favour of something more recognisably our own.

But it is also in their innocence of that burden of theatrical tradition that Aboriginal performing artists are finding their strength. They have arrived in the Western theatre at a time when the form is more diverse than at any other period in its history. In aesthetic criticism, absolutes of excellence have given way to issues of relevance and community debate. Writers today are freer to choose their own form than they have ever been: the only restriction lies in the capacity of their peers to understand it.

The form to which Aboriginal theatre has steadily moved is what the novelist Mudrooroo Nyoongar has called ‘Aboriginal reality’—the co-existence of a material and a spiritual reality represented symbolically, often by dance, or magic, which is introduced quite unselfconsciously into apparently realist drama. Jack Davis is particularly accomplished at this. In *Kullark*, his first play, the history of early colonial relations hangs over the life of a modern country-town family. In *The Dreamers* it is most clear: old Uncle Worru is dying and as the domestic drama is played out around him, the ghosts, the language and the rituals of his past invade his consciousness and interpret his world. In *Barungin, Smell the Wind*, Davis’ indictment of death in police cutody, the double reality is integrated symbolically: the funeral service with which the play opens is carried on the wind across the events which follow and returns again to the graveside as the national roll of the dead is intoned in a liturgical lament.

‘Jack Davis’ plays are often accepted as merely examples of twentieth century naturalistic European drama’, Mudrooroo wrote in his introduction to *Barungin*, ‘but I see this as a white reading in that this way the symbolic aspects are relegated to secondary motifs—attempts to break free of the format—rather than being of primary importance. I do not see them as devices to breakdown the ‘realist’ frame, but as integral parts pointing to the polysemic nature of Aboriginal drama.’

It is fair warning: to directors, dramaturgs and to publishers. My task as an editor is to make a work as accessible and compelling to the reading public as possible and to present the author to greatest advantage. When dealing with unconventional work like this it is tempting to intervene: to regularise presentation, to correct punctuation, to ‘improve’. The poet Robert Adamson described an incident in his experience. He had been sitting on a jetty with Kevin Gilbert, each with a copy of their first published books of poetry. Adamson was excited and proud at having his work in print. Gilbert was angry and threw his book into the harbour. The quality of his poems had been destroyed, he said, by the addition of punctuation. The profound feelings they expressed had, in his view, been ‘civilised’.

The same warning applies to the advice offered by directors and dramaturgs in the early stages of play development. And I have been guilty myself of giving orthodox presentation to publication.

There are black writers who have refused to be performed and published by white institutions for this reason. There are others, and Davis and Mudrooroo are among them, who believe the purpose of their work is reconciliation.

But the real strength behind the work of our Aboriginal theatre artists—a strength entirely their own which owes nothing to training or education—is not the politics, nor the scars of history; it is the life-force: the irrepressible humour, the capacity to survive. We saw it in the disreputable Uncle Tadpole in *Bran Nue Dae* seducing his audience with 'Is You Ma Baby?'. In the invincible Millimurra family in Jack Davis' *No Sugar*, forced from their home by a greedy politician and into a reservation where the children are separated. We see it in the dying alcoholic and her feckless family in Sally Morgan's *Sistergirl*; and the old woman with the tub in *The Cherry Pickers*. More than anything it is this larrikin quality, eternally triumphing over circumstance, that will lead the way to a reconciliation between the races. For if there is a perspective which distinguishes the work of our black writers it is that of reconciliation. There is violence in some of the plays, and anger, and despair; but the drive is to re-enact the past in order to come to terms with it. Which makes it a political act but also an artistic one.

The progress of Aboriginal writing for the theatre has in the 1990s discarded polemic for a deeper psychology. The plays have become more concerned with the emotional and spiritual life of the characters; more confidently experimental in their structure; and more inclined to include the white man and woman in their view of world. Eva Johnson's play *Murras* (1988) is a highly politicised work which spells out the significance of the Aboriginal homeland and the pleasure and pride invested in traditional skills. Following the 1967 referendum new housing began to be provided to assimilate the black population. A generation on from the families in *The Cake Man* and *No Sugar*, in *Murras* the deprivation is not material; its focus is upon loss of a well-recognised identity and connections with the dreaming. The play shows the forced removal of a family from the country to the town, the powerlessness imposed by the new community and the growing movement of protest which the young son joins.

Eva Johnson's powerful solo performance *What Do They Call Me?* (1990) moves further in this direction. It is a three-part monologue by Connie Brumbie, thrown into gaol for drunkenness, mourning the children who were taken from her in the 1950s under the Aboriginal protection legislation; her daughters Regina, now a middle-class married woman brought up unaware of her Aboriginality; and Alison, now a social worker, activist and lesbian, who seeks to reconcile the family to each other and their past.

In similar vein is Ningali Lawford's solo show *Ningali*, which she has performed all over the world in the 1990s, developing it as she went. In it she tells the story of her untroubled childhood in the Kimberleys, the loneliness of a city boarding school, an extraordinary six months as an exchange student in Alaska, the rebellion and trauma of adolescence and racist encounters, and the rediscovery of herself through dance and the emergence of a strong maturity. More than the men these women have used performance to focus upon the healing process; they have given their audiences lasting images of power and grace.

Another such performer is Deborah Mailman, whose work *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, created with Wesley Enoch, director of the Koemba Jarra theatre company in Brisbane, has also been around the world. This is the most innovative in structure of all the works so far created. It is written in 18 scenes, in a free-verse form incorporating enactments and film images, a variety of storytelling forms and symbolism. The text brings to life a multiplicity of small and large events and responses to them, and ends, movingly, with the poem 'Plea':

> You know there has always been this grieving,
> Grieving for our Land, our families.
> Our cultures that have been denied us.
> But we have been taught to cry quietly
> Where only our eyes betray us with tears.
> But now, we can no longer wait,
> I am scared my heart is hardening.
> I fear I can no longer grieve
> I am so full and know my capacity for grief.
> What can I do but...perform.
> These are my stories.
> These are my people's stories.
> They need to be told.

The most recent black playwright to come to national attention is John Harding, whose play *Up the Road* was first presented by the Ilbigerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative in Melbourne in 1991. It was further developed by the director Neil Armfield in 1997 for seasons at Melbourne's Playbox Theatre and Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney. Harding's protagonist is, for the first time, a middle-class Aboriginal, Ian Sampson, a Canberra bureaucrat who returns to his hometown after a decade for a family funeral. There he faces not only punishment by the woman and now-dead brother he deserted, but finds himself the centre of conflict over government policy and local affairs. It is basically a realist play about domestic issues but it carries Aboriginal drama a further step towards autonomy by creating a cast of characters no longer objectified by protest against or reconciliation with the white race, but well-realised individuals working their way through the conflicts of their own community wrought by the rapid pace of change.

2. Aboriginality and the white playwright

So far I have not discussed a further result of the black civil rights movement: the black theme in recent white drama. Aboriginal characters have been common in plays with rural settings from the early colonial period, mostly as comic figures with a native wit and a sharper mind than the new-chum hero. In the realist drama between the 1920s and the 1960s the plight of the Aborigine was examined by many politically active white writers. But most of the work was little more than a well-intentioned attempt to acknowledge injustice. Plays like that are still being written today, of course. But there are some that stand out from the early period, like *Brumby Innes* by Katharine Susannah Prichard (1883–1969): the first play in our literature to confront the sexuality of the outback. Though written in 1927 it was not until 1972, with the support of Nindethana Theatre, that it was seen in performance. Brisbane author George Landen Dann (1904–1971), a long-time friend of the timber workers on Fraser Island and a student of Aboriginal lore, wrote several plays about Aboriginal life and race relations in Queensland, notably *Fountains Beyond* and *In Beauty it is Finished*. The latter, which examines the moral consequences of isolation and emotional deprivation, was attacked as 'a sordid drama of miscegenation' prior to its premiere in 1931. In Melbourne the socialist playwright Oriel Gray (1920–2003) wrote several plays on similar themes, the best-known of which is *Burst of Summer* (1960), inspired by the dilemma of Ngarla Kunoth, taken from a country town to star in Charles Chauvel's film *Jedda*.

There were, however, neither the theatres prepared to present these plays professionally nor the black actors trained to play in them. Now that we do have a body of actors, we may find these writers still have something to say in the debate. Meanwhile younger writers are again attempting a dialogue.

With the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts in 1968 a period of consciousness-raising began in the white community about the good and bad aspects of what it means to be Australian. Spurred on by the 200th anniversary in 1970 of Captain Cook's landing at Sydney Cove, several plays involving Aborigines were presented, notably Bill Reed's tripartite *Truganinni* (1971), a study of the sole survivor of the Tasmanian massacre of 1830s, and John Romeril's short play, *Bastardy* (1972), in which an aging white prostitute receives an unexpected visit from an acknowledged black son. Its premiere featured the young Jack Charles in an early role.

A play which provides a radical insight into the spirituality of the land felt by both blacks and whites is Dorothy Hewett's *The Man from Mukinupin* (1979), a musical play set in a country town in Western Australia at the time of World War I. The seasons, the extremes of heat and drought and the life cycle of the characters are linked by the author to the hidden history of rape and massacre in the creek bed, ghosts in the night and the rituals of marriage and survival within which are recreated both Aboriginal and European folk mysteries. Two young white lovers are played by the same actors as two outcast black lovers.

With the rise of the black theatre groups, which grew up first in Melbourne and Sydney, then in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, there began debates, particularly within the forum

of the National Playwrights' Conference, about the right—and the capacity—of a white writer to attempt a black character. In 1987 the First National Black Playwrights' Conference was held in Canberra. Today, though the debate goes on, the annual national playwrights' conference is a black and white affair. Today Aboriginal actors are no longer confined to playing Aboriginal characters; and in most productions blacks and whites work together. Kevin Smith, for example, became a member of Neil Armfield's ensemble at Belvoir Street in 1995 and gave a new dimension to several classical roles.

The most prominent playwright to attempt the task of fully realising Aboriginal characters is Louis Nowra. His early work established him as a writer concerned with alienation, deracination and the violence that boils up when the natural order of the land is violated. Colonialism was his first metaphor. While the tattered remnant of a people discovered in the horizontal forests of Tasmania in the 1930s and fictionalised by Nowra in his notable *The Golden Age* (1985) is clearly an approach to the subject, the Aborigine first appears fully in his adaptation of Xavier Herbert's massive novel *Capricornia*, commissioned for the bicentenary in 1988. It was quickly followed by *Byzantine Flowers* (1989), the story of the slow empowerment of an exploited black woman; *Radiance* (1993), a tribute to three favourite female actors, Rachel Maza, Lydia Miller and Rhoda Roberts, came next; and more recently *Crow* (1994). *Radiance* is the story of three ill-matched half-sisters who gather to scatter their mother's ashes. Their ethnic origin is nowhere mentioned in the text but the theme of exploitation makes this implicit. *Crow*, on the other hand, returns to *Byzantine Flowers* territory.

Some of these plays succeed better than others in relating the Aboriginal experience; but, representing the mainstream of theatre as he does, they have helped to bring us into a new, more relaxed, stage in the debate. A successful production of *Radiance* by Wesley Enoch for the Queensland Theatre Company and Kooemba Jarra aroused a variety of responses, with some audiences recognising with applause aspects of Aboriginal life revealed by actors rather than the text; while others regarded the season as an appropriation of territory. Nowra's interest in Aboriginal life and history has not been political, nor does he regard Aborigines as separate from his own society but rather as part of the post-colonial environment which makes it. As in all his plays, the characters and situations are just a small imaginative leap from his own experience. *Radiance* has been adapted to film by Rachel Perkins, whose father Charles was a leading figure in the protest movement from the 1960s.

Writers who have sought to deal more directly with the social aspects of Aboriginal living conditions include Ned Manning, whose *Close to the Bone* (1991) about the forced separation of Aboriginal children from their parents, was developed with students at the Eora Centre in Sydney; and Julie Janson who spent many years researching firstly *Gunjies* (1993) about a death in custody; and later *Black Mary* (1996). *Black Mary*, the story of Maryanne Ward, wife of the bushranger Captain Thunderbolt and his strategist, was first presented by Nibago Productions in Sydney and later developed by Belvoir Street Theatre into an epic production at the Wilson Street Carriage Works for the Festival of the Dreaming. Maryanne was created by another remarkable Aboriginal actor, Margaret Harvey.

Nationally, the most familiar of the plays with this new perspective is Nicholas Parsons' *Dead Heart* which played at the Festival of Perth and in Sydney in 1993–94 and became a feature film in 1996. As Parsons has stated, it is not an 'Aboriginal play' but one which sets out to examine the clash of cultures in the blacks' heartland, a reserve in the desert region of the Northern Territory, among the Pintupi people. A handful of government officers have made their commitment to the country; but Pintupi govern by their own law. Two Aborigines stand in the centre of the dilemma when a young man is secretly executed under one law and the police seek justice under another. The conflict destroys the community: black and white evacuate and the place returns to the desert.

Dead Heart is the most sophisticated of the plays yet written, in terms of attempting to convey both sides of the cultural dilemma beneath the current political battles over land rights and social services; and in acknowledging

the strength of the 'Aboriginal reality' which Mudrooroo defined.

The 1990s is also seeing a number of familiar plays adapted for Aboriginal actors: Michael Gow's *Away*, for example, in the Kimberleys; Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* into the Bundjalung language; and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, both performed at the Festival of the Dreaming. The latter was directed by Noel Tovey, a former dancer who spent most of his working life in the United Kingdom but became an activist in the Aboriginal cause upon his return. His most notable production was an adaptation by Mudrooroo and Gerhardt Fischer of Heiner Muller's drama *The Commission* (about an attempt to free Jamaican slaves in 1789). The work was developed over ten years to become *The Aboriginal Protesters Confront the Proclamation of the Australian Republic on January 26, 2001, with a Production of* The Commission *by Heiner Muller*. Tovey's impressive production for the Sydney Festival in 1996 was also presented in Berlin.

The plays continue to be written, and within them the theme of reconciliation strengthens. Not many of the plays yet are major works, not many are yet ready for the world outside. But if the work so far has offered nothing else, I would like to believe that it has made, and will continue to make, some contribution to a greater mutual understanding and respect; and especially a recognition of those two realities; and the values of that world which created them.

3. Bibliography

Plays by Aboriginal writers

Roger Bennett, *Funerals and Circuses*. Sydney: Currency Press 1995

Jimmy Chi and the Kuckles, *Bran Nue Dae*. Sydney and Broome: Currency Press and Magabala Books 1991

Jack Davis, *Barungin, Smell the Wind*. Sydney: Currency Press 1989

Jack Davis, *The Dreamers* and *Kullark*. Sydney: Currency Press 1983

Jack Davis, *Honey Spot*, a play for children. Sydney: Currency Press 1987

Jack Davis, *In Our Town*. Sydney: Currency Press 1992

Jack Davis, *Moorli and the Leprechaun*, a play for children. Sydney: Currency Press 1994

Jack Davis, *No Sugar*, Sydney: Currency Press 1986

Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, *The Seven Stages of Grieving*. Brisbane: Playlab Press 1997

Kevin Gilbert, *The Cherry Pickers*. Canberra: Burrambinga Books 1988

John Harding, *Up the Road*, Sydney: Currency Press 1997

Jane Harrison, *Stolen*, Sydney: Currency Press 1998

Andrea James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!* Sydney: Currency Press 2003

Eva Johnson, *What Do They Call Me?* in *Australian Gay and Lesbian Plays* ed. Bruce Parr. Sydney: Currency Press 1996

Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg, *Women of the Sun*, four television dramas. Sydney: Currency Press 1983

Robert J. Merritt, *The Cake Man*. Sydney: Currency Press 1978

Dallas Winmar, *Aliwa!* Sydney: Currency Press 2002

Anthologies

Contemporary Indigenous Plays. Sydney: Currency Press 2006. Contains Vivienne Cleven, *Bitin' Back*; Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*; David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle, *King Hit*; Jane Harrison, *Rainbow's End;* and David Milroy, *Windmill Baby*.

Blak Inside: 6 Indigenous Plays From Victoria. Sydney: Currency Press 2002. Contains John Harding, *Enuf;* Tammy Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*; Tracey Rigney, *Belonging*; Maryanne Sam, *Casting Doubts*; Jadah Milroy, Crow Fire; and Richard J. Frankland, *Conversations With the Dead*.

Plays from Black Australia. Sydney: Currency Press 1989. Contains Jack Davis, *The Dreamers*; Eva Johnson, *Murras*; Bob Maza, *The Keepers*; and Richard Walley, *Coordah*.

Selected plays by white writers

Andrew Bovell, *Holy Day*. Sydney: Currency Press. 2001

George Landen Dann, *Fountains Beyond*. Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co. 1944

Eric Earley, *The Custodians*. Sydney: Currency Press 1993
Barney Foran, *Come Hell or High Water*. Sydney: Currency Press 1988
Gordon Francis, *God's Best Country*. Sydney: Currency Press 1987
Trevor Graham, *Mabo: Life of an Island Man*. Sydney: Currency Press 1999
Rodney Hall, *A Return to the Brink*. Sydney: Currency Press 1999
Dorothy Hewett, *The Man From Mukinupin*. Sydney: Currency Press 1979
Thomas Keneally, *Bullie's House*. Sydney: Currency Press 1981
Ned Manning, *Close to the Bone*. Sydney: Currency Press 1994
Ned Manning, *Luck of the Draw*. Sydney: Currency Press 2000
Ray Mooney, *Black Rabbit*. Sydney: Currency Press 1988
Phil Motherwell, *Steal Away Home*. Sydney: Currency Press 1987
Louis Nowra, *Capricornia*. Sydney: Currency Press 1988
Louis Nowra, *Crow*. Sydney: Currency Press 1994
Louis Nowra, *Radiance*. Sydney: Currency Press 1993
Christine Olsen, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (the screenplay). Sydney: Currency Press 2002
Nicholas Parsons, *Dead Heart*. Sydney: Currency Press 1994. Film adaptation: Currency Press 1996
Bill Reed, *Truganinni*. Melbourne: Heinemann 1977
John Romeril, *Bastardy*. Melbourne: Yackandandah 1982
Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Brumby Innes* (1927). Sydney: Currency Press 1974.
Betty Roland, *Granite Peak* (1957). Sydney: Currency Press 1988
Jill Shearer, *The Foreman*. Sydney: Currency Press 1978
Tony Strachan, *State of Shock*. Sydney: Currency Press 1986
Katherine Thomson, *Wonderlands*. Sydney: Currency Press 2004

Reference

Keith Chesson, *Jack Davis, A Biography*. Melbourne: Dent 1988
Kevin Gilbert, *Living Black, Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert*. Ringwood, Victoria: Allen Lane, Penguin 1977
Karen Kaine-Jones, 'Contemporary Aboriginal Drama.' *Southerly* No. 4, 1988, 'Focus on Aboriginal Literature'. Sydney: English Association
Philip Parsons (ed.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia*. Sydney: Currency Press 1995
Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words White Page*. Brisbane: Queensland University Press 1989
Cliff Watego, 'Aboriginal Australian Dramatists' in *Community Theatre in Australia*, ed. Richard Fotheringham. Sydney: Currency Press 1992

Other reading

Sightlines: Race, Gender and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1998.
'Reconciliation? Aboriginality and Australian Theatre in the 1990s.' *Our Australian Theatre in the 1990s*. Ed. Veronica Kelly. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998. 71–88.
'De-scribing Orality: Performance and the Recuperation of Indigenous Voices.' *Describing Empire: Colonialism and Textuality*. Ed. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson. London: Routledge, 1994. 98–111. Reprinted in Colin Counsell and Patrick Wolfe, ed. *The Performance Studies Reader* (Routledge 2001)
'Talking Country: Place and Displacement in Jack Davis's Theatre.' *Jack Davis: A Critical Study*. Ed. Gerry Turcotte. Sydney: Collins-Angus & Robertson, 1994. 60–71.
'The Dance as Text in Contemporary Australian Drama: Movement and Resistance Politics.' *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 23.1 (1992): 133–47. Reprinted in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1994.
'Historical Re-presentation: Performance and Counter-Discourse in Jack Davis's Drama.' *New Literatures Review* 19 (1990): 91–101.