Performing Australia's black and white history: acts of danger in four Australian plays of the early 21st century.

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Alison Lyssa's former surname through marriage was Hughes. Her birth surname was Darby.

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Summary

In an Australia shaped by neo-conservative government and by searing contention, national and global, over what the past is, how it should be allowed to affect the present and who are authentic bearers of witness, this thesis compares testimony to Australia's black/white relations in two plays by white writers, Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day* (2001) and Katherine Thomson's *Wonderlands* (2003), and two by black writers, Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* (2001) and Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* (2002). Drawing on post-colonial theories of theatre's language of resistance,[1] and Felman and Laub's psycho-analytic theory that bearing witness to trauma is a "performative act,"[2] I argue that Indigenous playwrights Anderson and Frankland each refuse empire's construction of itself as natural/ism and create multi-layered witness to trauma and its transcendence. The non-Indigenous writers, despite billed intentions to repudiate Aboriginal suffering, trap Indigenous witness within a white-directed utopia (Thomson) or dystopia (Bovell). In *Holy Day*, colonial raced and gendered stereotypes control the narrative, perpetuating myths that the displaced Aborigine is 'lost' and traditional culture is dream or nightmare. Highly visible Aboriginal defiance turns on itself, co-opted into a Bovellian myth of Aboriginality as an agent of racism. *Holy Day*'s one break in the frame offers ineffective witness to silenced Indigenous pain. In *Wonderlands*, despite robust and well-researched articulation of Indigenous lands rights, the Aboriginal characters serve the imaginary "good Australia" identified by Jennifer Rutherford.[3] *Wonderlands* wounds white aggression and sends it offstage lest it have to be confronted, while the saintly Indigenous characters salve white pain and wait for the

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[1] See Michele Grossman, *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 2003), Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), Helen Gilbert, *Sightlines: Race, Gender, and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), Marc Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries: Postcolonial Hybridizations of Dramatic Realism*, Dramaturgies, No. 9 (Brussels, Belg.: P.I.E.- Lang, 2003).

[2] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 53.

[3] See Jennifer Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 2000).

white gift of their white-recorded history. Indigenous playwrights, Anderson and Frankland, subvert the silence that the coloniser mourns in passing.

Candidate's statement

The written material in this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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All sources have been acknowledged.

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Date: _____

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Introduction

SEREBRYAKOV. Pain – is – invasion.

Howard Barker, *Uncle Vanya*.[1]

Theatre is a tiny realm of the imagination that nonetheless maintains the power to influence our thoughts, our feelings and our actions in the greater realm of human society.

Rhoda Roberts.[2]

Selection of plays for analysis

Ubersfeld calls theatre "a dangerous art". Its dangers and its privileges make it vulnerable to censorship, self-censorship, and "theatrical seduction (that) may transform it into nothing more than a means of entertainment for the pleasure of the dominant class."[3]

This study investigates the "dangers" that four Australian plays, which premiered between 2001 and 2003, may represent to conservative views of Australia's history as a result of their onstage depiction of perceived crises in the lives of Indigenous Australians. Two of the plays are by Indigenous writers. *I Don't Wanna Play House* is Tammy Anderson's polyvocal, storytelling, "country and western"-singing monodrama about her childhood, in which the domestic violence, sexual abuse, and racist denigration and dispossession that impacted on her and her family are exposed, deconstructed and transcended.[4] Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* combines multiple performance modes, such as intimate address to the

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[1] Howard Barker, *Uncle Vanya*, *Collected Plays*, vol. 2 (London: J. Calder; Riverrun Press, 1990) 299.

[2] Rhoda Roberts, "A Passion for Ideas: Black Stage," *Third Rex Cramphorn Memorial Lecture*, Company B Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 23 Nov. 1997, Currency, <http://www.currency.com.au/> accessed 15 Dec. 2003. Roberts was Artistic Director of the inaugural Festival of the Dreaming, 1997.

[3] Anne Ubersfeld, Paul Perron, Frank Collins and Patrick Debbèche, *Reading Theatre*, Toronto Studies in Semiotics (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 4.

[4] Tammy Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, *Blak Inside: 6 Indigenous Plays from Victoria*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2002) 37-69. First produced by Playbox Theatre, dir. John Bolton, musician Don Hopkins, at The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 25 Apr. 2001. The production has toured in Australia and internationally, including to Stables Theatre, Sydney, 17 July 2001; Space Cabaret, Adelaide, 28 May 2002; regional Victoria; Victoria University; Tasmania; NAIDOC Week, Royal Women's Hospital, Carlton, Vic, courtesy of a grant by The Besen Family Foundation, 8 and 9 July 2005; 'Hong Kong 2002' festival; Minneapolis and Boston, 2004.

audience, drama, a singing chorus, ritual transformation and a protagonist who converses with those who died in custody, to tear open to view the destructive effect Australia's criminal justice system is having on Indigenous people – the incarcerated, their families and the community.[5]

The other two plays are by non-Indigenous writers. Within a narrative that borrows from thriller-suspense drama and (apart from one destabilising break in the frame) adopts a linear and realist form, Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day* depicts Australia's frontier past as a place of horrors, where white characters commit atrocities and depredations against Indigenous people and themselves, while fabricating historic records and creating myths to conceal what they are doing.[6] Using two parallel time frames, a minimalist set evoking a Queensland pastoral district, and occasional monologues that alter the tempo of the drama and invite reflection, Katherine Thomson's *Wonderlands* presents a multi-generational struggle for a shared white and black belonging to the land. The drama exposes to scrutiny and repudiation an Australian history of racism, fear, denial and misinformation that drives modern white pastoralists' opposition to Indigenous human rights and land rights. A contemporary white character's significant support for Indigenous rights is enacted as a culmination of a counter-narrative in Australia's past where racism is abhorred. Precedents are revealed in acts of white gratitude to Indigenous people for help in establishing the pastoral industry, and in white voices of opposition to fellow whites who slaughtered

[5] Richard J. Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead*, *Blak Inside.* 215-87. First co-produced by Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Cooperative, Playbox and La Mama, dir. Richard J. Frankland, at Carlton Courthouse, Melbourne, 13 Feb. 2002. Transferred to The Beckett Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 26 Feb. 2002. New production by Company B, Belvoir, dir. Wesley Enoch, at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July 2003.

[6] Andrew Bovell, *Holy Day*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2001). First produced by State Theatre Company of South Australia, dir. Rosalba Clemente, at The Playhouse, Adelaide, 21 Aug. 2001. Toured to Playbox, The Merlyn Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 15 Sep. 2001. New production by Sydney Theatre Company, dir. Ariette Taylor, Wharf 1 Theatre, Sydney, 26 Sept. 2003.

Aboriginal people on the frontier, and, a generation later, forced the removal of remaining Aboriginal people from pastoral properties flourishing on their land.[7]

The four selected plays are among a surging number, which since the 1970s, with a rare few prior to that time, have been bringing to the stage aspects of crises that have affected Australian Indigenous people from 1788 when Europeans invaded their land, claiming it for their own.[8] The plays were chosen for their dramatic power and

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[7] Katherine Thomson, *Wonderlands* (Sydney: Currency, 2004). First produced by HotHouse Theatre, dir. Marion Potts, at The Butter Factory Theatre, Albury/Wodonga, 13 June 2003. Toured to Griffin Theatre Company, at Stables Theatre, Sydney, 16 July 2003.

[8] Works by Indigenous playwrights include: Wesley Enoch after Euripides, *Black Medea* (2000 and 2005); Gulpilil (a.k.a. Gulpilil, David) and Reg Cribb, *Gulpilil* (2004); Louis Nowra and David Page from original concept by David Page, *Page 8* (2004); Noel Tovey, *Little Black Bastard* (2003); Andrea James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!* (2003); John Harding, *Enuff* (2002); Tracey Rigney, *Belonging* (2002); Maryanne Sam, *Casting Doubts* (2002); and Jadah Milroy, *Crow Fire* (2002); Leah Purcell, *Black Chicks Talking* (2002); Scott Rankin and Leah Purcell, *Box the Pony* (1999); Wesley Enoch, *The Sunshine Club* (1999); Jane Harrison, *Stolen* (1998); Deborah Cheetham, *White Baptist ABBA Fan* (1997); David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle, *King Hit* (1997); Jimmy Chi, *Corrugation Road* (1996); Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (1995); Jim Everett, *Changing Time* (1995); Ningali Lawford, *Ningali* (1994); Archie Weller, *Ngoonies* (1994); Eddie Bennell, *My Spiritual Dreaming*, Festival of Perth (1993); Sally Morgan, *Sistergirl* (1992); Richard Walley, *Balaan, Balaan Gwdha* (1992), and *Munjong* (1990); David Milroy, *Wild Cat Falling* (1992); Roger Bennett, *Funerals and Circuses* (1992) and *Up the Ladder* (1990); John Harding, *Up the Road* (1991); Jack Davis, *In Our Town* (1990); *Honey Spot* (1988); *Barungin [Smell the Wind]* (1988); *No Sugar* (1985); *Kullark* (1979); *The Dreamers* (1982); Jimmy Chi and Kuckles, *Bran Nue Dae* (1989); Bob Maza, *The Keepers* (1988); Eva Johnson, *Murras* (1988); *Tjinderella* (1984); Richard Walley, *Coordah [Brother]* (1987); Gerry Bostock, *Here Comes the Nigger* (1976); Robert Merritt, *The Cake Man* (1975), Kevin Gilbert, *The Cherry Pickers* (1971).

Non-Indigenous writers who have represented Aboriginal issues or protagonists in their plays include: Hannie Rayson, *Inheritance* (2003); John Romeril, *Miss Tanaka*, adapted from a story by Xavier Herbert (2001); Ned Manning, *Luck of the Draw* (1999), and *Close to the Bone* (1994); Rodney Hall, *A Return to the Brink* (1999); Julie Janson, *Black Mary* (1996); and *Gunjies* (1993); Nick Parsons, *Dead Heart* (1993); Beatrix Christian, *Inside Dry Water* (1993); Peta Murray, *One Woman's Song* (1993); David Buchanan, *Looking Off The Southern Edge* (1992); Suzanne Spunner, *The Ingkata's Wife* (1990); Louis Nowra, *Crow* (1994); *Radiance* (1993): *Byzantine Flowers* (1989), and *Capricornia*, Adapted from a novel by Xavier Herbert (1988); Ray Mooney, with Tribal Adviser, Gnarnayarrahe Waitairie, *Black Rabbit* (1988); Phil Motherwell, *Steal Away Home* (1988); Gordon Francis, *God's Best Country* (1987); Tony Strachan, *Between the Rock and A Hard Place* (1988), and *State of Shock* (1986); Thomas Keneally, *Bullie's House* (1980); Dorothy Hewett, *The Man from Mukinupin* (1979); Jill

because together they offer a range of dramaturgical strategies for bearing witness to crises affecting Indigenous people, whether transformed to the stage from trauma personally experienced by the writer, as in the case of the plays by Anderson and Frankland, or from mainly researched and intuited material, as in the works by Bovell and Thomson. Both genders are equally represented in this study. Each play has been performed in more than one city or town and has had significant critical attention. Each has been published, an honour not granted the majority of new Australian plays.[9]

Conversations with the Dead and *I Don't Wanna Play House* were chosen for study from a wide field of recent plays by Indigenous writers, amongst them Andrea James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!* (2003), which integrates traditional song in its structure, and interweaves landscape, mythic magic realism, Aboriginal religion and storytelling with the drama of "actual court transcripts" from the recent failed struggle of the Yorta Yorta people for land rights.[10] *Black Chicks Talking* (2002) presents stories of contemporary Indigenous women, researched by Leah Purcell and adapted for the stage by Purcell and Sean Mee.[11] The *Blak Inside* season at Playbox (2002) of which *Conversations with the Dead* and *I Don't Wanna Play House* were a part, included four other plays: John Harding's *Enuff* imagines an ironic dystopia where blacks lose patience and plan an armed uprising against whites for Reconciliation Day.[12] Tracey

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Shearer, *The Foreman* (1977); John Romeril, *Bastardy* (1972); Bill Reed, *Truganinni* (1971); Oriel Gray, *Burst of Summer* (1960); Betty Roland, *Granite Peak* (1957); Frederick Vickers, *Stained Pieces* (1949); Oriel Gray, *Western Limit* (1946); Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Brumby Innes* (1927).

[9] For an indication of the large numbers of new Australian plays not published, see the work of The Australian Script Centre which "collects, catalogues, promotes and distributes unpublished Australian plays and now holds hundreds of scripts." <http://www.ozscript.org/html/about_us.html> (Accessed 13 Mar. 04).

[10] Andrea James, Writer's Statement, *Yanagai! Yanagai!*, (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2003) vii. First co-produced by Playbox and Melbourne Workers Theatre, dir. James, Merlyn Theatre, CUB Malthouse, Melbourne, 10 Sept. 2003.

[11] Leah Purcell and Sean Mee, *Black Chicks Talking* was first produced by La Boite Theatre in assassin. with Bungabura Productions, Optus Playhouse, QPAC, Brisbane, 11 Dec. 2002. Although the script has not been published, Purcell's interviews with nine young Aboriginal women, successful in a variety of professions, have been. Leah Purcell, *Black Chicks Talking* (Sydney: Hodder Headline, 2002).

[12] John Harding, *Enuff*, *Blak Inside.* 1-35.

Rigney's *Belonging* reveals through a linear narrative a schoolgirl's struggle to reconcile two imperfect worlds: her Indigenous community with its valued but in some aspects violently degraded Aboriginal culture; and, the suburbia of her white school friends that may appear on the surface comfortable and desirable, but is revealed as a site of betrayal and prejudice.[13] Maryanne Sam's *Casting Doubts* bubbles subversive humour from its narrative and its metatheatrical interventions, casting doubts on the ethics of those who cast black performers for roles on stage and screen.[14] Jadah Milroy's *Crow Fire* creates worldly and supernatural transformations to embody multiple realities: the perfumed white politician dresses up for the struggle to stop her marriage and good intentions going awry; the double-natured, hallucinatory "White Lady" who embodies the lure of heroin cradles to death the black man from the desert community; and, black Crow, in the author's words, "an omen of death, a cheeky mischief-maker, a messenger, a survivor, a bird—Corvus Orru!" dances the dream of Utopia and reconciliation.[15]

A smaller number of 21st century plays by non-Indigenous writers employing Indigenous characters have as yet been published. Hannie Rayson's *Inheritance* (2003) was considered, but not chosen for this study. Although its themes include race relationships in rural Australia, and conflict over ownership of the family farm results in great loss for Nugget, the sole Indigenous character, the vibrant life of the drama mostly shifts away from Nugget and focuses on the lives of the other ten characters, all of whom are white.[16]

There is an intriguing counterpoint to *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* in a recent work by another non-Indigenous writer, John Romeril's *Miss Tanaka* (2001), adapted from a short story by Xavier Herbert.[17] With its spectacle, puppetry, magical transformations, self-debunking mishaps and enigmatic characters, particularly the eponymous

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[13] Tracey Rigney, *Belonging*, *Blak Inside.* 71-106.

[14] Maryanne Sam, *Casting Doubts*, *Blak Inside.* 107-67.

[15] Jadah Milroy, *Crow Fire*, *Blak Inside.* 172. Milroy, *Crow Fire*, 169-213.

[16] First produced by Melbourne Theatre Company at the Playhouse, Victorian Arts Centre, 5 Mar. 2003. Hannie Rayson, *Inheritance* (Sydney: Currency, 2003).

[17] First produced by Handspan Visual Theatre and Playbox Theatre at The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 21 Feb. 2001. John Romeril, *Miss Tanaka* (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2001).

protagonist, a young shape-shifting Aboriginal/Asian, Romeril's play, set in a mythic 1930s Broome, privileges the ludic. In their texts, Bovell and Thomson privilege not playfulness but the crafting of substantially naturalistic drama. Because a fictionalised interpretation of historic and/or present day crises between blacks and whites in Australia provides the dramatic spine for *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands*, but not for *Miss Tanaka*, where race is much less a determinant of the dramatic action and the behaviour of the characters, Romeril's play has not been included in this study.

A note on the *Conversations with the Dead* texts

For the four selected plays, the performance texts used are the published ones, except for Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*. Analysis is based primarily on the unpublished script from the play's second production, which is the only one that I have seen. It was directed by Wesley Enoch for Company B, Belvoir (Sydney 2003), who kindly provided a copy of the performance script.[18] Reference is also made to the text published by Currency that derives from the premier production, directed by Frankland for Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Cooperative, Playbox and La Mama (Melbourne 2002).[19]

The text used for the 2003 Company B, Belvoir production is considerably shorter than the published version. Changes include the dropping of an opening sequence in which Captain Cook's official orders to take possession of any "uninhabited" country for "the King of Great Britain" are set against an Indigenous perspective that uses interwoven action, song and projected images to challenge the British crown's act of possession. The chorus sings of the blood shed by those who came in the tall ships. A figure throws a spear that shatters an image of Cook's ship. Projected images evoke 200 years of tumultuous change affecting Indigenous people and culminating in the present-day trauma of deaths in custody.[20] The absence of this prologue from the 2003 production does not appear to detract from the impact of that history, because invasion and resistance are present subtextually throughout the play.

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[18] Richard J. Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead*, dir. Wesley Enoch, ts., Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre Performance Script, Sydney, 30 July 2003. Courtesy of Company B, Belvoir. Referred to henceforth as Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script).

[19] Referred to henceforth as Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox).

[20] Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 219-220.

Empire's cruelties are represented metonymically in the gaol that is the locus of the action, while Indigenous experience and resistance to that paradigmatic institution is expressed by the chorus and the struggles of contemporary characters. Other changes to the script for the 2003 production, such as dialogue cuts and the re-shaping and re-ordering of parts of the action, have created, or so it seems from the page, a more tightly focused drama.[21] The more recent text is therefore used as the primary basis for this study, even though it has not been published.

Political and cultural context

Each of the plays attests to harrowing aspects of Australian history that may be sourced in the troubled confluence since 1788 of blacks and whites, two peoples with disparate paradigms and disparate power to enforce or resist encroachment. As Robert Manne elucidates, in the quarter of a century following the demise of the McMahon government in 1972 and the election of the Howard government in 1996, there was "a new Australian consciousness" of the nation's past and of the devastation brought to Aboriginal people.[22] According to Manne, a significant catalyst for this urgently needed change in sensibility was the Australian anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner's 1968 ABC Boyer Lecture, entitled "'The Great Australian Silence,'" where he posited that the nation had developed "'a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale'" and argued that "'[w]e have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.'"[23] The *Holy Day* programme reprints an extract from an essay by Tom Griffiths, who draws on Stanner to explore historic and contemporary constructions of the silence about Aborigines, and the implications for "the white Australian psyche."[24]

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[21] A frequent theatre-goer who saw both productions and with whom I was speaking by chance after I had completed the chapter on *Conversations*, told me that the original production had possibly even greater dramatic and emotional power than the second, although both were intense and cathartic. Personal communication, 22 Oct. 2005.

[22] Robert Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash: on Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal history*, ed. Robert Manne, (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003) 1-3.

[23] W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming: The Boyer Lectures 1968*, "The Great Australian Silence", Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1969, 25, cited in Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 1.

[24] Tom Griffiths, "The Construction of Silence," Programme for *Holy Day*, by Andrew Bovell, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney, 13 Aug 2003, n. pag. First published in Attwood, Bain and S.G. Foster,

Manne argues that Stanner's heralding of the changed consciousness in the nation's understanding of its history, led to landmark shifts in legal and political decision making. Both Manne's examples have a bearing on the plays being studied here. The High Court judgment in the Mabo case (1992) found native title in common law.[25] As the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission elaborates, the High Court "rejected the idea that Australia was *terra nullius* ('land belonging to no one') at the time of European settlement," and "recognised the common law right of Indigenous peoples to land based on their continuing use and connection to land."[26] The import of the High Court's decision is dramatised in *Wonderlands* as a struggle by black, and sympathetic white, Australians against white racist denial of Aboriginal occupancy.[27]

Manne's second example is the inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal children from their communities, commissioned in 1995 under Paul Keating's Labor government, and resulting in the *Bringing Them Home* report.[28] Central to *Holy Day*'s drama is a stolen black child and a white child who is missing.[29] In *Wonderlands*, although given very different treatment, the suffering caused Aboriginal people through the forced removal of their children and the suffering of a white woman because her child has gone "missing" create emotions whose conjunction plays a crucial role in bringing the drama to its climax.[30]

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ed., *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003). Also in *Eureka Street*, March 2003.

[25] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 2-3.

[26] "Social Justice and Human Rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples," 2003, Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/info_sheet.html> accessed 2 Nov. 2005.

[27] See Chapter Two.

[28] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 3-4. See Ronald Darling Wilson, *Bringing Them Home: A Guide to the Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1997, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/> accessed 24 June 2005.

[29] See Chapter One. See Bovell's essay, Andrew Bovell, "A Sophisticated Nation," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney Theatre Company, 2003.

[30] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 61. See Chapter Two.

Two other significant events from the awakening of national consciousness in the 1980s and 1990s to the harm done to Aboriginal people are of relevance. The establishment of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (October 1987) under Prime Minister Hawke led to the employment of Richard Frankland as one of its officers, and subsequently to his writing *Conversations with the Dead* with its stark exposure of the appalling impact the Australian criminal justice system has on Aboriginal people.[31] The other event, the High Court Wik case (1996) which found that Aboriginal Native Title was not extinguished on Pastoral Leases, is significant in Thomson's *Wonderlands* as the non-fictional legal framework within which the characters enact a fictional story of a struggle for land rights by black, and sympathetic white, Australians against white racist pastoralists.[32]

All four plays in this study premiered under the Howard government, which at time of writing (2005) is in its fourth term. In the first year of his Prime Ministership (1996) Howard spoke of a "challenge" facing the nation:

> And that is to ensure that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it.[33]

In 2000 with the nation's centenary of federation scheduled for the following year, "hundreds of thousands of citizens," as Robert Manne describes, "walked across the bridges of Australia's capital cities, as a symbol of their desire for reconciliation."[34] While those who crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge applauded a dot of an

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[31] See Chapter Four.

[32] See Chapter Two. See Henry Reynolds, Introduction, *Wonderlands*, by Katherine Thomson, (Sydney: Currency, 2004) ix-x.

[33] John Howard, "The Liberal Tradition: The Beliefs and Values Which Guide the Federal Government," *Sir Robert Menzies Lecture: The Hon. John Howard, M.P., Prime Minister of Australia*, 18 Nov, 1996, Menzies Lecture Trust, <http://www.menzieslecture.org/1996.html> accessed 10 July 2005. For the Prime Minister's speech for reconciliation that contrasts with Howard's, see Paul Keating, "'Redfern Speech'," *Australian Launch of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People*, Redfern Park, Sydney, 10 Dec, 1992, <http://www.antar.org.au/keating_redfern.html> accessed 26 Feb. 2005.

[34] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 4.

aeroplane writing “Sorry” in white smoke upon the sky,[35] the Prime Minister Howard would only speak of “’regret’” for what had been done to Aboriginal Australians. He continued to refuse to apologise for the nation's past.[36] Manne describes "the Howard years" as a time when “a counter-revolution in sensibility concerning the dispossession of the Aborigines [. . .] was swiftly gathering momentum."[37] Citing a conservative campaign to discredit the findings of the *Bringing Them Home* report into the removal of children, Manne perceives "in the tone of public discourse" a hardening of "attitudes towards the question of historic injustices suffered by the Aboriginal people."[38] *Wonderlands* could be read as a symbolic enactment of non-violent bridge-crossing in which the citizenry, black and white together, overcome prime ministerial opposition with its false and racist interpretation of history, and fulfil the nation’s destiny – a shared belonging to the land.[39]

As Manne attests, controversy about interpretations of Australia’s history intensified with publications of Keith Windschuttle's charges that historians such as Henry Reynolds exaggerated or even fabricated accounts of frontier massacres.[40] The *Holy Day* programme has extracts from an ABC TV debate (2001) where Windschuttle’s accusations are refuted by Reynolds who defends the validity of his research and contends that there was “substantial killing [. . .] as settlers came into Aboriginal country without any respect to their ownership or traditions.”[41] *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* are part of the maelstrom of Australia’s ‘history wars’. Both have characters who testify to white massacres of Indigenous people.

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[35] Personal recollection of ‘The People’s Walk for Reconciliation,’ Sydney, Sunday 28 May 2000. For Thomson’s use of the bridge metaphor in *Wonderlands*, see Conclusion, 182.

[36] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 5.

[37] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 5.

[38] Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 5.

[39] See Conclusion, 182, and Chapter Two.

[40] See Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 5-6. Manne brings together a substantial body of scholarly refutation of Windschuttle’s argument. See Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003). See also Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 2003).

[41] Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle, interview with Tony Jones, "Debate Rages over 'Peaceful' White Settlement: Extract from ABC TV *Lateline*,16 Apr. 2001," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney Theatre Company, 2003. See also Macintyre and Clark, *The History Wars*.

The crisis in Australia's historiography runs contemporaneously with scandalous everyday crises in the lives of Indigenous people in Australia: greatly disproportionate problems of poverty, ill-health, reduced life expectancy and high rates of imprisonment, deaths in custody, infant mortality, domestic violence, unemployment and substance abuse. Tammy Anderson's opening words in *I Don't Wanna Play House* evoke the disruption brought about by acute poverty lived on the margins of Australian society:

> TAMMY. In the first fifteen years of me life I lived in sixteen houses, three caravans and I went to twelve schools.[42]

Such problems, exacerbated by a history of death, dispossession, disruption of communities and culture through relocation, suppression of language and the enforced removal of children, form the background to the plays under discussion.[43] In *I Don't Wanna Play House* Tammy's Dad's description of his capture by "welfare" and his entry into "a life of crime" depict his tragedy as an almost inevitable destiny for an impoverished Aboriginal youth in a denigrated community:

> DAD. When I was a kid I hated goin' to school, I was always pissin' off. . . I'd be out knockin' off the milk money and the paper round money, anything I could get me hands on really… And when I'd get home I'd have ta give the old man half … If I didn't have anything…
>
> Welfare came and put me in a boys' home. I was in and outta there for seven years…[44]

Australia imprisons Indigenous people in greatly disproportionate numbers. In programme notes for *Conversations with the Dead*, Associate Professor Chris Cunneen, Director, Institute of Criminology, University of Sydney Law School, outlines the work of the 1987-1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and scarifies Australian governments [he uses the plural] for their failure to implement the far-reaching changes recommended to reduce the disproportionate representation of Indigenous people in prison and to turn around the "brutality, neglect and racism [which] continue to be hallmarks of the criminal justice system".

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[42] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 43.

[43] For example, for evidence of the cruelties and dislocation inflicted on Aboriginal people through the forced removal of children, see Wilson, *Bringing Them Home.*

[44] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 44.

Cunneen subsumes debates about the ownership of history and policies which adversely affect Indigenous people:

> At a broader level, the last seven years [1996-2003] has seen a move away from the recognition of the impact of colonisation and racism on Indigenous people. The inability to respect an Indigenous right to self-determination, the inability to apologise for past historical injustices, the attempt to write history as a story of great imperial achievement means that the trauma of the past will continue to manifest itself behind the bars and bolted doors of Australian gaols.[45]

In contrast Prime Minister Howard affirms a version of history that constructs Europe's occupancy of Australia as unashamedly moral: "I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement." The Prime Minister presents his advocacy of opposition to a "'black arm band' view of our past" as entirely compatible with his policy of "a practical programme of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage."[46]

In programme notes for *Conversations with the Dead* Frankland sources "attitude" as "the biggest killer", whose consequences have been the dispossession, killing and rape of Indigenous people, the taking of their children and the attempt to silence their voices and denigrate their culture:

> Attitude, societal and individual, acquiescence of politicians and those that hold the wealth and power. That is what causes it [the killing] and is the prime reason it continues.[47]

Reviewing Robert Manne (ed.), *Whitewash: On Keith Windshuttle's "Fabrication of Australian History*", and Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Tony Birch argues that conservative political leaders are elevating a history construed through ideological spectacles into national myth that distorts public discourse, fortifies neo-colonial power and sanctifies punitive actions against despised groups of people:

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[45] Chris Cunneen, "Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Background Notes, 7 July 2003," Programme for *Conversations with the Dead*, by Richard J. Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July 2003.

[46] Howard, "Beliefs and Values."

[47] Richard J Frankland, "Writer's Note," Programme for *Conversations*, Company B, Belvoir, 2003.

> Both *Whitewash* and *The History Wars* suggest that the discipline of history in Australia is a battlefield [note the martial metaphor] for the nation's hearts and minds. But, more explicitly, it is a plaything for particular ideological forces. At present, we have a group of populist conservatives waging not a history war but a propaganda one – and a cultural and political struggle. It is an issue for all of us, not just historians.[48]

Don Watson analyses how Prime Minister John Howard denigrates language itself by painting "invented virtues" over a mythic version of Australian history:

> Myths are tempting to those who are in a position to manipulate their fellow human beings, because a myth is sacred, and what is sacred cannot be questioned. That's where their power comes from. They simplify and provide meaning without the need of reason. [. . .]. They stifle doubt and provide relaxation and comfort.[49]

In his marginalia Watson quotes the dramatist Eugene Ionesco, a wild debunker of trumpeting authority: "'Men hide behind their clichés.'"[50] In *Rhinoceros* Ionesco makes incarnate the thick hide of conservative-populist cliché. When Daisy and Berenger are the only humans left, Daisy longs to enter the rhinoceros world:

> Those are the real people. They look happy. They're content to be what they are. They don't look insane. They look very natural. They were right to do what they did.[51]

Her reward for relinquishing doubt as she moves to take her place in the herd is to hear their roaring as singing: "They are like gods."[52]

The genesis of the plays

The plays from the four selected writers and their ancillary texts, such as interviews or programme notes, reveal a desire to challenge the hegemony of the myth of a god-like whiteness whose sacralised history has the right to impose silence on

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[48] Tony Birch, "The Abacus of History," Rev. of *The History Wars*, by Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, and *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Robert Manne, *Australian Book Review*, 255 (2003): 10.

[49] Don Watson, *The Decay of Public Language* (Sydney: Random House, 2003) 106.

[50] Watson, *The Decay of Public Language* 107.

[51] Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*, trans. Derek Prouse, *Penguin Plays: Rhinoceros; The Chairs; The Lesson* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1962) 119-21.

[52] Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*, 119-21.

others. Each playwright gives a particular personal, contemporary and historical context for their work and a conscious choice to bear witness to their own experience and their own response to Australia's conflicted past.

Tammy Anderson describes the genesis of *I Don't Wanna Play House* which deals with domestic violence, alcoholism and sexual abuse of children: "[. . .] I was watching my children playing in the backyard one day, [. . .] and my daughter asked me to give her a 'whizzy'. It all came back to me. Secrets. Secrets. I put pen to paper [. . .]."[53]

In *Conversations with the Dead* Richard Frankland draws on his own anguished experience working with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and on the trauma that incarceration and death bring to individuals, families and communities: "In some ways we searched for justice, searched for a fair go [. . .]. In reality we only stumbled from one hurting point to another."[54] The emotion Frankland describes is given vivid expression onstage, when the protagonist's first words to the audience as he stumbles into the morning are, "I'm looking for hanging points."[55] As the character's actions make clear, "hanging points" are any features in a cell, or elsewhere, that could be used to anchor a noose.

For Anderson and Frankland, the traumas to which they testify in *Conversations with the Dead* and *I Don't Wanna Play House* have particular resonance as a transformation into performance of lived experiences of crisis, traumas personally experienced by the writer and shared with others in their communities. *Wonderlands* and *Holy Day* are fiction. Thomson and Bovell each mark her/his play's genesis in a compelling idea to create a drama from conflict rooted in Australia's unresolved colonial history. As Bovell puts it:

> Our past hangs over us like a shadow. *Holy Day* takes us into that shadow but it does so only to invite a consideration of its legacy.[56]

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[53] Tammy Anderson, Author's Notes. *I Don't Wanna Play House*, *Blak Inside.* 41.

[54] Frankland, "Writer's Note," Programme for *Conversations*, Company B, Belvoir, 2003.

[55] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 2.

[56] Andrew Bovell, Playwright's Note, *Holy Day* iii. Also incorporated by Bovell in "A Sophisticated Nation," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney Theatre Company, 2003 n. pag.

Verghis, who interviewed Thomson prior to the 2003 Sydney season of *Wonderlands,* reported the play's genesis in Thomson's desire "to unearth the dramatic heart of the native title debate."[57] The play "rose slowly" from Thomson's archival research and her journeys, physical and emotional, to the outback, "meeting remote Aboriginal communities [and] building the trust of old tribal 'aunties.'" The graziers and pastoralists with whom Thomson spoke were "often suspicious and angry" and "totally perplexed" by a land rights claim. For Thomson, Verghis writes, the play "is simply a story of country" fought over by opposing sides, each with a deep sense of belonging to that land:

> 'I'm not a country person, so I find it hard to understand,' [Thomson] says, 'But what I do feel is that our history, in all its inspiration and shame, is something that non-Aboriginal Australians should make an effort to understand.'[58]

On interviewing Bovell for the forthcoming Sydney Theatre Company production of *Holy Day*, Morgan wrote: "Andrew Bovell believes it is time for white writers to tackle Aboriginal issues." Bovell had begun the play in the 1980s, but had put it away, having felt "strong calls from Indigenous people for white writers and artists to back off. A decade on he feels there's a different cultural sensitivity. In the 1980s he wondered how a white writer could tell this tale. Now he wonders how a white writer cannot do so." Bovell grew up in south-west Western Australia, ten kilometres from the site of a massacre, about which he knew nothing until he was at university. "Yet," says Bovell, "the resonance of that history lived in that community in the tension between black and white. [. . .] But nobody had the language or stories to deal with it." [59]

In creating *Holy Day* as a challenge to that absence of discourse about the trauma inflicted on Indigenous people, Bovell found a focus in the lost child in the Australian landscape:

> When I started to look at the mythology of the lost child in Australia, all the representations of the lost child were white [. . .]. but what we as a

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[57] Sharon Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 July 2003, Metropolitan: 12.

[58] Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[59] Andrew Bovell, interview with Joyce Morgan, "Child's Play Defines Shadow of Our Culture," *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 20 Sept. 2002, Metropolitan: 16.

> culture don't seem to be able to own at the moment is that the most potent lost child or stolen child is actually black.[60]

In creating their fictitious narratives, the non-Indigenous writers, Bovell and Thomson, do not draw merely on abstract research. Both affirm personal experience as part of their creation of their play. Verghis reports Thomson's revelation of her transformative emotional experience from the two years spent travelling through outback Queensland to research *Wonderlands*: "She came away changed, she says quietly."[61]

Although Bovell's comments on the genesis of his play appear less revelatory of personal transformation, he describes the effect that the unacknowledged local history of massacre had on the white community of his youth: "[. . .] we carried it in our soul."[62] Bovell expresses an urgent conviction that non-Indigenous Australians must engage emotionally and cognitively with their experience of being part of the dispossessing culture:

> There are these wonderful stories now emerging from Indigenous culture that are illuminating their experience for us, but at the same time, in understanding their experiences, we've got to do the hard work of understanding our own.
>
> Why were these atrocities committed? Why did this kind of dispossession take place? We have to address it and we have to address it in many different ways. I want to be able to look Aboriginal people in the eye, but until white Australian culture addresses the past symbolically as well as practically, I don't think we can.[63]

Bovell suggests in an interview with May-Brit Akerholt that prior to the recent rise of Indigenous writers in Australian theatres, a development he welcomes as "exhilarating", it was necessary for white artists with their greater access to resources to make an active choice to hold back and "clear a cultural space that Indigenous people could fill." While concerned at the danger of "subtle appropriation" by white writers' "using Aboriginal stories to adorn and enrich our own narrative," Bovell

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[60] Bovell, "Child's Play Defines Shadow," 16.

[61] Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[62] Andrew Bovell, interview with May-Brit Akerholt, "The Evolution of the Play," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney Theatre Company, 2003.

[63] Bovell, quoted in Bron Sibree, "One Man's Unsettling View of the Australian Frontier," *Canberra Times* 15 July 2003: 9.

believes that now there are white writers conscious of “the earlier mythology of Terra Nullius” and therefore “able to acknowledge the level of dispossession and describe it as genocide – or at least many of us are.” For Bovell interested white artists “must talk about it [the genocide], must account for it.” [64]

Productions and venues

Because I was able to see each of the four selected plays in 2003, the first year of my Masters’ candidature, this study draws on those live performances as well as on the written playtexts. A comparative examination of the venues and promotional material indicates that the ambience and ‘culture’ of the theatre presenting the work has the power to affect the way each of the plays is produced, billed, performed and received.

Company B Belvoir Street, where *Conversations with the Dead* was performed in the ‘Upstairs’ Theatre, has a reputation for staging challenging new work, as did Nimrod Theatre Company who were the building’s previous occupants.[65] Belvoir Street Theatre with its padded bench seats and its location in the inner Sydney suburb of Surry Hills where it is hemmed in by unpretentious high-density housing contrasts with the chic armchair comfort and higher ticket prices of the Sydney Theatre Company’s Wharf where Andrew Bovell’s *Holy Day* was staged.[66] Above the timber walkway that takes Sydney Theatre Company patrons the length of the converted wharf to the glass walled foyer furnished with restaurant and balcony overlooking Sydney Harbour, great banners were hanging as if for a festival. The images in perfect colour were of the latest motor-car from Jaguar, Sydney Theatre Company’s principal sponsor for 2003. The captions proclaimed “The Art of Performance”, as if exhorting arriving and retreating tides of customers not to take what they might see in the theatre too seriously, because the ‘real’ stage is one’s personal creation,

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[64] Bovell, "Evolution of the Play."

[65] The Belvoir Street Theatre building was formerly the home of Nimrod Theatre Company who converted it from a salt factory. See Julian Meyrick, *See How It Runs: Nimrod and the New Wave* (Sydney: Currency, 2002) 92.

[66] Production by Sydney Theatre Company, dir. Ariette Taylor, Wharf 1 Theatre, opened 13 Aug. 2003.

attainable by purchasing the branded experience through which one chooses to perform oneself to oneself and to others.[67]

As a member of the Australian Writers' Guild I was able to take advantage of a Sydney Theatre Company offer of tickets to *Holy Day* at a fraction of the regular price. The most likely explanation of this rare generosity is that the Company sought urgent promotion of the play to cover the embarrassment of too many empty seats. Some regular patrons may have chosen to stay away from a work that the Artistic Director, Robyn Nevin billed in the subscription brochure as:

> [. . .] isolating a dark moment in our history from the 19th century Australian bush landscape, in a remarkable play which compels us to pause and look back before we move forward, a play I believe we had to do.[68]

Although elsewhere in the brochure the content of the play is elaborated, Nevin in her introduction avoids direct mention of the clash between Aboriginal and white Australia that is at the core of *Holy Day*. In other promotional material Nevin is again adamant that she feels compelled to do the play.[69] Her tone seems almost to apologise to subscribers for her choice as she explains that Bovell's play "raises issues about our past and the kind of past we [white Australia] feel uncomfortable about."[70] It is as if she must tread warily when presenting her patrons with work that touches on difficult issues of Australia's black and white history.[71] Her words seem designed to calm an anticipated subscriber anxiety about that history by shrinking its

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[67] Jaguar's logo and caption, "The Art of Performance", appeared on the front cover of the company's annual brochure. *Sydney Theatre Company 2003*, (Sydney, Austral.: Sydney Theatre Company, 2002). For a study of the development of corporate branding as the marketing of "experience" and "lifestyle" see Naomi Klein, *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2000) 21.

[68] *Sydney Theatre Company 2003*, n. pag.

[69] "Sydney Theatre Company: Rich Pickings," *Sydney Morning Herald* 20 Sept. 2002, Special Promotion 2003 Sydney Theatre Company Season Guide: Special Supplement, n. pag.

[70] Sydney Theatre Company, "Rich Pickings."

[71] For commentary by Nevin on the pressure on the STC "to produce productions that will earn significant amounts of money at the box office" and on her calculation in mounting the season that "big" earners for the Company such as David Williamson's *The Club* "make it possible for us to do *Holy Day* [. . .] and other plays that will not achieve high income at the box office", see Penny Brown, "Nevin Pledges Plays `We Need to Confront'," *The Australian* 20 Sept. 2002: 15.

pain to an isolated “dark moment” that may be dealt with merely by pausing and looking back before resuming forward momentum.

In Company B Belvoir Street’s much more modestly presented brochure for its season that included *Conversations with the Dead*, Artistic Director Neil Armfield makes a virtue of the theatre’s focus on work that faces political issues. Deploring national and international war- and fear-mongering and the local climate of “rising aggression as the talk-back jocks encourage the worst and most shameful tendencies of the electorate” and Australian Government policies turn desperate refugees into a “faceless” enemy, Armfield offers theatre as an opportunity to contemplate and wonder at the complexities and gift of existence and “the clumsy power of the things that would threaten it”:[72]

> In the 2003 season we have a series of shows that deal with crises in society or community, and how the processes of history and human struggle work to cleanse and renew a damaged world.[73]

Armfield bills *Conversations with the Dead* as “a deeply personal work about the legacy of Aboriginal deaths in custody,” and urges Belvoir Street’s patrons to experience theatre that intertwines entertainment, imaginative play, progressive political awareness and the optimistic quest for meaning and renewal through understanding of self and other:

> So come to the theatre and leave for a time the defensive posturing of those who are guiding our future. Come and find some meaning, some calm, some release, a laugh, a place where your imagination can play and you can indulge in the complications of empathy: perhaps the most valuable of all human capacities.[74]

A similar optimism about theatre’s role in promoting a questioning of contemporary government policies through the filter of a humanitarian and creative consciousness is evident in the Griffin Theatre Company’s promotion of the six plays in its 2003 season, one of which was the touring HotHouse Theatre Company’s production of *Wonderlands*. Describing the “distinctively different” works in the season as having “a

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[72] Neil Armfield, "Message from Neil," *2003 Belvoir Street Theatre* (Sydney: Company B Belvoir, 2002) 7.

[73] Armfield, "Message," 8.

[74] Armfield, "Message," 8.

deep vein running through them to do with the clash of belief systems or cultures," Artistic Director Ros Horin, like Armfield, emphasises the positive role of artists in exploring hard questions about human connections and divisions that have far-reaching political and social impact:

> [. . .] What with the shock jocks and some politicians whipping up fear and prejudice – and each new act of terrorism sending us ducking for cover behind the safe and familiar – it's up to our artists to probe the difficult questions. How do we bridge the gaps – 'translate' between different cultural groups – and break down the barriers – so that we can live in harmony. [sic][75]

Horin describes *Wonderlands* as "a deeply human, insightful drama about the cultural divide between pastoralists and Indigenous Australians over the simmering issue of Native Title."[76] A prolific, highly acclaimed writer, Katherine Thomson has had work produced in a wide range of venues, including prestigious halls like the Sydney Opera House and by producers such as the Sydney Theatre Company.[77] When *Wonderlands*, commissioned by HotHouse, came to Sydney it was not to glamorous waterfront, but to the Griffin Theatre Company's Stables in Darlinghurst, a few steps from the hub of Sydney's red-light district, Kings Cross. A maximum of 120 patrons are able to cram onto padded benches in two raked tiers facing one another across the intimate triangular stage. The Stables Theatre, named after the building's origins, was once home to the late Nimrod Theatre Company who established its reputation as a site for challenging new work.[78] Griffin pride themselves on being "[. . .] the only theatre company in Sydney entirely dedicated to the development and production of new Australian writing for the stage." Griffin describe themselves as "one of the great

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[75] "6 Playwrights, 6 World Premieres, 6 Reasons to Subscribe to Griffin in 2003," *Media Release*, Nov. 2002, Griffin Theatre Company, <http://www.griffintheatre.com.au/> accessed 20 Oct. 2004.

[76] "6 Playwrights."

[77] The Sydney Theatre Company produced Thomson's *Navigating* (1998) and *Harbour* (2004). For production details of Thomson's and other Australian playwrights' work see "AusStage: Gateway to the Australian Performing Arts," AusStage, <http://www.ausstage.edu.au/> accessed 24 Sept. 2005.

[78] Nimrod used to pack 140 into the tiny theatre. For a description and images of the theatre at the time of Nimrod's opening there in 1970, see Meyrick, *See How It Runs* 22-27.

engine rooms of the Australian theatre, working in innovation and as a gateway for new ideas and talented new artists."[79]

When the Playbox production of Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* (2001), a mono-drama with songs where the author plays all fourteen characters accompanied by a musician, toured to Sydney later that year, its venue was The Stables.[80] The Griffin Theatre Company's "Media Release" for the season describes Anderson as "from the Palawa people of Tasmania" and extols her autobiographical play for its theatricality and for the optimism of "her song of overcoming horrendous obstacles":

> *I Don't Wanna Play House* is a tale of an indomitable spirit wrought with love and tremendously coarse humour. [. . .].
>
> With disarming and often shocking honesty Anderson tells of a childhood only a great spirit could survive.[81]

This conception of theatre as a site for affirmation of the human spirit and for exploring the need to strengthen connection with others is reiterated in Anderson's own words, as quoted by Griffin Theatre Company:

> Often the play is through the eyes of a child with all the happiness and possibilities that a child embodies. It's about keeping going and striving for hope and above all, that the family stays together.[82]

Although I missed seeing *I Don't Wanna Play House* in its 2001 Sydney season, I was fortunate to be in the audience for the performance Anderson gave for the 6th Women Playwrights International Conference, Manila, 17 Nov. 2003.[83] The

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[79] "Griffin Theatre Company," Griffin Theatre Company, <http://www.griffintheatre.com.au/> accessed 24 Sept. 2005.

[80] Playbox production, dir. John Bolton. Stables Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company, Sydney, 17 July 2001.

[81] "Griffin Theatre Presents the Playbox Production of *I Don't Wanna Play House*," *Media Release*, May 2001, Griffin Theatre Company, <http://www.griffintheatre.com.au/> accessed 20 Oct. 2004.

[82] Anderson, quoted in "Griffin Theatre Presents the Playbox Production of *I Don't Wanna Play House*."

[83] WPI Philippines' 6th Women Playwrights International Conference, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Manila, Nov. 14-20, 2003. In the absence of the musician who would have been on stage with her had it been a full production, Anderson provided her own accompaniment, picking up her guitar to play as needed.

Conference programme describes *I Don't Wanna Play House* as “often heartbreaking as Anderson relives the abuse she and her family endured but the dominant note is love.”[84]

Each of four plays, *Wonderlands, Holy Day, Conversations with the Dead* and *I Don't Wanna Play House*, are billed in tones that urge potential audiences to value theatre not only as art, but for its power – indeed, its obligation – to tackle painful subject matter that has contemporary political and social relevance. This traumatic material is variously expressed as work that makes (white) theatre goers “feel uncomfortable” about their nation’s history; raises “difficult” questions about divisive cultural attitudes and public policies; challenges aggressive governmental and other “clumsy power that would threaten [the gift of existence]”; or, enacts personal revelation of “horrendous” abuse suffered by an Indigenous child.

Each billing presents the theatrical performance of trauma as a preferred path to the overcoming of crises. By speaking of drama such as *Conversations with the Dead* as if its vital quality is transcendence, Armfield at Company B Belvoir Street grants theatre the status of teleological signifier able to “deal with [. . .] how the processes of history and human struggle work to cleanse and renew a damaged world.”[85]

For Horin and Griffin Theatre Company the healing qualities of theatre are exemplified in the two plays performed there. *Wonderlands* offers “insight” into how humanity may bridge cultural divisions. In *I Don't Wanna Play House* “the great spirit” of the protagonist/performer Anderson overcomes abuse through hope, familial connection and love.

Nevin’s promotion of *Holy Day* at the Sydney Theatre Company as “the dark moment” from the past that “compels us to [. . .] look back before we move forward”[86] invites the potential audience to freeze the play in the past, and to view its

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[84] Synopsis: *I Don't Wanna Play House*, from a Review of Aaron Jelbart, *The 6th Women Playwrights International Conference: Programme of Activities*, (Manila, Philippines: WPI Philippines, 14-20 Nov. 2003).

[85] Armfield. For an understanding of teleology as an imputation of a goal towards which an abstracted human experience is deemed to be progressing I have been assisted by Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996) 131-34.

[86] *Sydney Theatre Company 2003*, frontispiece.

depicted violent destruction of Aboriginal people from within the reassurance offered by a metatheatrical narrative of national progress. Yet that is the very narrative whose silencing of Indigenous voices Bovell's play seems intended to confront.

Performance as testimony

These acts of theatre bearing witness to suffering of Australian Indigenous people, are appearing at a time of searing contention, nationally and globally, over what the past is, how it affects the present and who are the authentic bearers of witness. Developing their theory of testimony in the late twentieth century, Felman, literary critic/teacher, and Laub, psychoanalyst, deem the contemporary cruelties to be of such measure and the need to bear witness so compelling, that Felman marks our time as "the era of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima, of Vietnam – [. . .] the age of testimony." Such an age demands the bearing /bringing forth of witness.[87] Such an age demands illumination that has not previously been brought forth – illumination that reaches people, not merely cognitively, but through "the intelligence of the emotion." The viewers or receivers of a work of art that bears witness become participants in that witness. The act of testimony creates "an effective and affective shock that resonates [. . .] in the whole body [. . .]."[88]

Testimony, to be effective in breaking the silence / and thereby opening the possibility of healing, bears witness, as does teaching and psychoanalysis, not as a passive transfer of knowledge, but in a way that is "*performative*." Something happens, Felman argues, emotionally as well as cognitively. Testifier and receiver "*live through a crisis*." They experience the encounter as "surprising, cognitively dissonant," and "not just congruent with everything that they have learned beforehand" (original emphasis).[89] The "existential crisis in all those involved" is crucial to the transformation that is testimony.[90]

Felman analyses Carl Lanzmann's 1985 documentary film, *Shoah*, a syncresis of interviews with people bearing witness to their experience of the Holocaust. To avoid the overwhelming emotion of the work crushing him, or others, Lanzmann

[87] Felman and Laub 53.

[88] Felman and Laub 239.

[89] Felman and Laub 53.

[90] Felman and Laub xvi.

deliberately excluded from the film such overtly emotive elements as archival images of the camps and the victims. Yet, paradoxically, the film is resoundingly effective in its generation of affect even though Lanzmann set out "to reach people through their intelligence."[91] Felman sees Lanzmann's work as transmitting "the intelligence of the emotion" which is equivalent to bringing "the darkness of the inside to the physical light of the outside." Intelligence for Felman is a "physical enlightenment", a literal shedding of light.[92]

The experience of Lou Bennett, who played the women characters (Lily, Wife, Aunty, Spirit Woman, Glenda and Jane) in the original production of *Conversations with the Dead* (Melbourne 2002), is illustrative of theatre's power to tell stories that, in Felman's sense, shed light through an affective and cognitive crisis that resonates in the whole body. As Bennett attests, *Conversations* stirred an "exhausting and emotionally exhilarating" tumult of pain and outpouring grief that was transformative for herself and others in the cast and audience:

> For a lot of my aunties and uncles – elderly women and men in our community – it was too much them coming to hear these stories [of self-harm and death in the gaol], and so they had to leave after the first act.
>
> In many cases after we finished [performing] we'd go out to meet them and we'd be in tears, [. . .] consoling and crying and talking with them. It was exhausting… emotionally exhilarating and exhausting. I haven't cried so much even in my own personal life as when I performed all of the women characters.
>
> It had thirty-three scenes. I was in eighteen, and was crying in about twelve – or being in a painful emotion. It was cathartic for a lot of us.[93]

The play brings together playwright, cast and audience as owners of, and witnesses to, the truths of their experiences. As the playwright Frankland told interviewer Judy Adamson at the time of the Sydney production (2003), the cast of *Conversations* "has an 'ownership' of the work [that comes] from their own families' experiences of death,

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[91] Felman and Laub 204

[92] Felman and Laub 239 footnote 19.

[93] Lou Bennett, personal communication (my transcription), at 6th Women Playwrights International Conference, Manila, 19 Nov. 2003. My meeting with Bennett was fortuitous. I did not conduct formal interviews as part of this study. With hindsight, I feel that it would have been valuable to do so.

jail and assimilation."[94] Lou Bennett told journalist Sophie Best at a rehearsal on the eve of the play's première, that she has had family members die in custody, and others from her extended family "'taken away,'" and that in exposing the "scars" *Conversations* brings "healing":

> These are real stories – they're so raw, they touch a nerve, and I feel like we've honoured these people and these stories.[95]

As Bennett makes clear, both the stories and the people who own them are honoured in the play's bearing of witness that recognises and acknowledges, in public, those stories' truths. Art, writes Felman, is a vital way of making known what has previously been hidden:

> [. . .] art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times* [original emphasis].[96]

The major task of this study is to examine how the four selected plays bear artistic witness to trauma resulting from empire's occupation of Indigenous land and the consequent imposition on Indigenous people of abusive power by a (white) state or individuals. Each play constructs its own version of Australian history and landscape, whether through the fiction of Bovell's *Holy Day* and Thomson's *Wonderlands*, or the reframed autobiographical experience of Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* and Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House*. The plays bear witness to suffering from which a privileged non-Indigenous Australian, such as myself, is most likely protected.

Significant differences are found in how the staged trauma is depicted and how it affects characters of particular race, gender and age. In the plays by the non-Indigenous writers, *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands*, even though the Indigenous characters are passionate in their pursuit of their rights, the action is largely driven by the white characters, while the desire of the Indigenous characters remains

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[94] Judy Adamson, "Lost Voices: Ninety-One Lives, One Play and a Nation's Shame," *Sydney Morning Herald* 26-27 July 2003, Metropolitan: 5.

[95] Lou Bennett, quoted in Sophie Best, "Singing out the Stories of the Dead," *Age* 13 Feb. 2002, The Culture: 6.

[96] Felman and Laub xx.

trammelled within a narrative arc that effects closure upon its own peculiar version of Australian history – a dystopia in *Holy Day* and a utopia in *Wonderlands*. In *Conversations with the Dead* and *I Don't Wanna Play House* the Indigenous characters are constructed from desire. The desire of the Indigenous characters rages and storms. It is not confined to good and wise behaviour. Its expression is not tidied and sanitised as it is in *Wonderlands*. It is not left without a tongue as it is in *Holy Day*. In the plays by the Indigenous writers, Indigenous desire is gifted the strength to drive the action.

'Desire' in the sense in which it is being used here may be thought of as synonymous with a character's power to feel, recognise and act upon a 'truth' of bodily experience. My use of the term 'desire' is not to be thought of as confined to what *OED* describes as a "specific" meaning of "desire": "Physical appetite; lust."[97] Rather, I am using the word 'desire' to express the longing or yearning of a character to express her/his self.

Bennett speaks of the performance of *Conversations* as an "honouring" of people and their stories of grievous suffering inflicted upon them. The power of artistic witness to 'honour' people and their experience of trauma lies, I suggest, in its power to represent the *fullness* of truth of felt experience. If desire is confined to fit an arbitrary code such as race or gender, even if that confined desire is benignly constructed and passionately expressed, its testimony will be confined. Its witness will not honour the story or the people to whom it belongs. A confined desire bearing witness will not be what Felman calls an "encounter with the real."[98]

As well as the construction of race and gender, the extent to which the plays possess or dispossess Western theatrical conventions affects how the testimony is experienced and whether that witness is able to challenge preconceptions. As Felman puts it:

> Testimony cannot be authentic without that crisis, which has to break and to transvaluate previous categories and previous frames of reference.[99]

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[97] *OED*.

[98] Felman and Laub xx.

[99] Felman and Laub 54.

In conservative, naturalistic Western theatre, the audience are accustomed to the verisimilitude of an onstage world. Although they remain sophisticated observers of Coleridge's famous "willing suspension of disbelief [. . .] which constitutes poetic faith,"[100] they may nonetheless cease to re/mark that what they are observing is not, in fact, a copy of reality. As Ubersfeld's analysis of "theatrical illusion" posits, the spectators take back into their own world a "passivity" garnered from the perfect illusory one where they could change nothing.[101] The "powerless voyeur" sees onstage a "picture" of social and economic relationships between people "constructed in conformity with the way a given social stratum sees itself." The spectators know that it is not a "true picture of the world," but have entered a denial of that truth:

> [T]he illusion in its perfection offers them [the spectators] the model for a certain attitude towards the world. It is not objective relationships that are mimed, but rather a certain type of representation of those relationships and the attitude that flows from it.[102]

Following Ubersfeld, I argue that rather than opening a way for Felman's "performative crisis" that breaks and re-evaluates "previous categories and previous frames of reference," naturalistic theatre makes it difficult for the spectator to see that relationships between characters, such as raced or gendered ones, are not 'real' but constructed. Examination of how the plays by the black and white writers disrupt – or fail to disrupt – the pretence that naturalistic theatre is a copy of reality, is a crucial part of my study. In the white playwrights' work, the acceptance – for the most part – of naturalistic conventions, appears to mimic a failure to overturn the raced, gendered and classed power relationships that support white control of the destiny of the Aboriginal characters and of the narrative.

It should be noted here that Bovell and Thomson are skilled dramatists who endow their characters with complex qualities that forestall their simplistic labelling as stereotypes. Both create their own cracks in theatre conventions through which to make direct address to the audience. Both writers, however, create in their plays,

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[100] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001) 677 (Ch.14).

[101] Ubersfeld 25.

[102] Ubersfeld 26.

variations of inherited colonial relationships of power. What is emphasised in those power relationships is very different: in *Holy Day* white women are malign, while in *Wonderlands* white women learn benevolence. Yet in both plays, the white women control the destiny of the black women. Drawing on Penelope Ingram's work, I suggest that whiteness in both plays is given 'invisibility' as the standard against which others are constructed as copies of the 'real' who lack the power of the 'real' and its desire.

Ingram writes:

> Because they are ostensibly without race, not simply one race among many, whites have come to represent the standard against which all else is defined.[103]

The plays by Bovell and Thomson invite belief in theatre-as-reality as an ostensible challenge to empire's version of itself. Yet their naturalistic drama may bolster "poetic faith" in versions of history remade as masquerade, whose concealed premise remains white desire enacted through white power. My study of the work of the black playwrights, Anderson and Frankland, reveals them to be ripping the curtain of invisibility from Western neo-conservative pretence that the white body, language, imagery and empire are the measure against which others are found lacking.

"Counter-hegemonic possibilities" abound in theatre, Tompkins argues.[104] With its multi-layered elements, from lighting, set and sound, to the living bodies of performers, their costuming, gestures and dialogue, the theatre offers multiple opportunities for a disjunction of theatrical elements, creating irony or revealing the restrictive, unrepresentative nature of stereotyping.[105] I argue that it is the Indigenous writers, Frankland and Anderson, who take advantage of these qualities of theatre to expose the lie of the invisibility of whiteness.

Through their own combination of Indigenous and Western performance traditions *Conversations with the Dead* and *I Don't Wanna Play House* each disrupt the frame

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[103] Penelope Ingram, "Racializing Babylon: Settler Whiteness and the 'New Racism'," *New Literary History*, 32 (2001): 158.

[104] Joanne Tompkins, "Re-Orienting Australian Drama: Staging Theatrical Irony," *Ariel - A Review of International English Literature*, 25 4 (1994): 120.

[105] Tompkins, "Re-Orienting Australian Drama," 119-20.

of theatre as empire's mirror. Dramaturgies such as Frankland's magic realism and circular or ritual time, and Anderson's virtuoso polyvocal monologue and song, place these texts in a strong gathering of work by postcolonial writers who disrupt white-centric theatrical, cultural and political assumptions. Frankland and Anderson are, to use Coleridge's words, "awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom."[106]

In its search for any shocks against custom that the selected plays may deliver, this study has been informed by Howard Barker's argument that theatre is "not a moral place, as our ancestors knew well when they intermittently banned it."[107] Scathing of "a humanist theatre" where "writers are smitten with the idea of themselves as educators" and "have made a theatre of morals almost as rigid as the medieval stage and have contributed to a new style of social conformism,"[108] Barker extols theatre as an act "without a conscience" that takes writer, actor and audience to "wildness and barbarism" where "we glimpse the landscape of a pre-moral world and are allowed to run in it."[109]

Barker's apparently irreconcilable poles of an affronting "conscience-free theatre" and a moralistic Brechtian "telling" would appear to be bridged by acclaimed Australian theatre director Neil Armfield. Quoting a line of dialogue from the film *Elizabeth* Armfield claims for theatre the potential "'to touch the divine, here on earth.'" In so doing, Armfield argues, theatre "can reconcile, and teach, and bind and transport, and give us great pleasure."[110]

If Barker is right in its condemnation of the life-diminishing conformity taught by theatre whose aim is to 'teach',[111] theatre in Armfield's model may be condemned to repeat what Nietzsche describes as "the obligation to use the customary metaphors,

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[106] Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria," 677 (Ch.14).

[107] Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd ed. (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester UP, 1997) 76.

[108] Barker, *Arguments* 76-77.

[109] Barker, *Arguments* 77.

[110] Neil Armfield, "Australian Culture: Creating It and Losing It," *The Fourth Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture*, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 9 Nov. 1998, Currency, <http://www.currency.com.au/> accessed 6 May 2003.

[111] See Barker, 126-27.

or, to put it in moral terms, the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention … and in a style that is binding for all."[112]

Kathleen Mary Fallon slammed Nick Enright's *Cloudstreet*, adapted from Tim Winton's novel and directed by Armfield, for its failure to disrupt the conventions of a colonialism that it refigured as an act of assumption of whiteness and blackness into a "'spiritual'" oneness:

> [I]t slumps back into trite 'spiritual' insights 'there's no them only us', rejuvenated Christianity and a feel-good, heartfelt 'not a dry eye in the house' 90s version of colonialism. No Apology necessary. No Land Rights necessary. No Compensation necessary. ALL THE 'BLACKS' IN *CLOUDSTREET* ARE DEAD [original emphasis]!![113]

Fallon's critique has helped my understanding of how the two white-authored plays in this study portray the testimony of otherness. Although far from utopian, for whites or blacks, *Holy Day* ends with the white control over the land and over the sole surviving 'black' character, named Obedience, who is in a state of symbolic death – motionless, raped, with her tongue removed. *Wonderlands*, although far from trite in its rigorous critique of racism, and although it insists on Land Rights, nevertheless shifts significant problems offstage to facilitate "a feel-good" united Australia.

Armfield points to the need to connect the work of theatre with a time of crisis: "I fear we have rather tough times ahead. We must keep our faith and keep working."[114] Armfield's Vanya-like conclusion suggests a turning inward, to the familiar, away from the fearful, in contrast to Barker's cry for "a journey without maps whose destination might be an intemperate zone, a place of fear and little comfort."[115]

Barker's theatre without a map offers the imagination the freedom from restraint that Felman's theory of testimony offers the body in its witness to its experience. Commenting on Camus' proposition that the artist "'testifies not to the law, but to the

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[112] Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," *The Norton Anthology* 878.

[113] Kathleen Mary Fallon, "A Close Look at *Cloudstreet*," *Australian Book Review*, 215 (1999): 24.

[114] Armfield, "Australian Culture."

[115] Barker, *Arguments* 77-78.

body,'"[116] Felman describes the artist as bearing witness not to "truth (a theory)", but to "*freedom*" (original emphasis):

> Witnessing for the artist is to reveal the body's otherness to theory, the body's physical resistance to theory.[117]

Where the truths of felt experience are "honoured" in theatre, as Bennett describes their being in *Conversations with the Dead*, those truths operate very differently from "truth" as a theory of how one ought to behave. The truths of the body's experience may wrest away the power that Baudrillard ascribes to Empire – the use of simulation to liquidate the real and generate "the map that engenders the territory," hiding from us "the desert of the real".[118] The body is real when its story is heard as it is in *Conversations* and in *I Don't Wanna Play House*.

As indicated by Robyn Nevin's billing of *Holy Day* for the Sydney Theatre Company's season as "a dark moment" to be viewed as a mere pause before "we" continue the narrative of national progress, "The Great Australian Silence" about Aborigines, to which Stanner drew the nation's attention in 1968, has tenacity. This study investigates how the four selected plays of the 21st century challenge the 'white' Australian nation's construction and maintenance of that "Silence". Evoking the massacres of the colonial incursion, Rhoda Roberts calls that terror "the silence by violence." Roberts reconstructs that silence from the perspective of the voice it attempts to crush: "Let me tell you, it's deathly loud."[119]

In examining Urvashi Butalia's work on witness to the sectarian violence arising from "virulent" "othering" in India at the time of Partition, Rustom Bharucha writes:

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[116] Camus, "Le Témoin de la liberté" (1948) in *Actuelles* 1, 188 et 191; *Oeuvres complètes d'Albert Camus*, vol 5, Paris: Gallimard and Club de L'Honnête Homme, 1983. Trans. Felman. Cited in Felman and Laub, *Testimony* 108.

[117] Felman, 109.

[118] Jean Baudrillard, "*The Precession of Simulacra*," trans. Paul Foss, and Patton, Paul, *The Norton Anthology* 1732-33.

[119] Roberts, "A Passion for Ideas: Black Stage."

> *How* people remember is almost more important, and illuminating of a moment of violence, than *what* they remember.[120]

This study will be alert to how the selected plays by Thomson, Bovell, Anderson and Frankland use the language of theatre to represent – or subvert – cultural and political conventions that sustain the silencing of the experience of Indigenous Australians.

[120] Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking through Theatre in an Age of Globalization* (London: Athlone, 2000) 114-15. Bharucha cites Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, New Delhi: Penguin, 1998.

Chapter 1:
Defiance and Servility
in Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day*

> To write is a political act.
>
> Jack Davis.[1]

Writing in 1995 the late Bob Maza suggested that "[p]ossibly the greatest difference between black writers and white writers in Australia is ideology."[2] Maza described the "free flight" of black writers and black theatre able to explore "new heights" uninhibited by an imperative to clone "standards and procedures" of a European theatre "steeped in centuries of culture." White writers, Maza argued, are "in the main [. . .] preoccupied with justifying and qualifying their existence in this land," and "Australian white theatre [. . .] is still standing outside, peeping through the fence."[3] Maza's trope would suggest that that "fence" is the symbolic creation of a transplanted civilisation who confines its view of itself within the imagined safety of an inherited and guarded landscape of the mind from which it affords itself only a partial view of the actual land upon which it has built its culture and its prosperity.

Although Bovell and Thomson each appear to rip significant panels from the fence that conservative white theatre builds around its status as the privileged and entertaining clone of empire's narrative of progress, I argue that *Wonderlands* traps Indigenous witness within a white-directed utopia and *Holy Day* within a counter image, a dystopia. The public success of *Wonderlands* and *Holy Day* would indicate that my view may be a minority one.[4]

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[1] Quoted in Katherine Brisbane, "The Arts and the Pre-Emptive Buckle," *The Australian* 30 October 1999: 64.

[2] Robert L. Maza, "Aborigines and Theatre," *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, ed. Philip Parsons with Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency, 1995) 14.

[3] Maza, "Aborigines and Theatre," 14.

[4] Bovell and Thomson's plays have received literary establishment laurels. *Holy Day*: New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Play Award, 2002: shortlisted; AWGIE Awards, Stage Award, 2002: winner; Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Louis Esson Prize for Drama, 2002: winner. 2005. *Wonderlands*: New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Play Award, 2004: shortlisted; Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Louis Esson Prize for Drama, 2004: shortlisted; AWGIE Awards, Stage Award, 2004: shortlisted; Rodney Seaborn Playwrights' Award, 2003: winner. In contrast,

Holy Day reinscribes colonialism's unrelenting hierarchy

Describing herself as "a proud Indigenous Australian woman," Bob Maza's daughter, Rachael Maza, who played Linda in *Holy Day*'s original production (State Theatre Company of South Australia, 2001), said:

> My favourite play is *Holy Day*, as a play that attempts to tap into the Australia Psyche [sic], in a way that is confronting and brutally honest. [5]

How can I quarrel with Rachael Maza? *Holy Day* brings onstage to scrutiny "the white Australian psyche," whose construction, as Griffiths argues, is steeped in "the emotional and political slippage – the distinctive dissonance – at the heart of the Australian frontier experience" that Stanner called "'the Great Australian Silence' about Aborigines."[6] On *Holy Day*'s mid-19th century frontier a self-serving white brutality silences its victims and lies to itself about the virtue of its colonizing purpose.

Four of the white characters are ferocious in using their power over the two Aboriginal characters and the unseen local 'blacks' who kill the occasional sheep. The missionary's wife Elizabeth, found to be a widow when her husband's suicide is revealed, falsely accuses a young Aboriginal woman, Linda, of stealing her baby. The white farmer Wakefield presides over the brutal capture and chaining of Linda. Refusing to countenance mounting evidence that she is innocent, he will not release her, and she kills herself. The ex-convict Nora, who runs an inn for travellers, holds in illiterate servitude a young Aboriginal woman Obedience, whom she 'took' from her mother as a baby. Nora tries to prevent Obedience associating with the chained Linda, and when, after Linda's suicide, Obedience sets out to find her mother, Nora sends the ex-convict Goundry to re-capture her. Goundry returns the girl raped, with her tongue sliced out.

Conversations with the Dead is to date listed only for The Kate Challis RAKA Award, 2002: runner-up. No awards listed for *I Don't Wanna Play House*. AustLit: The Resource for Australian Literature, <http://www.austlit.edu.au> accessed 30 June, 2005.

[5] Rachael Maza, interview with Nancia Guivarra, "A Profile of Actor and Assistant Director of *Riverland*, Rachael Maza," *Blackarts*, ABC Message Stick Online, 21 Jan. 2004, <http://www.abc.net.au/message/blackarts/perform/s1028840.htm> accessed 2 July 2005.

[6] Griffiths, "Construction of Silence," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney, 2003, n. pag.

Aware that fellow whites are gathering with horses and guns to kill unsuspecting local Aboriginal people, Wakefield, whose status as sheep-grazier gives him a leader's authority, looks the other way while dismissing pleas from the Jewish ex-convict Epstein for action to prevent the massacre:

> WAKEFIELD. We're building a nation here. It can't be done without cost.
>
> EPSTEIN. And what kind of nation will it be?
>
> WAKEFIELD. A *proud* nation one day [emphasis added].[7]

In his study of the impact of violence and racism on the Australian colonial frontier, historian Henry Reynolds writes that "most" white people accepted the "grossly disproportionate" killings of blacks "as a necessary corollary of progress."[8] Wakefield appears to epitomise what Reynolds calls "the shield of overwhelming community approval and rigid codes of silence" that protected "the killers".[9] For the play's early 21st century audiences the attitudes that Wakefield enacts onstage could be seen as a reflection of the "Beliefs and Values" that John Howard enshrined as Federal Government policy in his year of accession, 1996:

> [. . .] we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be *proud* than of which we should be ashamed [emphasis added].[10]

In *Holy Day* Wakefield fabricates history. Early in the play, when found writing in his journal, he declares: "A man likes to think that one day his descendants will want to know what life out here was like."[11] He regards himself as a humanitarian, refusing to shoot the "blacks" who steal his sheep: "That would be murder [. . .]. I'm not a murderer."[12] As the play moves towards its end, following the offstage massacre of Aboriginal people from which Wakefield has turned away his eyes,[13] there is a scene where Wakefield wordlessly destroys the journal. As the stage direction puts it : "*WAKEFIELD takes his journal from inside. He rips the pages from it letting them fall*

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[7] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

[8] Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987) 58.

[9] Reynolds, *Frontier* 59. For Reynolds' account of "a tradition of brutality" see 58-80.

[10] Howard, "Beliefs and Values."

[11] Bovell, *Holy Day* 11.

[12] Bovell, *Holy Day* 11.

[13] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

to the ground."[14] He connives with Elizabeth, who will become his wife, never to speak about what has happened.[15] The two of them step together inside his dwelling *"leaving the pages of the journal on the ground.*"[16] With his own record of his occupation of the land destroyed, he cuts himself from a document that might otherwise inscribe a trail to the massacre or any of the other atrocities he knows to have taken place – abducted children forced into service; rape; mutilation; chaining; beatings; and, wrongful imprisonment. He is guilty. He knows it. He profits from it.

Wakefield's destruction of the journal and his pledge of silence in perpetuity could be understood as an admission of abjection, a recognition by Wakefield of extreme failure. His dream of preserving a personal history for his descendants has been destroyed, as has his dream of a co-existence between black and white that cannot countenance murder. I would argue, however, that Wakefield does not enact the failure of his dream, but the self-mutilation that is its success. He keeps the land and the sheep. He acquires a compliant, grateful white wife. He exonerates himself from public or private culpability for the massacre he has refused to take any steps to forestall.[17] He protects himself and his descendants from knowledge of the massacre and of himself. No stage time is allocated for Wakefield to contemplate the gravity of the change he has made to himself.

Although Haskins argues that *Holy Day* perpetuates the stereotype of "the genteel squatter" who stands "surrounded by a maelstrom of violence, [. . .] hands unstained, making judgment on the guilt of the women upon whom all the abjection of colonialism has been heaped,"[18] I read Wakefield's character as more complex. Bovell charts with skill the process by which Wakefield moves from humanitarianism to culpability to projected innocence, presenting a telling portrait of a man who keeps his public profile clean by presenting himself to posterity as believing the opposite of the truth – that he is not guilty.

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[14] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

[15] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

[16] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

[17] See Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

[18] Victoria Haskins, "'Fear the Bitch Who Sheds No Tears': The Cultural Depiction of the White Female Scapegoat in Australian Historical Drama," *Lilith: A feminist history journal*, 12 (2003): 59-60.

Before and after it happens, the massacre is refused existence. The lie becomes the new reality which has been and always will be henceforth lived. The scene in which the missionary's widow, Elizabeth, calls on Wakefield takes place not long before the anticipated gunfire that signals the massacre can be heard from offstage. Elizabeth comes straight to the point: Mr Wakefield, will you take me…? I have nowhere else to go."[19] In the space of the stage direction, "*Pause*", Wakefield weighs what he reads in her face and tone of voice against what he already knows about her and himself. The skilled crafting of the plot has created multiple possibilities for what he might do, such as negotiate, reject, deny, misunderstand, scorn, pity, accept, even welcome. In that pause Elizabeth as supplicant reads his face, his body and the beating of her own fear. He has what she wants, a house of wood he will one day remake of stone. She decides to confess: "I am ready to tell you the truth [about her accusations that a young Aboriginal woman Linda took her baby]."[20]

Quicker than speech, Wakefield uses a gesture to enforce silence: "*He holds up his hand to hold her words back*." Because she obeys him she has saved them both and is allowed to hear his explanation: "Don't… for if you do, I can only turn you away." To maintain the self-constructed goodness that his position at the apex of the white hierarchy demands, facilitates and rewards, he must not hear the truth. His prospective wife learns that she must not put him in a position where truth will open his honour to question. If in future anyone asks him, or his descendants, what happened, the 'truthful' reply can be given that he did not know, he was not a witness and nobody told him. By refusing to know he absolves himself of responsibility. He cannot be accused. He agrees to accept her "for a man out here needs a woman," but he sets a condition which shapes past, present and future into a collective delusion:

> WAKEFIELD. [. . .] You and I will be silent about what has passed.
> For what is not spoken will eventually fade.[21]

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[19] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

[20] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63. For Elizabeth's awed discovery of Wakefield's plans to expand his house and acreage, see 47.

[21] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

As the frontier community's 'moral' guardians the pair cement their respectability and conspire to white-out their own and other whites culpability for atrocities committed against Aboriginal people, and against powerless lower-class whites, namely the Jew Epstein and the youth Cornelius.[22]

"Reality is concealed."[23] These are Robert Fisk's words from a contemporary context where he points to a dangerous effect of hiding the truth – people come to believe in their own propaganda. In Fisk's example, by downplaying the attacks on their troops the US forces in Iraq came to believe that their occupation of Iraq was improving people's safety. Through his concealment of reality Wakefield transforms himself from participant in crime into the stereotyped figure Haskins describes – the absolved "unstained" white squatter. Haskins locates *Holy Day* in a tradition of fictional representations of history that make the vicious male convict and the cruel colonial women into "scapegoats that clearly operate to remove guilt from certain elements in our society, and assuage the consciences of those who attend the theatre."[24]

> What these stereotypes obscure, fundamentally, is the role of those who wielded the power over, if not the practice, of the two great genocidal crimes in our history—mass killing and mass child removals.[25]

On the national stage the Prime Minister John Howard declared: "We need to acknowledge as a nation the realities of what European settlement has meant for the first Australians."[26] With polished euphemisms Howard shrank what he called "realities" – whose silenced subtext is massacre and the forced removal of children – to mere "injustices". Naming what happened not as crimes perpetrated against Aboriginal people, but as "assault on their traditions and the physical abuse they endured," the Prime Minister allowed himself to laud "our [sic] history" as one of "heroic achievement." Those who challenged his interpretation were accused of distorting history through their "'black arm band' view of our past."[27] In *Holy Day*

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[22] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63.

[23] Robert Fisk. Interview with Peter Thompson. ABC Radio National "Breakfast" programme, 26 Apr. 2004. Personal transcription.

[24] Haskins, "'Fear the Bitch'," 60.

[25] Haskins, "'Fear the Bitch'," 59.

[26] Howard, "Beliefs and Values."

[27] Howard, "Beliefs and Values."

Wakefield seeks, unsuccessfully, to seduce the dissenter Epstein into profiting from colonisation through taking up a mallet and getting paid for “an honest day’s work” helping him “mark [his] land”:

> WAKEFIELD. Take it, man, [the mallet] and turn your eyes away from the river, for once it’s done [the unnamed massacre] not a word of it will be spoken. It will be as though it never happened.[28]

Holy Day brings centre stage the making of what Griffiths calls “the emotional and political slippage – the distinctive dissonance – at the heart of the Australian frontier experience.”[29] Although he contributes to and benefits from the destruction of people upon whose land he will graze his sheep, Wakefield shapes for himself and his “proud nation” a mythical ‘history’ in whose service violence is simultaneously sanctioned and denied.[30]

As a well-nourished and educated white Australian I am daily protected from the cruelties invasion inflicts on Indigenous Australians. My quarrel with Bovell’s construction in *Holy Day* of “the white Australian psyche” is that the white colonial hierarchy with its raced and gendered stereotypes preserves its privilege by maintaining control over the narrative and binding the characters into a hierarchy beyond which there is only death.

The European characters who invade the land, bodies or beliefs of others, plot the fate of the rest on a scale where whiteness, maleness, wealth, nationhood and belief in the English God are the imperial measure. Without exception, to be ‘black,’ ‘female,’ ‘Jewish’ and ‘young’ is to ‘be’ a punishable offence, although conditional immunity is granted the white women. The middle-class white female, Elizabeth, uses her wiles to gain protection through marriage, while the lower-class female, innkeeper Nora, employs her punishable offence to soothe unruly customers and pass them the pox.[31]

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[28] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62 and 64.

[29] Griffiths, "Construction of Silence," n. pag.

[30] For analysis of rationalisations of “punitive expeditions” against Aboriginal people, see Reynolds, *Frontier* 32-57. See Epstein’s confrontation of Wakefield, Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

[31] Bovell, *Holy Day* 12.

Because the law that underpins the colonial state is "a long way" off,[32] Wakefield as white landowner and Elizabeth as the missionary's widow function as its metonym, prosecuting, condemning, authorising punishment and self-exoneration. Wakefield's actions make clear his participation in the terrible crimes against Aboriginal people. He orders Goundry to chain Linda to a tree. When Epstein objects that "[s]he's not a dog," Wakefield insists: "I tell you the rope won't hold her."[33] Later when Wakefield interrogates the captive on his own, he does not bother to pretend to keep his middle-class hands clean. To Linda's defiant: "You've got no right here," Wakefield "*seizes the chain and pulls her to her feet*" saying: "this is my right."[34] At other times, in keeping with his public self-portrait as a humanitarian ruler, Wakefield praises the good care tribal Aboriginal people give to children and defends their right to come and go with the seasons.[35] As a man of reason, Wakefield poses as a critic of religious intolerance who considered Elizabeth's late husband, the missionary, to be "a zealot".[36] Yet, the moment the white hierarchy is threatened, as it is when Nora suggests to him that Elizabeth probably killed her own baby after having found her husband with an Aboriginal woman, Wakefield's professed enlightenment collapses into zealotry:

> WAKEFIELD. In another time, Nora, you would burn at the stake for the witch you are and I would be the man who lights the pyre.[37]

Wakefield's metaphor evokes men's power to create a religion that, to draw on David Hume, inspires from its essence "a violent hatred of every other worship" by representing dissenters "as the objects of divine wrath and vengeance."[38] Where Hume cites the "ROMAN Catholic religion" (original emphasis) as his example, Wakefield enacts a theology for secular empire, where God, Nation, Law, the Land and its original inhabitants must all be directed to the service of his individual prosperity as a sheep-owning white man. He uses essentialist logic to rationalise his

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[32] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

[33] Bovell, *Holy Day* 31.

[34] Bovell, *Holy Day* 40.

[35] Bovell, *Holy Day* 26-27.

[36] Bovell, *Holy Day*, 26.

[37] Bovell, *Holy Day* 42.

[38] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," *The Norton Anthology* 498.

creed, sanction his actions and bind others to his God-given purpose, using any means necessary.

Wakefield uses the conditional to cast himself as the instrument of divine justice: “I would be the man who lights the pyre.” By clothing his theology and its imbricated mastery over others in the language and metaphor of another less-enlightened time when people burned witches because they did not know any better, Wakefield exonerates his hatred from being put to the test. He does not have to confront the hatred which, to borrow an image from Hume, has “taken strong possession of his heart.”[39] Nora responds to Wakefield with a quick verbal slapping that lets him know she knows he is a hypocrite, but she does not *do* anything that might translate her insight into action. She lets him walk away undisturbed and unperturbed.[40] Nora has exposed the suppression of truth and the concomitant tyranny over opposition that are foundation stones of what is, in effect Wakefield’s ‘theology’ of nation-building, but the struggle between truth and ‘theology’ – the central struggle of Howard’s Australia – is kept from being tested. There is no crucible on this stage.

Having been transported to the colony, Nora, who is Irish and loves to rail against the English, their church and their God,[41] nonetheless joins the Englishman Wakefield in relishing the power that being part of the white invasion gives her over the original inhabitants. Nora’s course in life, as revealed by her actions rather than her words, is identical with Wakefield’s – self-preservation through control over self and other. Both attempt to avoid what Nora calls “real trouble with the blacks.”[42] Both rely on the useful labour of the blacks who obey them. Nora has Obedience as domestic servant / surrogate daughter, and Wakefield uses Aboriginal people to work on his farm for “free”.[43] Both Nora and Wakefield are careful to do nothing to stop other whites exterminating non-compliant blacks.

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[39] Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," 498.

[40] Bovell, *Holy Day* 42.

[41] Bovell, *Holy Day* 3.

[42] Bovell, *Holy Day* 42.

[43] Early in the play, when Epstein asks him for employment, Wakefield says: “I've got blacks to do the work.” Agreeing with Epstein that they are not “reliable”, Wakefield adds that they are “free”. His is the conqueror’s compounding of opposing meanings of “free”. His sleight of hand allows him to conceive of his noble savage remaining “free” (uncorrupted / unfettered by civilisation) while he works for “free”

The only Europeans who do not participate in atrocity against blacks are males who deviate from the imperial scale and are themselves its victims. The youth Cornelius is sexually and physically bludgeoned by ex-convict Goundry into a hellish parody of the dependency forced upon the female characters. Cornelius cannot tell the truth of his experience because Goundry has removed his tongue. Like Cornelius, the Jewish ex-convict Epstein has his body marked as female. When Wakefield accuses Goundry of raping the youth, Goundry's insults demonise Epstein as 'filth' and 'woman':

> GOUNDRY. [*drinking*] And who accuses me? This filthy Jew. This Jew who was happy enough to be a woman to me when the desire took him.
>
> EPSTEIN. He's lying.
>
> GOUNDRY. Ask the man what his crime was.
>
> [*Pause.* WAKEFIELD *looks to* EPSTEIN. EPSTEIN *is silent*].[44]

Having a tongue gives Epstein little advantage. He has been unmanned. White law will not take his testimony seriously. His efforts to protect Cornelius collapse. Although in a conversation with Nora when nothing is at stake Epstein shows his understanding of the Anglo-colonists' racism that renders him "more foreign than others" while "the blacks are the most foreign of all", Epstein's defiance remains token.[45] Although he confronts Wakefield in his den, calling him a "gutless coward" for taking no action to prevent the massacre, Epstein exits without waiting for Wakefield's reply.[46] Epstein's visit stirs Wakefield to destroy his records, but the scene ends without Epstein or any other character able to pick up those torn pages and use them to press Wakefield to a crisis. Epstein is not seen again and the audience are later told, without any consequences for the remaining course of the drama, that Epstein has been killed trying to warn the blacks of the massacre.[47]

(unpaid and willing). Desperate for employment to escape being on the road with the brutal Goundry, Epstein offers to "work for free too", until he proves his "worth", implying that "worth" is something to which the "blacks" could never aspire. Bovell, *Holy Day* 10.

[44] Bovell, *Holy Day* 55.

[45] Bovell, *Holy Day* 30.

[46] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

[47] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62 and 64.

Epstein's is one of many acts of defiance by the invaded characters, whether black, "foreign," female or feminised-male, which in their moment of performance masquerade as vigorous challenges to colonial power. Most challenges are vanquished almost instantly. All are crushed. None put at risk the white hierarchy, or its theatrical conventions. None bring onstage another reality with power to disrupt the trajectory of the white narrative.

Bovell's white characters rarely put themselves at risk and then only briefly before retreating into the stereotype lest the *Holy Day* paradigm to which they owe their existence should disintegrate. The fate meted out to the two white women illustrates how stereotyping, punishment of boundary-crossing and concealment of reality work together to maintain the hierarchy. While their punishment is far less than that hurled at the black women, both Nora and Elizabeth are chastised, each according to their class. As a member of the propertied class Elizabeth's alliance with Wakefield exonerates her from her suspected never-to-be-enunciated transgressions – infanticide and casting the blame onto a black woman. Elizabeth's punishment is a silent dismemberment. Because her tongue must make permanent its habit of speaking lies lest it betray what the body knows, she must sever it, metaphorically. In perpetuity Elizabeth must silence any of the body's testimonies or knowledges that might threaten imperial myths of white (male) supremacy to which she and Wakefield owe their privilege and with which they are building a nation. She is condemning her own body to judge its sensations and to silence any that the myths by which she lives deem out of order. Not only her own body is condemned, but the bodies of her husband and their heirs.

Nora's lower class means that the punishment for being female is marked upon her body differently from Elizabeth's. The tight-laced, tight-lipped chastity of Elizabeth contrasts with the poxed and prostituted free movement and free tongue of Nora who labours without stays at chopping wood and serving travellers. Where Elizabeth, whose false accusations bring about Linda's suicide, must figuratively sever her own tongue, Nora, whose treachery leads to Obedience's rape and mutilation, must refuse to see. Nora's blindness as she averts her gaze from the destroyed girl is as selective of 'reality' as Elizabeth's silence.[48]

[48] Bovell, *Holy Day* 66.

Where the higher class white woman's metaphorically severed tongue prevents disruptive knowledge disseminating, the metaphoric closing of the lower class white woman's eyes prevents knowledge entering consciousness. In a reversal of the fate of Teiresias or Gloucester, Nora's blindness is the loss of inner sight. Sophocles' Teiresias attributes his power of prophecy to his blindness: "[. . .] that I may see for others."[49] Whatever Nora may feel or learn from Obedience's pain, she shares with no-one. When Lear in his madness comes upon the blinded Gloucester, one of their welter of insights is that the blind see "feelingly" a hierarchy of power and money which punishes the beggar:

> KING LEAR. Look with thine ears: see how yond
> justice rails upon yond simple thief.[50]

The pain that crosses the faces of Elizabeth and Nora when they silence or blind a part of themselves is cut off on the spot, lest it dwell on their personal responsibility for the wounds inflicted on Obedience, Linda and her people for their defiance of *Holy Day*'s order. The rigid construction of the characters suppresses their recognition of their own feelings and reinforces a paradigm in which others, by definition, have feelings that must not be allowed to count. The white women's reward for their invisible self-wounding is reintegration into the relative safety of their predetermined place in colonial society whose power and prosperity they help entrench. No room is given for those women to acknowledge publicly to their white 'community' the damage they have done to the black women, or to themselves through their acts of great cruelty.

Indigenous characters are silenced

Where the two white women inflict invisible inner wounds on themselves, gross physical wounds are inflicted on Obedience and Linda for their failed attempts to defy having been born on the 'black' side of *Holy Day*'s theology. As I wrestle with the silence that closes over *Holy Day*'s sole surviving Indigenous character, a young black woman, I become aware of the weight of my tongue. Agile lover of metaphors,

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[49] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. E. F. Watling, *The Theban Plays*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1947) 153.

[50] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Peter Alexander (London: Collins, 1951). 4.6.144-155.

it tests itself against teeth and the colours of vowels to remind me how much of the self would be lost were it cut away. At the end of *Holy Day* the young black woman "*remains facing the audience, her mouth bleeding, her stare vacant*."[51] Her outside mirrors her inside. Her white rapist, Goundry, has taken her tongue and with it language, taste, pleasure, and self. An Indigenous actor cast in the role of Obedience must use her own strength, resilience and presence to perform a prescribed and proscribing absence. She must portray a life emptied of life. No future is imagined for the character beyond the harsh control of the white innkeeper Nora who named her Obedience, after rescuing her, so Nora insists, from a drunken black mother about to abandon the baby because the father was white.[52]

[51] Bovell, *Holy Day* 66. Drawing on sources such as the account of "atrocities and conspiracies of silence" in W.H. Traill, 'Historical Sketch of Wild', A. Garran (ed.) Picturesque Atlas of Australia, 3 vols. Melbourne, 1880, 2, 362-7, Reynolds includes rape and mutilation among his list of the atrocities that "accompanied frontier skirmishing". Reynolds, Frontier 59.

[52] Bovell, *Holy Day* 43 and 52.

Image 1: Obedience defies Nora.[53]

As the play builds to its climax, Obedience is rocked by the suicide of Linda. After a lifetime of servility Obedience defies Nora, sharply exposing the white woman's hypocrisy before leaving in search of her mother.[54] Obedience's defiance is problematic. Nora undercuts the girl as she has done throughout the play. See Image 1 where Natasha Wanganeen movingly portrays the tentative nature of that defiance. Although Nora claims to love the girl, she dispatches the vicious ex-convict Goundry to look for her and bring her back, even though she knows he raped the youth Cornelius and cut out his tongue.[55] When Goundry carries Obedience back onstage, the white knife has cut her tongue from self.[56] She can no longer speak, nor can she read or write.[57] Nora has taken the girl from her own culture, but has failed to give her literacy in the one she has forced her to adopt. The play ends with Obedience's memory cut from telling and her past cut from present and future.

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[53] Photo: Tracey Schramm. Natasha Wanganeen as Obedience. Pamela Rabe as Nora. *Holy Day* by Andrew Bovell. Dir. Ariette Taylor. Sydney Theatre Company, 13 Aug, 2003. Courtesy STC Archives

[54] Bovell, *Holy Day* 60-61.

[55] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63. For Nora's knowledge of Goundry's cruelty see 46-47.

[56] Bovell, *Holy Day* 65.

[57] The audience know that Obedience is illiterate. When the mute Cornelius gives Obedience a letter written by his mother before Goundry killed her, Obedience cannot read it. Bovell, *Holy Day* 37.

Michael Dodson makes it clear that Indigenous people do not view the past as a severed event:

> The past and the present and the future do not fall into distinct linear categories. […]. In all expressions of our Aboriginality, we repossess our past, and ourselves. And the past cannot be dead, because it is built into the beings and bodies of the living.[58]

Holy Day does not allow disruption to the death of the past that ends its narrative. Silence is inadequate testimony. If one may apply Felman and Laub's theory of testimony developed in response to the Holocaust, to what happens when Lear holds his dead child in his arms, Lear's action is seen as not merely cognitive, but "the intelligence of the emotion".[59] Although Cordelia's experience can no longer be told, Lear must "bring to the light" (Felman) his experience of her death that is the consequence of his actions:

> LEAR. Howl! Howl! Howl! O, you are men of stones!
> Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
> That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone for ever.
> I know when one is dead and when one lives;
> She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
> If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
> Why, then she lives.[60]

As she "*cradles Obedience's broken body*", Nora has four words to respond to the wreckage of her adopted daughter:

> NORA. What have I done?[61]

Nora's witness is so brief and her tongue, which has been so free earlier in the play is now so guarded that any complex expression of emotion, such as horror, grief, rage, or acknowledgment of responsibility cannot be possible. Perhaps Bovell is aware of the inadequacy of Nora's scripted dialogue. A stage direction commands the performer to let out "*a deep moan*".[62] With the immediate entry of Cornelius and

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[58] Michael Dodson, "The End in the Beginning: Re(De)Finding Aboriginality," *Blacklines:* 40.

[59] Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 239.

[60] Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 5.3.257-63.

[61] Bovell, *Holy Day* 65.

[62] Bovell, *Holy Day* 65.

Goundry's demand that Nora give the boy to him, the scene shifts away from Nora's relationship with Obedience. There is no opportunity for the "*performative*" act, that Felman describes, where "an effective and affective shock [. . .] resonates [. . .] in the whole body [. . .]" (original emphasis).[63] Because *Holy Day* severs Nora and Obedience from the experience of each other's bodies before the "intelligence of the emotion" and its crisis can be lived, the silence is not broken. The play ends without what Felman calls "an act of *crossing* the dividing line between the inside and the outside" (original emphasis).[64]

Playwright Howard Barker attests a similar discovery about the power to release silenced experiences of trauma through theatre. Watching a performance by life prisoners and observing their repudiation of naturalism, their wish "to inhabit other life" and their pity for the pain suffered by characters in situations very different from theirs, Barker came to realise "that theatre was a place where feeling was permitted which was denied elsewhere".[65] *Holy Day* cuts off the emotional struggle between Obedience and Nora before it becomes "performative" (Felman and Laub). Nothing happens onstage that would allow the potential testifier, Obedience, or Nora as her witness, to shatter the glassy silence and move "to inhabit" (Barker) the life of the other. *Holy Day* does not repudiate silence, nor naturalism. The way is not opened for the transformation and regeneration that is the catharsis of which Lou Bennett speaks in the audience's relationship with the performance of *Conversations with the Dead*.[66] Nora's cradling of Obedience does not become an embrace which might bring each separate self into living through the crisis of her own and another's pain. Instead, Nora's face hardens against truth and for empire. Rather than speaking the truth about what has happened to Obedience or the Indigenous neighbours who have been massacred, Nora watches where the axe falls. The sound of her axe punctuates, but cannot puncture *Holy Day*'s silence.[67]

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[63] Felman and Laub, *Testimony* xvi, 53, 239.

[64] Felman, 233.

[65] Barker, *Arguments* 65-66.

[66] See Introduction, 34-35.

[67] *Holy Day*, by Andrew Bovell, dir. Ariette Taylor, Wharf 1 Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney, 26 Sept. 2003. Natasha Wanganeen as Obedience and Pamela Rabe as Nora. In the playtext published in 2001 prior to the first production, the woodchopping is not scripted. Instead, a stage direction sends Nora goes offstage leaving Obedience alone. Bovell, *Holy Day* 66.

Nora reduces to kindling a lump of wood that has been a tree – a metonym of the fate of Obedience, her tongue, her people and their landscape. In Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), the destruction of Friday's tongue stirs an outside voice, that of a white woman Susan Barton, to imagine with passion the testimony the black man would tell were he able. Barton explores such ironies of empire as its co-option of Providence to sanction its cruelties.[68] Cruso's reply, that Providence needs to sleep sometimes because (black slave) labour is needed "for the business of the world to prosper" has strong parallels with Wakefield's embrace in *Holy Day* of "building a nation".[69] But, in contrast to the persistent counter-voice of Susan Barton in *Foe*, *Holy Day* disposes of Epstein without allowing him to bear witness to the Aboriginal deaths, Linda's suicide, or the rape and mutilation of Obedience.

Even in that play of morally confused revenge and action-movie-fodder, *Titus Andronicus*, that Shakespeare probably wished had been attributed to Marlowe, there is someone to speak for Lavinia, whose tongue her rapists have cut out.[70] The words of her father Titus, however, fail to resonate in our imaginations, because his obsession with construing the loss of his daughter's chastity as "shame" stops him noticing that she suffers. Titus' shortcomings as advocate for a mute / mutilated young woman need not have stopped Bovell inventing a character for *Holy Day* who might notice that Obedience suffers or that Linda has killed herself in custody, and respond from the heart.

Bovell makes no use of any non-naturalistic dramaturgical strategies that might give Obedience's trauma tongue, such as the fluid use of time in Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* that enables the present to re-enter and transcend the

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[68] To Cruso's claim that it was slavers who had cut out Friday's tongue, Susan responds: "'Where is the justice in it? First a slave and now a castaway too. Robbed of his childhood and consigned to a life of silence. Was Providence sleeping?'" Cruso's reply comes with a satisfied belly, for Friday has been serving him and Susan a meal: "'If Providence were to watch over all of us [. . .] who would be left to pick the cotton and cut the sugar-cane? For the business of the world to prosper, Providence must sometimes wake and sometimes sleep, as lower creatures do.'" J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1986) 23.

[69] Bovell, *Holy Day* 62.

[70] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Edward Ravenscroft (London: Cornmarket, 1969) 5.3.167-204.

past. Anderson's strategies for staging rape, locating responsibility and celebrating survival, that are elaborated in Chapter Three, are in great contrast to Bovell's adherence to linear reinscription of rape as an unchallengeable instrument of colonial power.

Magic realism that Indigenous playwrights use as a counter energy to colonialism contrasts sharply with Bovell's dramaturgy. Gilbert describes the "healing force" of a shape-shifting trickster, Nanabush, in work by Indigenous Canadian playwright Tomson Highway, *The Rez Sisters* (1986) and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989). With the power to transcend "gender binaries," one of Nanabush's functions is "to absorb and transform the pain resulting from atrocities associated with the colonisation of Native lands and cultures."[71] These works "aim to refuse the power of rape by subsuming it within the mythological frameworks involved, since Nanabush is, above all, the great survivor."[72]

The paralysis or death that defeats the Indigenous characters in *Holy Day* contrasts with what Gilbert calls "subversions of colonial rule" in Jack Davis's play *Kullark (Home*):

> Although *Kullark* details with great clarity the subjugation of the Aborigines and their disenfranchisement in the face of European military power, the authority of the colonizers is never complete or uncontested.[73]

The absence in *Holy Day* of an alternative to the conventional European narrative shrinks the staged experience of the Aboriginal characters to a single reality that contrasts with the many layers in work by writers such as Jack Davis and Richard J. Frankland, whose play *Conversations with the Dead* will be examined in Chapter Four. On one level, as Gilbert points out, Davis's plays "illustrate the success of the imperial venture to appropriate Aboriginal land and confine its occupants to the marginalized spaces." A similar claim could be put forward for *Holy Day*. Davis, however, does not settle for the one reality that colonialism imposes. Although "the success of the imperial venture" means that "displacement and dislocation [feature]

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[71] Helen Gilbert, "Introduction: Tomson Highway, *the Rez Sisters* (Canada 1986)," *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*, ed. Helen Gilbert (London: Routledge, 2001) 391.

[72] Gilbert, "Introduction: Tomson Highway," 391.

[73] Gilbert, *Sightlines* 62.

as the defining elements of Black experience," Davis's work centres on the world of Aboriginal experience. That focus allows the performance of what Gilbert identifies as "the idea of survival and resistance."[74]

If, however, theatre is regarded as a place where a counter-colonial cause may be better served by reproducing past horrors without transcendence or survival, then *Holy Day* could be regarded as an effective illustration of those horrors. Obedience's body left standing silent and bleeding with no hint of any relief certainly makes visible the argument Bovell expresses in interviews that the British colonisation of this country "in many instances was terribly violent [. . .] and caused these people to suffer enormously."[75] While I agree with Bovell's description of what colonisation has done, I question the way he constructs that suffering on stage. Obedience's glazed silence contrasts not only with the spirited countering of silence in work by Tammy Anderson and Tomson Highway, but with the spirit of Bovell's own crusade expressed in programme notes to turn around the failure of white language to address the suffering: "There has been a deafening silence as regards the way in which the land was inhabited by Europeans."[76] Whether consciously or not, *Holy Day* reproduces the historic silence that Bovell laments.

Holy Day's sole break in the frame offers ineffective witness

There is, to give Bovell credit, an atypical break in the otherwise conventional closed narrative, where there is another 'reality' – that of resistance able to break the silence. The actor who plays Obedience steps out of character and makes a direct address, shifting to a syntax remote from her habitual speech to report to the audience the unseen massacre of the Aboriginal people by the river.[77] Haskins found it "the most powerful scene in the play."[78] Although I appreciate Bovell's skill in creating in simple language strong images of white callousness and black suffering, Obedience as didact/historian has to compete with an otherwise onrushing drama that privileges the point of view of that callousness. Obedience's self is as absent

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[74] Gilbert, *Sightlines* 63.

[75] Bovell, "A Sophisticated Nation."

[76] Bovell, "Evolution of the Play," n. pag.

[77] Bovell, *Holy Day* 64.

[78] Haskins, "'Fear the Bitch'," 52.

from her witness when she is outside the narrative frame as it is when she lives her surrogate life within that frame's restrictions. Inside and outside mirror her denied self. Laub writes:

> One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.[79]

Even though, in stage time, the massacre occurs moments earlier, the monologue's use of the past tense fossilises the event and prevents the 'telling' as an act of discovery or "illumination" in Felman's sense of a performative act that through affect releases the darkness from inside into the light.[80] In analysing *The Plague* as an illustration of a work of the imagination to gain "insight into the unimaginable" horror of "history as holocaust," Felman quotes Camus' character/narrator, Rieűx, who only recognises witness "*sans reserve* [without boundaries]."[81] Obedience does not have that freedom. Because Obedience tells the story as a closed event, her action stifles the possibility of an opening of theatre out "beyond itself" in the sense of Stephen Connor's description of such postmodern work as Handke's which implicate the audience in the action and invite "active and transforming reflection".[82] Because Obedience does not take any of the white characters out of their frame and into a space where they might hear what she has to say, both the white characters and, I suggest, the audience, are protected from any imperative to respond. Her message, that the whites killed the powerless blacks, may bring an audience to reflect on that cruelty, but does not act to disrupt the physicality of the play which presents Aboriginal people in general, and the two onstage Indigenous characters, Obedience and Linda, as powerless and defeated.

As soon as Obedience steps back inside the narrative's frame, the lower-class white male Goundry captures, rapes and mutilates her (offstage). In the child-like world of

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[79] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," Felman and Laub, *Testimony* 78.

[80] See Felman, *Testimony* 239.

[81] Felman, *Testimony* 105. [my translation.] Felman quotes Camus: "*Je n'admets que les témoignages sans reserve"* and translates it as: "I've no use for testimonies that are not unqualified." To avoid the negatives that are not there in the original, I prefer to translate it as: "I only recognise testimonies without boundaries."

[82] Steven Connor, "Postmodern Performance," *Analysing Performance*, ed. Patrick Campbell (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996) 123.

the theatre, consciously or unconsciously, the causal link is implicit. Goundry could be read as the uncanny vengeful metonymy of *Holy Day*'s unrelenting white hierarchy, punishing young black female defiance and making sure that Obedience will never again bear witness to what she knows. Dare I suggest that in taking this revenge and depriving the only surviving black character of her voice, *Holy Day* is (unconsciously no doubt) inviting lavish praise of itself as the great white transmitter of the 'truth' of the "shadow" of Australia's past – a 'truth' that once revealed, will set Australia free.

Holy Day perpetuates white myths

Holy Day perpetuates the white myths that construct the displaced Aborigine as 'lost' and traditional culture as dream or nightmare. Michael Dodson attests that "the violation of the rights of Indigenous peoples throughout the world" has at its heart "the denial of our control over our identity, and the symbols through which we make and remake our cultures and ourselves."[83] Far from having what Dodson calls "the freedom to live outside the cage created by other peoples' images and projections,"[84] the Indigenous characters in *Holy Day* sit in the cultural vacuum of imperial imaginings. Maryrose Casey might have been describing Bovell's characters when she summed up Euro-Australian narratives that frame "displaced and dispossessed" Aboriginal people as "'inauthentic'":[85]

> The lost Aborigine was deemed to be without a culture, to be lost between cultures, and therefore could not be in a position to make a contribution other than by 'learning' the European way – that is, if Aboriginal people were deemed capable of learning.[86]

Linda and Obedience are not allowed through the barred gate into white culture whose purpose is served by keeping them in their 'lost' state. Each is only believed when she tells white characters what they want her to say. The whites believe Obedience when she betrays Linda, and Linda when she makes a false confession to taking Elizabeth's baby.[87] When Obedience contradicts Nora's insistence that the

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[83] Dodson, "End in the Beginning," 31.

[84] Dodson, "End in the Beginning," 31.

[85] Casey, *Creating Frames* 11-12.

[86] Casey, *Creating Frames* 14.

[87] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28, 56.

sea is “red”, Nora denounces the truth as “a lie”.[88] Although Nora knows how to read she has brought Obedience up in great ignorance. Having torn her as a baby from traditional Aboriginal culture and its richness, and forbidden her contact with “the mission blacks,”[89] Nora imparts only those aspects of European culture that facilitate Obedience’s servitude. Because in Nora’s eyes Linda poses a threat to her control over her surrogate daughter, Nora refuses Linda food, shelter or work, and tries to prevent Obedience communicating with her. As Obedience tells Linda when she manages to sneak away: “She’ll kill me if she finds out.”[90] Obedience’s hyperbole aptly conveys her fear of habitual beatings with which Nora seeks to prevent the girl recovering her stolen self.

One of Casey's sources, a late 1960s report on “’Aboriginal Theatre’” by Stefan Haag, a former Director of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, pronounced “pure ethnic Aboriginal culture” to exist only in “traditional tribal living” and therefore to be “’doomed’”, leaving “the individual faced with either a void or the complete adoption of an alien culture – our [sic] culture”.[91] From within their “’void’” *Holy Day*’s Aboriginal characters are unable to form a supportive relationship or experience Aboriginality in Dodson’s sense of a living culture whose inherited “collective identity” each generation transforms “creatively.”[92]

Ian Anderson writes of his pain as a teenager on reading historian N.J.B. Plomley’s formulation that “’hybrid’” Aborigines "'belong to neither race (and are shunned by both), and lacking a racial background [. . .] have no history.’"[93] Anderson realised it was his own families to which “this infamous description” referred:

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[88] Bovell, *Holy Day* 13, 52.

[89] Bovell, *Holy Day* 3.

[90] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22.

[91] Stefan Haag. ‘Report on Aboriginal Theatre’, typescript undated, c1969, n. pag. Quoted in: Casey, *Creating Frames* 13.

[92] Dodson, "End in the Beginning," 31.

[93] Ian Anderson, "Black Bit, White Bit," *Blacklines* 46. Anderson quotes N.J.B. Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines: A Short Account of Them and Some Aspects of Their Life*, N.J.B. Plomley in asscn. with Adult Education Division, Launceston, Tasmania, 1977, 66.

> It is difficult to describe the feelings this statement evoked. It was something like grieving; but a grieving over a tremendous loss which is in itself then denied as being yours.[94]

The Indigenous characters in *Holy Day* are constructed from a surface where their portrayal as 'lost' is maintained by refusing them any engagement with vast and complex emotions such as those to which Ian Anderson alludes as his personal response to discovering the coloniser's power to deny him and his families a self. The containment of Obedience's emotions is evident in Scene Eighteen where Nora seeks to reassert the control over the girl that she fears is slipping from her.[95] Pressed by Obedience to take her back to where she found her, Nora is adamant that her mother "left" her "among the saltbush". When Obedience challenges Nora's authority to interpret her mother's actions, insisting that "[s]he might have come back," Nora constructs "blackfellas" as brutes and Obedience's 'mixed' body as her destiny:

> NORA. [. . .] You see you've got white in you. Your father… was white. You see it now, more and more, blackfellas with a touch of the chalk. They would have taken one look at you and they probably killed the woman that gave birth to you. That's what they would have done. They would have killed her and left you out in the scrub. That's how those blacks think.[96]

Nora's self-satisfaction is palpable. She has 'proven' that Obedience's culture rejected the girl because of her body / her self. Nora's racist classification deems Obedience's self to be less than her own, but greater than that of the woman who gave her birth and from whom she has been removed for her own safety. Moreover, through con/verting the classic white racist insult, "a touch of the tar", to "a touch of the chalk", Nora imputes to the "blackfellas" a vicious racism that punishes miscegenation with death and abandons infants supposedly 'contaminated' with 'white'. By describing Obedience's people not as people but as colour, "those blacks", Nora carves a conceptual boundary between them and Obedience, and invites the girl to collude and be grateful.

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[94] Ian Anderson, "Blacklines: Black, White Bit," 46-47.

[95] Bovell, *Holy Day* 50-52.

[96] Bovell, *Holy Day* 52.

Obedience knows that gratitude is synonymous with bondage. Although she is unable to counter Nora's imperial authority with a scrap of knowledge about "those blacks", Obedience smashes Nora's claim to speak the truth:

> OBEDIENCE. What colour's the sea? [*Beat*] What colour is it, Nora?
>
> NORA. It's red.
>
> *OBEDIENCE takes the brush from the bucket and starts to scrub the table.*[97]

The audience knows Obedience knows Nora is a liar. Linda has told her that the sea is "the same colour as the sky."[98] But the scene ends there, with Obedience's emotions trapped in potentially volcanic but actually compliant scrubbing of the table.

Testifying to Ronald Wilson's *National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, "'Fiona'" who was taken by police from Ernabella in 1936 aged five makes clear the desperate efforts of 'black' mothers to protect their paler children from white racist attack:

> We had been playing all together, just a happy community and the air was filled with screams because the police came and mothers tried to hide their children and blacken their children's faces and tried to hide them in caves. [. . .].
>
> My mother had to come with us. She had already lost her eldest daughter down to the Children's Hospital because she had infantile paralysis, polio, and now there was the prospect of losing her three other children, all the children she had. I remember that she came in the truck with us curled up in the foetal position. Who can understand that, the trauma of knowing that you're going to lose all your children? We talk about it from the point of view of our trauma but – our mother – to understand what she went through, I don't think anyone can really understand that.[99]

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[97] Bovell, *Holy Day* 52.

[98] Bovell, *Holy Day* 18,22.

[99] Fiona, "Bringing Them Home: A Guide to the Findings and Recommendations of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families," *Confidential evidence 305, South Australia*, 1997, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 129, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/stolen_children/stories/fiona.html> accessed 24 June 2005. 129.

Holy Day's narrative protects Obedience, constructed as stolen too young to remember the wrenching, from knowledge of any Indigenous experience to which she could bear witness, or with which she might overcome silence and engage directly with Nora's claim that black mothers reject children because they have "a touch of the chalk". In contrast, in *The Man From Mukinupin* (1979), by the white playwright Dorothy Hewett, the lone Indigenous character, Lily Perkins, challenges white characters every time they attempt to call her by their moniker, "'Touch of The Tar'".[100] Lily rejects this falsifying of her name / self with a tenacity evocative of John Proctor in Miller's *The Crucible* who chooses hanging rather than allow the (false) confession he has made to witchcraft to be posted on the church door:

> PROCTOR [*with a cry of his soul*]. Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my soul; leave me my name![101]

Despite feeling herself to be "nothin'", and despite the near-impossibility of any struggle against the self-fulfilling nature of the spurious self which "they" have decided is hers Lily, like Proctor, will not let anyone take away the only thing she has left, which is her name.[102] In the following exchange with a man whom she is, in her state of desperation, trying to seduce, Lily rejects the condescension, hypocrisy and abuse intrinsic to "Touch of The Tar", regardless of how it is spoken:

> JACK. (*gently*) Touch of The Tar . . .
>
> TOUCH OF TAR. Don't call me that. I'm Lily . . . tha's me name . . . Lily. Pretty, ain't it?[103]

Again there are parallels with Proctor's actions. With the words "Beguile me not!" Proctor exposes Danforth's effort to seduce him into pretending that a confession would not be selling out his children or his friends.[104] By asserting the power of her/his own name, whatever the consequences, both Proctor and Lily refuse their

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[100] Dorothy Hewett, *The Man from Mukinupin: A Musical Play in Two Acts* (Perth: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979) 56-58, 99-101.

[101] Arthur Miller, *The Crucible: A Play in Four Acts* (London: Cresset Press, 1964) 124.

[102] Hewett, 57.

[103] Hewett, 57.

[104] Miller, 124.

consent to a seduction which renders the imposed false self perpetual and irreversible. In *Holy Day*, although Obedience proves that Nora is a liar, she does not challenge Nora's identification of her as "a touch of the chalk".[105] Obedience's silence allows Nora to continue her increasingly vicious accusations against Obedience's people. Obedience keeps silent earlier in the play when the newly arrived traveller Goundry says: "Got a touch of the tar in her."[106] Obedience would, with good reason, be afraid of Goundry, and, it could be argued, is life-preservingly wise to remain silent. Lily and Proctor are created differently. Neither allows fear of death to deter the fight to preserve the identity without which life would be intolerable. Proctor dies for his name. To get her lover Harry to call her by her name, Lily fights a dangerous but ultimately successful struggle, physicalised as her unarmed battle against Harry who threatens her with a jagged broken bottle.[107]

When Obedience announces she is leaving, she begins with a well argued disruption of the false identity Nora seeks to impose on her, but Obedience's power to overturn the white narrative is undermined because the focus shifts away from Obedience's actions to Nora's fury as she depicts Obedience's mother as a weak, depraved, drunken sexual object:

> NORA. Go on then, get out. Go and find the slut that bore you if the grog has not done her in already [. . .][108]

Allowing those words to reverberate unchallenged, Obedience exits in silence, "*unseen by Nora.*" It is Nora, not Obedience, who reasserts her identity and her control over time and space as she wields the axe.[109]

Obedience's lack of equality as a dramatic force in her arguments with Nora contrasts with the verbal facility Jack Davis' *No Sugar* (1985) gives to Jimmy when he takes on white authority. In a bid for white votes, the teetering white government in late 1920s Western Australia has shunted Jimmy and his people to a camp miles from home on spurious grounds that they have a contagious skin disease. Far from

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[105] Bovell, *Holy Day* 52.

[106] Bovell, *Holy Day* 4.

[107] Hewett, *The Man from Mukinupin* 99-101, 05.

[108] Bovell, *Holy Day* 61.

[109] Bovell, *Holy Day* 61-62.

accepting in silence internment at the hands of a government who are trying to construct his people's skin as a disease, Jimmy puts the hung-over white Superintendent of the camp through a deconstructive hammering:

> NEAL. You're supposed to be up in the quarantine camp.
>
> JIMMY. Quarantine camp, me arse.
>
> NEAL. You're out of bounds and you know it.
>
> JIMMY. Come off it, you know that quarantine camp is a load of bullshit, so don't try and tip it over me.[110]

Where Obedience allows Nora to have the last word, Jimmy keeps up the bucketing against a language that structures him as its Caliban. Jimmy's linguistic skills force Mr. Neal to scurry to quarantine himself in his office. Jimmy refuses to allow Neal's narrative to construct him as 'lost'.

Traditional Aboriginality has been framed by Euro-Australian narratives, Casey writes, "as a singular, static and stone-age culture."[111] Whether construed by Obedience as an unreachable dream, or by Linda as an irrelevant nightmare, traditional Aboriginal culture in *Holy Day* is frozen offstage. Linda functions as an agent of that framing bringing nothing from her culture, except her boast to Obedience of her rejection of her people and their tyrannical marriage arrangements:

> LINDA. But the old man… my husband, he made big trouble. He said you been with that white man now, you clear off… Ah, my mother cried. But I didn't look back. I told all them blackfellas to bugger off… [. . .].[112]

The "lost" daughter Obedience's dream of returning to her land and the mother from whom she was stolen, is given nightmare reversal in Linda's dismissal of her people. While Linda's disparagement of traditional culture creates a back-story that may make credible her isolation from her people, her relating of that event truncates any performed witness to the meaning of that estrangement. According to a Howard Barker aphorism: "Tragedy liberates language from banality. It returns poetry to

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[110] Jack Davis, *No Sugar* (Sydney: Currency, 1986) 63.

[111] Casey, *Creating Frames* 11-12.

[112] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22.

speech."[113] The paucity of poetry in Linda's speech is a symptom of its failure to understand the rupture between mother and daughter as tragic. The utterance, "Ah, my mother cried," is squeezed by a context which deprives it of texture. Linda gives her mother no referent face or landscape. The cadences of the line evoke nothing. The mother projects no metonymic representation that could afford her an ongoing performative function. Empty of presence, she cannot affect the action. If Linda as a "lost" daughter has any desire to reunite with her mother before they are all put to death – Linda by hanging herself and her people by massacre – her desire stays hidden. If there is a subtextual link between the mother's tears and the waterhole where Linda waits for the whites to come and destroy her, it is not explored. To serve the narrative, Bovell requires banality of Linda and stasis of her culture. Her rebuff to her people is consistent with her chief characteristic, her lack of connection with anyone. The bombast as she separates herself from the "blackfellas" could even be viewed, uncritically, as adding entertainment and appeal to her character in performance.

Linda's rebuff to her mother is a fiendish reversal of the desire for "understanding" Bovell expressed in programme notes:

> In the stories of the stolen generations we [white Australia] seek explanation but we don't yet seek a deeper understanding of ourselves.[114]

There are many "stories of the stolen generations" in Ronald Wilson's *National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*. When, in *Holy Day*, Linda boasts of turning her back on her mother's tears, she replicates the mindset of the government that is described by "Fiona" in Wilson's report as treating Aboriginal mothers as people who do not have feelings:

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[113] Barker, *Arguments* 18.

[114] Bovell, Playwright's Note, iii. Also in Bovell, "A Sophisticated Nation."

> I guess the government didn't mean it as something bad but our mothers weren't treated as people having feelings. Naturally a mother's got a heart for her children and for them to be taken away, no-one can ever know the heartache. She was still grieving when I met her in 1968.[115]

Where Bovell's young Aboriginal character, Linda, is portrayed as stuck in an unbridgeable 'nowhere' between Aboriginal and European cultures, Eva Johnson's *Murras* (1988) offers one example from a multiplicity of work by Indigenous playwrights where the tension of loss and longing between Aboriginal culture and its sundered children is brought centre stage. When Ruby, a young Aboriginal mother on the margins of white society, realises that Russel, a prosperous young adult with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs who came from "the stolen generations" and was adopted into the white world, does not believe that he hasn't really missed out on much in life by not knowing his Aboriginal heritage, Ruby replies, "But you are nothing if you don't know where you come from."[116] Russel wants to stay in his adopted white world, but, Ruby will not let him go without hearing her point of view:

> RUBY. Russel, you gotta find your people, you know that? They probably look for you all this time.[117]

In *Holy Day* no-one comes looking for Linda, nor does Linda expend any energy to help Obedience look for her people. Linda's *actions* mark traditional Aboriginal culture as insignificant, uninteresting, static, compartmentalised and unforgiving. Linda rejects Obedience when she begs forgiveness for having betrayed her.[118] Although Russel in *Murras* presents himself, as does Linda in *Holy Day*, as having nothing to learn from Aboriginal heritage, Johnson's play has other voices from that heritage who present their culture as dynamic and active both in its metamorphic resistance to oppression and as a source of healing.[119] Even though *Murras* ends on Ruby's despair at the death and destruction European society has brought her

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[115] Fiona, "Confidential Evidence 305," 129. 129.

[116] Eva Johnson, *Murras*, *Plays from Black Australia* (Sydney: Currency, 1989) 92.

[117] Johnson, *Murras*, 93.

See also: John Harding, *Up the Road*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Playbox Theatre Centre Monash University Melbourne, 1997).

Jane Harrison, *Stolen* (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 1998).

[118] Bovell, *Holy Day* 44.

[119] Johnson, *Murras*, 105.

people, family and land, the Mimi Spirit from traditional culture dances a transcendence of that pain. Far from being rejected as either irrelevant or unreachable, traditional culture enters modern culture as a source of strength.

In *The Man From Mukinupin*, song is one of multiple strategies that Hewett gives Lily Perkins for revivifying herself and her people and overcoming white attempts to deny her feelings:

> TOUCH OF THE TAR'S SONG.
> [. . .].
> I wish'd they'd left me in the creek where me ol' people dies,
> the liddle child they found who cried, among the bindieyes.
> I 'ad a liddle dream that I might catch a fallin' star,
> but they took me down ter whitey town an' called me Touch o' Tar,
> but when the wild duck cries at night it seems I gotta rise
> with beatin' wings an' voice that sings out of the bindieyes.[120]

Where Hewett uses poetry, song and spirit to create a matrix that allows the pain of severed daughter and family to be recognised and performed, Bovell's Linda decontextualises and trivialises her mother's pain. The black mother in *Holy Day* is de/cried, passed over, sentimentalised and mocked.

[120] Hewett, *The Man from Mukinupin* 102.

To be black within the white paradigm is to be always already empty

Image 2: Obedience seeks connection with Linda.[121]

When Linda arrives at Nora's Travellers' Rest out of a storm she gives uncanny form to the defiance displaced by Obedience's servitude.[122] When Obedience, inculcated with white perceptions that blacks have no rights, characterises Linda's "mob down by the river" as the ones who take the white landowner's sheep, Linda reframes that perception:

> LINDA. Why not? He's got plenty.
>
> *OBEDIENCE smiles, attracted to the defiance in the woman.*[123]

The figurative pairing of Linda's defiant blackness and Obedience's servile whiteness appears to be a positive and a negative, like the "desire vs repression", or "life-death" polarities that Ubersfeld offers from classic Western theatre.[124] While masquerading as positive, Linda's is a counterfeit, deracinated, inarticulate defiance that affects the action as a negative. Three times at their first extended meeting, Obedience seeks Linda's help to re-connect with Aboriginal people and her mother

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[121] Photo: Tracey Schramm. Natasha Wanganeen as Obedience. Kyas Sherriff as Linda. Holy Day by Andrew Bovell. Dir. Ariette Taylor. Sydney Theatre Company, 13 Aug, 2003. Courtesy STC Archives.

[122] Bovell, *Holy Day* 2.

[123] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22.

[124] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 81-82.

but Linda defies her by shrugging off the questions.[125] On her third attempt, Obedience intrudes on Linda's silence with testimony to her own lost belonging:

> OBEDIENCE. I've seen the sea too. I don't know where. But I've seen it. And an old woman's face, black as night. I remember it. I don't know who she was but I remember her face and I remember the sea and it was blue.[126]

Obedience's rhythmic repetition makes a litany: "sea", "face", "seen" and "remember". The colours make intimate her mother and the place where she was last seen. The "old woman's face" is "black as night". The sea which Nora calls "red" is reclaimed as real: "it was blue."[127] Despite the emotional force driving Obedience's words, her subtextual plea for recognition goes nowhere. Linda says nothing, gives nothing. Her defiance is in abeyance, but no alternative energy moves the action. Linda does not re-link either of them with Aboriginal culture, people, land, law, language, spirit, or any practical knowledge that might help them survive. To do so would beg the question of why, although ravenous for the scraps of food Obedience has filched from Nora for her, Linda does not rejoin her mob by the river, at least for a feed of stolen sheep and some warmth by the fire.

Linda's blackness is absence. As a metonymy of Obedience's desire to defy white servitude and discover her sundered world, Linda fails. Linda's stasis drains energy from Obedience and returns her to the white shelter hollow, where her first action is to betray Linda to the whites and their inexorable and savage punishment.[128] Linda's inability to sustain a connection with Obedience is evoked in Image 2 by the distance between the bodies of the two performers and the tentative nature of Obedience's approach to her.[129]

The pathology that is imposed upon Obedience by *Holy Day*'s paradigm is evident in the scene where she seeks re-entry to the shelter of the Rest having left the Linda at the waterhole. It is important to ask how the 'black' defiance, which Obedience smiles to discover embodied in Linda, becomes the very thing that she betrays to the whites.

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[125] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22-23.

[126] Bovell, *Holy Day* 23.

[127] For Nora's first description of the sea as red, see Bovell, *Holy Day* 13.

[128] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

[129] See Image 2 in this chapter, 74.

I suggest that *Holy Day*'s narrative punishes Obedience's pleasure at Linda's defiance. The task the narrative demands of Obedience is that she must restore herself to surrogate whiteness and abjection by condemning Linda and herself.[130]

By denouncing Linda, Obedience formalises the gulf Linda initiated between them and marks herself for the moment as severed from those dangerous desires that Linda embodies as her metonym. In the rich complexity of "theatrical poetics" (Ubersfeld), the character of Obedience is itself a rhetorical figure, an oxymoron where "contradictory categories" of surrogate, servile whiteness and defiant, punishable blackness appear to be in conflict with one another.[131] Ubersfeld posits that a character who is "a living oxymoron" is "a locus par excellence for dramatic tension, because it metaphorically brings together two opposite orders of reality."[132] In the betrayal scene, the oxymoronic qualities within Obedience – defiance and servility – are revealed to emanate not from what Ubersfeld describes as "two opposite orders of reality", but from the same order of reality, that of death.

Although Obedience begins this exchange as the surrogate good 'white' girl coming to Nora with information to impart, the other of her "contradictory categories", the bad 'black' girl, asserts herself immediately, replying to Nora's demand to know where she has been "sneaking off it" with schoolgirlish petulance: "Nowhere."[133] Mirroring Linda's technique of defiantly refusing to answer questions, Obedience draws upon herself Nora's threat:

> NORA. Jesus, girl, don't you lie to me or I'll beat you black and blue.[134]

Uncannily, "black" and "blue" are the colours which connect Obedience with her mother and her place, yet there is no opportunity for Obedience to bring those resonances into this scene. The brevity of Obedience's "Nowhere" invites

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[130] Bovell, *Holy Day* 24-28.

[131] Ubersfeld's concept of "[contradictory categories" refers to oxymoronic qualities that can exist within a character, such as "life-death, light-night, law-crime". Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 81. For Ubersfeld's discussion of the centrality of character in "theatrical poetics," see 83.

[132] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 81.

[133] In an earlier scene Nora has herself described Obedience to Elizabeth as "a good girl". Bovell, *Holy Day* 16. For the betrayal scene see 28.

[134] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

comparison with Cordelia's initially muted response to King Lear's demand that each of his daughters makes public expression of her love for him.

> LEAR. [. . .] Speak.
>
> CORDELIA. Nothing, my lord.
>
> KING LEAR. *Nothing?*
>
> CORDELIA. *Nothing.*
>
> KING LEAR. Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again [original emphasis].[135]

Cordelia responds with a spirited defence of her muteness, which, as Ubersfeld points out, "makes her silence problematic". Although Cordelia "eloquently refuses to speak", she actually has a greater role in this scene than her sisters who comply with their father's demand.[136] Cordelia's clarity of purpose contrasts with Obedience's inarticulate and almost immediately vanquished defiance of her 'mother'. The *Holy Day* text offers the actor performing Obedience no space in which she might respond to Nora's threat of a beating. Instead Wakefield jumps in to reassert his authority with oily self-righteousness: "Obedience… you must tell us if you know something."[137] Obedience hides any shreds of rebellion beneath 'white' girl sycophancy. Her dialogue, devoid of irony, calls on her to address her interrogator as "Mr Wakefield" and to incriminate Linda by linking her with the missing baby's shawl. Where Nora's threat of physical violence went 'nowhere', Wakefield has induced Obedience's betrayal of Linda by hiding the force that upholds his power as male white landowner behind a veneer of prime ministerial avuncularity.[138]

Obedience's next action is extraordinary. Having publicly wrought a shift of white power over Linda's fate from Nora to Wakefield, and therefore by implication consenting to white male authority over herself and the other unseen Aboriginal

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[135] Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.1.86-89.

[136] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 91.

[137] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

[138] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

people, Obedience now tosses back to Nora direct personal power over herself.[139] Obedience reintegrates herself into the lowest level of the white hierarchy by lapsing once more into a faltering, inarticulate defiance. Her self-abnegation when Wakefield speaks creates a hiatus into which Nora steps:

> WAKEFIELD. Where is she [Linda]?
>
> *OBEDIENCE hesitates*.
>
> NORA. Tell him.
>
> OBEDIENCE. The waterhole.
>
> *She lowers her head*.[140]

Obedience's vacillation morphs into abjection's astute knowledge of its lowliness. Nora, as an ex-convict woman, has tutored Obedience in the structure of the class system. By ordering Obedience to "[t]ell him" what she knows, Nora reaffirms Wakefield's authority over *Holy Day*'s entire frontier 'community', including herself.[141] Wakefield will employ that power to direct the detention of Linda, using Goundry, who lurks on the despised periphery of white society, as the convenient instrument for inflicting the physical punishment Linda will receive.[142] Ruffled by Obedience's encounter with Linda's defiance by the waterhole, the white hierarchy has made Obedience complicit in its reinforcement. Far from being what Ubersfeld calls "a basic figure of theatricality, an essentially dialogical figure – [. . .] a living oxymoron" and a potential source of dramatic tension "par excellence", Obedience's "contradictory categories" are both negatives. The dramatic tension within Obedience in that scene is therefore muted, brief and inglorious. There is no risk for any of the white characters. The only characters at risk in that scene are Obedience and Linda, and the never seen "blacks" beyond the light of the white settlement. The struggle between bleached 'black' defiance and "touch of the chalk" servility within Obedience

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[139] When Linda and Obedience have their first encounter by the waterhole, rather than defying Nora's authority, Linda affirms it by designating her as the "boss woman" and urging Obedience to help her get work from Nora. Bovell, *Holy Day* 17.

[140] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

[141] It is for convenience, not as a description of social cohesion, that I call the characters of *Holy Day*, who form a disparate and isolated gathering around the Rest, a 'community'.

[142] Goundry's beating of Linda takes place offstage in Wakefield's presence. Bovell, *Holy Day* 31.

does not ignite dramatic struggle within any of the white characters. Instead the drama comes from Obedience stalling and playing Wakefield and Nora against one another. Within *Holy Day*'s order of reality, they rapidly coerce Obedience, with either threats or persuasion, to reveal what she has already invited them to find out. The major risk to the two white interrogators is not the frightened child that is Obedience, or the vulnerable isolate that is Linda. Rather, the force behind Nora and Wakefield's coercion of Obedience comes from their own deep-seated fear of the people whom Inga Clendinnen in her study of the early years of European settlement in New South Wales valuably calls "the Australians".[143] In *Holy Day* instead of Obedience being able to use her defiance as a dramatic force to challenge what Nora and Wakefield are doing, the double negative within the construction of her character condemns her instead to being an instrument of their plot.

There is a striking contrast here between Bovell's Obedience and James' character, Lola Williams in *Yanagai! Yanagai!* Lola is interrogated by the QC, who wins legal victory with his proof that the mission, to which her ancestors were forced to move and where she was born and raised, was at Healesville and not on the claimed Yorta Yorta land. In this extract from the end of her interrogation Lola continues to use the resonances within her of family and land to assert her strength and her relationship with country, even in defeat:

> QC. Thank you, Mrs Williams, you can stand down.
>
> LOLA. I was born and raised on the Cummeragunja Aboriginal Mission. We're Yorta Yorta. Everyone knows that. I told you that!
>
> QC: Thank you, Mrs Williams.
>
> LOLA. I'm Yorta Yorta.[144]

Comparison with Antigone is apt too. Antigone defies the political and physical might of King Creon. Against his orders, she buries and mourns the body of her brother, the "traitor" Polynices.[145] Before she is led to her punishment, the living death of entombment, Antigone forces Creon to listen to her. She evokes just as Lola does in

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[143] Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Pub., 2003) 4.

[144] Andrea James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2003) 16.

[145] Sophocles, *Antigone* 140.

James' play, an ethical and sacred power, founded in ancestors and place, that defies the unjust law imposed by the state:

> ANTIGONE. Gods of our fathers, my city, my home,
> Rulers of Thebes! Time stays no longer.
> Last daughter of your royal house
> Go I, *his* [Creon's] prisoner, because I honoured
> Those things to which honour truly belongs [original emphasis].
>
> *ANTIGONE is led away.*[146]

In *Holy Day*, under Nora's interrogation, Obedience's defiance that temporarily displaces her servility has none of the resonating power or personal dignity of Lola's or Antigone's courage in the face of dire defeat.

After the white landowner has had Linda chained to a tree accused of stealing a white baby,[147] Obedience offers to go and tell her people by the river. Linda subsumes the girl who wants to help her under the same category as her torturers:

> LINDA: You… and all the other fucking whites, keep away from my family.[148]

Linda appears to subvert the colonial binary, but in refiguring whiteness as negative (death; destroyer) she does not figure *anything* as 'life'. Linda's lumping of Obedience with "*all* the other fucking whites" recalls her earlier action when she "told *all* them blackfellas to bugger off" (emphases added).[149] Linda fights with the white empire's weapons of racist metaphysics – proliferating stereotyped hierarchies.

To draw on Gaita's moral philosophy, Linda, like the white racists, cannot see that her race-based categorisation holds her in a conceptual framework where she does not have to take "seriously" any harm her actions bring to those she marks as separate from herself.[150] Commenting on Cavell's notion of "'soul blindness'", Gaita draws on the example of a rapist slave owner in the Southern States of America who constructs moral categories for himself distinct from those he frames for another

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[146] Sophocles, *Antigone* 151.

[147] Bovell, *Holy Day* 31.

[148] Bovell, *Holy Day* 34.

[149] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22.

[150] Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*, 2nd. ed. (London: Routledge, 2004) 159.

race, and thus gives himself permission not to take a black woman's "sexuality humanly seriously." Racism's conceptual framework protects the rapist from being "threatened by the realisation of the evil he did to her."[151] Not one of the violently trespassing white characters in either Bovell's *Holy Day* or Thomson's *Wonderlands* experiences what Gaita, following Socrates, calls "remorse" – a realisation not only of what they have done to their victim but "the proper recognition of the harm the evildoer has done himself."[152]

A terrible unspoken irony of Bovell's *Holy Day* is that the lack of remorse from the white racists is mirrored in Linda's behaviour towards other Aboriginal people even though they, like her, are racism's victims.[153] I am not implying that Linda's use of racist categories to reject her mother and Obedience is in any way morally the same as the evils white characters commit – invasion, child theft, rape, mutilation and massacre. My argument is that Linda's 'black defiance' is misdirected into re-enforcing racism's conceptual framework.

Through her use of rape as metaphor for conquest, Linda sustains (unconsciously) racism's alliance with sexism. She tells the "blackfellas" to "bugger off". She condemns Obedience as one of "the fucking whites". When brought together these tropes make the action of the play explicit. The whites fuck and the blacks are buggered. It is not a joke. It is not about the adult body freed of colonisation and able to en/gender itself as a site for mutual gifts of pleasure. No. This is a text that reinforces white empire's figuring of itself as a masculinity whose body is weapon and whose destiny is to invade the figured emptiness of the other, interchangeably cast as black, woman, untongued man or landscape. Empire's masculinity compounds its power and profit by assigning to its lower-half, the brutal ex-convict, the bodily enforcement of its law. Empire's upper half, the landed aspirational gentleman Wakefield, who yanks on the chain that binds the 'savage' Linda when no-one else is looking, assumes a masculinity descended from sceptred power and uses

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[151] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 154-63. The words quoted come from 156, 159, 160. Gaita quotes from Stanley Cavell, *the Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 376. I would extend Gaita's argument to include sexism's construction of different moral categories for those it makes its victims.

[152] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 63.

[153] See Linda's rejection of Obedience's request for forgiveness. Bovell, *Holy Day* 44.

it to create the history, language and metaphors of nationhood that give the law its sanction.

Unlike the “irruptive” metaphors beloved of Derrida that upset “the entire inherited order”,[154] the metaphors that burst from Linda do not irrupt into the gentry’s master / slave binary to disturb its atrocities. Her metaphors are the master / slave binary’s irruption into her inheritance, destroying her Aboriginal culture, resistance and survival.

Even though early in the play white characters are disturbed by “the moving shadows” in the lightning-lit bush around the white landowner’s hut,[155] Linda’s people cannot come onstage. Those “shadows” might do more than take a sheep. They might rescue Linda from the narrative that holds her captive long before it puts her in its physical chains. Blackness as self-murder takes place within, long before Linda makes it visible as suicide, hanging herself with the chains the white men use to bind her.[156]

Holy Day brings no black men onto the stage. By their very absence their maleness is rendered ineffectual. In the scant stories told by the black women about the offstage people, black men are represented as unable to compete with white males, sexually or with weapons. Linda’s story of her rejection of her old black husband in favour of a young white man marks the black man derisively as at once lascivious in his taking of a young woman as wife, and as impotent.[157] When Obedience in her direct address to the audience describes how the party of white men with guns rode towards the black people by the river and began shooting women and children, her words reveal nothing of the black men except defeat: “The men ran for their weapons and were cut down.”[158] Black men are as powerless as black women to disrupt the *Holy Day* paradigm of white supremacy. White racism / sexism reinscribes itself as victor, and blackness / femaleness as shadow in the Australian landscape.

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[154] Jacques Derrida, "Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta," trans. Alan Bass, *Positions* (London: Continuum, 2002) 42-43.

[155] Bovell, *Holy Day* 11-12.

[156] Bovell, *Holy Day* 59.

[157] Bovell, *Holy Day* 22.

[158] Bovell, *Holy Day* 64.

Conclusion

In an essay in the programme Bovell claims credit for laying bare the cruelty of colonisation:

> In John Howard's Australia I would be called a revisionist for imagining a history that is different to the one we were taught in school. Just as in George Bush's America, the accusation of 'revisionist' is levelled at those who question the justification of the war against Iraq. But it remains the function of theatre, of all art, to challenge the prevailing view, to question authority, to expose hypocrisy and to go out on a limb in order to say something of substance.[159]

I wish he had. Bovell stages the stereotypes of 'the Australian Psyche' not in a spirit of buffoonery where they might undermine or parody a repellent reality, but as its unlaughable instruments. Because the hierarchy is policed so strictly, the only power the characters can sustain is the power to rip out dissidence and dissonance in others and themselves. Within this stereotyped world dramatic action is enfeebled, because the fake defiance would be too quickly crushed, and because stereotypes mitigate against surprise. To offset this weakening of dramatic tension, Bovell exaggerates the behaviours and in particular the way cruelties are inflicted, so that the audience can take surprise from the excesses. Of course the pushing of characters to the edge is a basic tool of drama, but Bovell substitutes his flamboyant use of this tool for the lack of power within his 'victim' characters to resist the hierarchy or to imagine an alternate reality.

One effect of this magnification of the policing of gender, race, class and religious boundaries in the face of weak or non-existent resistance is that stereotypes those boundaries produce are allowed to stand. This rigidity mitigates against self-discovery for the characters in Felman's sense of "unsettling [. . .] expectations" and reaching out "for what precisely *cannot be anticipated*" (original emphasis).[160] Felman brings together Freud's discovery of the "unanticipated" testimony of the unconscious and Mallarmé's simultaneous "liberation" of verse from the constraints of the alexandrine to suggest that "[t]he breakage of the verse enacts the breakage of the world."[161] Mallarmé's "decanonization" of an ordered poetic form brings into

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[159] Bovell, "A Sophisticated Nation."

[160] Felman and Laub, *Testimony* 19-25.

[161] Felman, 20, 25.

awareness “a vaster *desacralization*” and liberation “taking place in social consciousness and in culture at large” (original emphasis).[162]

Holy Day’s policing of the orders of empire denies any space within which the bodies of black and white, or male and female might hybridise as human beings, or come to appreciate more than one world or more than one way of knowing. There is no space for cultural bricolage.

At the end of *Holy Day* the instructions issued by the self appointed white mother Nora to her silenced Indigenous ‘daughter’ are as they were at the beginning and always will be: “Light the lamps, girl… Keep the night away."[163] Obedience must keep away herself, the dark, while Nora must forever fail to see.

The imperial order in *Holy Day* kills or destroys: its Aboriginal characters; their society and culture; all of its young characters (the two Aboriginal characters, the white youth Cornelius, and the offstage baby girl); and, its sole Jewish character. *Holy Day* could be deemed a perfect example of the argument British playwright Howard Barker propounds with severe pessimism, that the only theatre for a culture on the verge of extinction is tragedy:

> Since no art form generates action, the most appropriate art for a culture on the edge of extinction is one that stimulates pain.[164]

The action in Bovell’s play exposes to audience scrutiny its young, black, female (or feminised) victims as objects of pity whose easily crushed bursts of defiance disguise an inherent absence of power to hold the perpetrators of their assault accountable. The Aboriginal characters do not have the power to place any of their persecutors in a situation where he or she would have to face what it means for his or her own self to go on refusing to accept accountability.

The Aboriginal characters travel through the play as the objects of the tragedy, not its subject. Psychoanalyst Dori Laub writes that testimony to the trauma of the Holocaust gives birth to “the ‘knowing’ of the event,” in a way that is different from its

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[162] Felman, 20.

[163] Bovell, *Holy Day* 2 and 66.

[164] Barker, *Arguments*, 19.

presentation “simply as an overwhelming shock.”[165] In *Holy Day*, the pain in the chained and hanged figure of Linda and the raped and tongueless Obedience is pain displayed – deprived of e/motion. The two figures shock. They do not give birth to “‘knowing’” the pain. *Holy Day* fails to create an experience of tragedy in Barker’s sense of a work of art that “stimulates pain.” The tragedy of *Holy Day* is that it creates a museum of ‘overwhelming shock’ that puts on a simulated pain for ‘a dark moment’.

Holy Day is a linear narrative that premises itself on revealing a fictional but ‘authentic’ version of an oppressive white-imposed history. Without the power, however, to resignify that past in the light of what the present knows, or should seek to discover, Holy Day condemns itself to repeat empire’s suppression of its truths.[166]

In Barker’s *Scenes from an Execution* a brilliant Venetian artist, Galactia, has been commissioned by the Doge to paint his brother the Admiral on a giant canvas that will render glorious his victorious naval battle against the Turks. Galactia paints the carnage, but subverts the Admiral’s triumph by painting on the face of the Turk who kneels at his feet the knowledge –anguish – that the Admiral will not show mercy. Carpeta, Galactia’s lover, who makes a fine living painting pity-rich images of Christ on a cross, urges caution. Galactia’s living and her freedom are at stake:

> CARPETA. [. . .] if you could paint pity, the Church would stand up for you, and if you could paint glory, you would have the State. But you will please nobody.
>
> GALACTIA: You know what I think? I think you are marvellous at honouring yourself. Marvellous. But pity’s got nothing to do with greatness. It’s surrender, the surrender of passion, or the passion of surrender. It is capitulating to what is. Rather than pity the dead man I would say – there – there is the man who did it, blame him, identify. Locate responsibility. Or else the world is just a pool, a great pool of dirty tears through which vile men in boots run splashing.[167]

Bovell’s play smudges over or rushes past any moment in *Holy Day* when the action might offer the audience an opportunity to study in a cruelly victorious character’s

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[165] Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," *Testimony* 57.

[166] For Laub’s analysis of “uncanny repetition” of a suppressed traumatic past, see Laub, 64.

[167] Howard Barker, *Scenes from an Execution*, *Collected Plays*, vol. 1 (London: J. Calder ; Riverrun Press, 1990) 265-66.

face more than a gasp of recognition of responsibility for their acts of destruction. Barker's assessment of a culture unable to face itself applies:

> Tragedy is possible only in cultures secure enough to tolerate the performance of infringements against collective wisdom.[168]

[168] Barker, *Arguments* 97.

Chapter 2:
Writing a reconciled nation: Katherine Thomson's *Wonderlands*

> This is a play about white belonging, black belonging. It's about the dust storm of forgetfulness and about finding new ways to move forward. It's about the struggle to find the balance of a shared history – personal and political – and that binding, that connection, that sets our hearts free.
>
> Promotional material for *Wonderlands*.[1]

> I would love my protagonists to live at peace, to have found the benign closure to which they aspire and which – who knows? – they may even deserve. That this is not the case may be due to something that we might some day remedy: the limitations that power and history objectively place upon rebellion, aesthetic and political, in our times.
>
> Ariel Dorfman.[2]

> The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.
>
> William Blake.[3]

> 'I wonder if all things move along with us?'
>
> Lewis Carroll's Alice.[4]

Katherine Thomson's *Wonderlands* (2003), set in rural Queensland in the 1930s and the present day, offers a robustly articulated – and rightly acclaimed – case for Indigenous land rights. In *Wonderlands* it is not blackness and femaleness that are punished with mutilation, as they are in Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day*, but the racist aggression of white male pastoralists. As *Wonderlands* moves to its climax in its contemporary time frame, a young farmer Tom, against his better judgement, obeys his prospective father-in-law Lon and attempts to dynamite a cave that has Indigenous rock art. Lon fears that the Yirralong people, who want to lodge a Native Title land claim, could use the rock art as evidence of traditional Aboriginal occupancy of land that Lon regards as his 'property'. The gelignite misfires and Tom

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[1] "*Wonderlands* - Extraordinary New Native Title Play," *HotHouse Theatre: Latest News*, 2003, <http://www.hothousetheatre.com.au/pub_news/20036428410.htm> accessed 20 Jan. 2004.

[2] Ariel Dorfman, Foreword, *Resistance Trilogy*, by Dorfman, (London: Hern, 1998) viii. Dorfman's collection of plays explores "the derelict moral order" in Pinochet's Chile.

[3] William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Proverbs of Hell," *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Random House, 1953) 126.

[4] *Through the Looking-glass* in Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; and, Through the Looking-Glass* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 25.

has his hand blown off.[5] Lon suffers a heart-attack.[6] The campaign that Lon has been carrying out against the Yirralong fails. Powerless, he can longer disrupt the path to a shared black and white belonging to the land.[7]

To file the Yirralong land claim, Edie, as spokesperson for her people, needs to prove their link with their land, from which they were displaced many years before. In the play's other time frame, the 1930s, Lon's great aunt Alice, the white 'owner' of the property that Lon eventually inherits, has documents that could help Edie in the 21st century prove the Yirralong's historic connection with their land. Those documents, that in the contemporary time frame Lon keeps locked in the bank, are Alice's notebook and her father's journal, which contains his record of the Yirralong family tree and an account of how he shared his occupancy of the pastoral station with the Yirralong whom he recognised as the original owners. In the contemporary time frame, Lon's helplessness following his heart attack opens the way for his wife Cathy to fetch the documents from the bank. The play closes with Cathy giving those records to Edie to enable her to lodge the Yirralong land claim.

For a long time this chapter resisted writing. Again and again the lava that wanted to burn the paper cooled. Subterranean concerns about *Wonderlands*' representation of Euro-Australia's Aboriginal 'other' remained inchoate. In the face of the play's vigorous rebuttal of racism and its coherent and moving presentation of the significance of land rights for Aboriginal people, to be critical of the play seemed petulant, ungrateful and counter-productive. Yet, my concerns persisted and demanded a detailed investigation of the physicality of the play and the relationships between the bodies of black and white characters in performance. As will be argued, this study comes to the conclusion that the play has a consciously articulated text that is disturbingly at odds with the non-verbal behaviour of the performing bodies. In the play's physicality, black bodies serve white bodies who suffer pain. The narrative traps its non-white characters as a well-behaved, benignly-treated subservient 'other' within a good and fair Australian nation.

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[5] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 62.

[6] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63-64.

[7] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 65.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of my disquiet about the play's construction of the relationship between black and white Australia, it is important to recognise and discuss Thomson's positive representation of Aboriginal Australia within a drama that articulates a forthright case against racism. It presents that case on shared ground to which both white and black characters belong.

Stage ground is constructed as shared space and shared history

On a stage space that in the original production was "a packed red-earth floor with a gumleaf encrusted curtain snaking across the space"[8] *Wonderlands* calls on every character, Indigenous- and Euro-Australian, to express and defend her/his own sense of deep personal, familial, communal and ancestral "belonging" to the land. With the curtain movable so that acting areas are defined as needed and with "'soft'" transitions between the two parallel time frames of the 1930s and the present-day, the shared ground is inscribed with the presence of the past. Played upon as both "earth" and "floor", the stage is at once: a (white-owned) pastoral lease in Queensland in 1931 called Ambertrue; the property's homestead in the 2000s; a river-bank; a community hall; "the [Indigenous] cultural co-op office in town"[9] and a street in the same country town.[10] The stage/ground is marked from beyond the action by both a far-reaching past of traditional Aboriginal occupancy and a more rigidly calculated past that begins in the 19th century with Euro-Australian occupancy of Ambertrue and other pastoral properties.

The white land tenure overlaps with, and then displaces, the original ownership. In the 1930s time frame when Alice inherits the pastoral lease Ambertrue from her mother, any remaining Yirralong who do not have a job on the 'property' are being forcibly relocated to settlements such as Palm Island.[11] Alice encourages Jim, the Yirralong man employed as a stockman, to share the management and occupancy of

[8] For the set description see Thomson, *Wonderlands* ix.

[9] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 59.

[10] This list of settings paraphrases the one given in the published play's introductory notes on "Setting." Thomson, *Wonderlands* ix.

[11] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24-25.

the land with her – a tradition in her family: "The grace my father used to say was black saviours, white pioneers."[12]

As Alice discovers from the journal of her long deceased father, there were heinous actions in his lifetime to destroy Indigenous people. Her father preserved his answers to an 1884 government survey on the reasons for any decline in "native numbers":

> ALICE. [. . .]. Father writes down ' . . . bloody warfare, the Native Police, and my fellow pastoralists poisoning natives like vermin.' He keeps referring to the 'colonial invasion'. [. . .].[13]

As a sympathetic white keeper of the white-disrupted Aboriginal past, Alice's repeated use of the dramatic present – "writes" and "keeps" – helps hold that past on stage and relevant to the action in the parallel 21st century time frame, where the 1930s scenes are juxtaposed with contemporary conflict over a Native Title claim involving the same property. There is resonance in the present-day frame when Alice reinforces the historic primacy of Yirralong ownership of the land by telling Jim about an entry in her father's journal:

> ALICE. He writes that the Yirralong were landlords, how we were here on your terms. [. . .].[14]

In acknowledging the benefit she and her father derived from Ambertrue's Aboriginal past, Alice projects into the future a broad cultural and social benefit from the history she is writing:

> ALICE. [. . .]. Think ahead to thirty, forty, fifty years time. Australia in the future [. . .]. People should know how differently we lived with the old blacks. How here on Ambertrue we didn't chase them off. Maybe there'll be a time when people won't believe that you could go out riding and hear that stone chatter or … The things your [Jim's] parents taught me, they're the sort of things that I'm putting down in the book. [. . .].[15]

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[12] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 36.

[13] Alice speculates that her father did not return the survey because of fears that the information might get "into the wrong hands" and put the Yirralong in further danger. Alice's speculation is confirmed by Jim, the black stockman with whom she shares the scene. Thomson, *Wonderlands* 36.

[14] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 35.

[15] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24.

The action makes it clear that Alice's historical writing is an act of white ownership not relevant to Jim's pressing concern about the impending forced removal of his people. He resists Alice's enthusiastic recall from her childhood of traditional tribal activities such as chanting and "stone chatter" that reset the past as a museum of cultural curiosity.[16] The vanishing of that experience makes Alice's memory of it more valuable (for her), but multiplies the loss for Jim and his people who face a different and very threatening reality where "Everyone's too sick to fight [their eviction]."[17] Jim acknowledges remembering ceremonies from his childhood, but only in response to Alice's prompting, and does not volunteer details. The threats to the Yirralong's survival render intrusive Alice's plans to draw on the elders' knowledge to complete her history of Ambertrue, including lists of Yirralong vocabulary. Jim responds: "Long story, Miss Alice. But they've had enough of lists."[18] Jim knows that Alice as his employer only has to "give the nod" and he and his wife face removal by the police. He displaces his anger onto the fragment of traditional knowledge that intrudes on the fraught present:

> JIM. [. . .]. You know what's been churning through my mind? That Yirralong lullaby. How I never want to hear that bloody song again.[19]

Through Jim's actions Thomson reinforces the significance of the living Yirralong culture and their connection with the land. Jim is gathering ochres from four specific locations for his Uncle to take with him on that forced journey to no location, no place, no past.[20] The Yirralong way of life that is rapidly becoming the past becomes present onstage as Jim's gift to the future. Jim's words to Alice expose the double nature of his Aboriginal present. In the face of white power to supplant the culture of the 'other', his gift is all the more necessary as an antidote to its own futility:

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[16] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 14.

[17] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24.

[18] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 15.

[19] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 25.

[20] The Yirralong are being taken to an unknown state-designated area which could be, in Jim's words: "[. . .] that Palm Island. Or that other big place nearly to Brisbane." Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24.

> JIM. [. . .]. Everyone's saying, Uncle, where we're going they don't let you dance, but he's saying, what sort of place don't let you dance?[. . .]. [21]

Although Jim has no power to prevent his Uncle and the other offstage Yirralong being severed from their home, the ochres in his hands gather yet another meaning: an onstage metonymy of his people as living presence and its loss. The forced relocation of people and ochres to a reserve or mission where ceremony is forbidden rips the contiguity of Aboriginal past, present, place and ceremony. Like the ochres, the people who are taken away under white law are being renamed as relics and transgressions.

The action of the 'uncanny' reveals white-dominated history is not disrupted.

"Uncanny" irruptions into the text reveal that white-dominated space and history are not being disrupted. The disjunction between the play's spoken and physical texts comes into focus when Alice discovers in her father's journal a "very fragile, yellowed fold-out paper" on which he pencilled the family tree of the Yirralong – Jim's family. To borrow from Freud, the performance of 'black' history as unfolding from, and re-enfolding into, 'white' history, appears to be an "uncanny" metaphor – one of those veiled encounters with "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."[22] Freud cites Schelling's concept of the "uncanny [*das Unheimlich*]" as "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light."[23] Alice's enlistment of Jim's aid to re-enfold the black past within a white constructed order may represent an uncanny irruption onto the stage of the play's (unconscious) need to re-enact the original (frightening and hidden) white enlistment of the help of "black saviours" to enfold blackness within the white order. Alice in *Wonderlands* seeks to ameliorate the catastrophic consequences of the white imposition of its history, but the play appears unable to rip the fabric of that order.

Alice takes no notice of such concerns as these, and rushes on with the task of amelioration. As the benign sovereign of Ambertrue, Alice is hurrying against her own

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[21] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24.

[22] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Art and Literature*, vol. 14 (London: Penguin, 1985) 363-64.

[23] Freud, "The Uncanny," 364. See also 345-47.

impending death (although she does not realise that consciously) to “write a letter of agreement” as proof of her plan to will Ambertrue to Jim: “Under white man’s law.”[24] Alice is incognisant of irony in her determination to use the law to shield her employee and his family against the ferocity with which that law is displacing his people into ‘chaos’.[25]

Alice is scrupulous in her efforts not to negate Jim or the culture of his people. Yet Alice’s actions appear to confirm Robert Young’s argument, following Cixous, Kristeva and Levinas, that within a colonized world the only alternative to negating the other is to construct a “reduplication of the [colonizing] self.”[26] Young’s choice of the word “reduplication” when ‘duplication’ could suffice, perhaps signals the Freudian “compulsion to repeat” an act that brings one face to face with fears experienced earlier and then repressed.[27] Might Alice be ‘reduplicating’ the primal colonizing act of her father, a benign invader dependent upon the cooperation of the colonized? Alice continues his project of protecting the colonized and the richness of the traditional culture within the colonizer’s language, purpose and inherited order.

Constructed with Thomson’s sparkling wit as a lone childless spinster (“The chap I ordered from the David Jones catalogue doesn't seem to have arrived”), and as a feminist who would make sure that any chap who did arrive would “have to abide by [her] decision,” Alice pre-empts any internecine discord that might interfere with her figuring of Jim as her heir.[28] In Hannie Rayson’s *Inheritance* confrontation is violent

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[24] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 36-37, 53.

[25] Removal is experienced by the displaced as ‘chaos’, but by the state authority carrying out the forced removals as a justified imposition of order. Kevin Gilbert quotes a displaced Indigenous woman, Alice Briggs, on the breakdown of community that has resulted from the imposition of “white man’s law”: “The tribal people … they were strict in their ways. Not like a white man’s law; it stinks, it does. And they've built these houses [at Purfleet Aboriginal Reserve near Taree, New South Wales], they put ‘em here … instead of putting them here, why didn't they mind their own business and let Aborigines cater for themselves? [. . .].” Kevin Gilbert, *Because a White Man'll Never Do It* (Pymble, N.S.W.: HarperCollins, 1994).

[26]Young argues that Cixous, Kristeva and Levinas are each “trying to place the other outside the sphere of mastery rather than in a relation of negation or of reduplication of the self.” Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (London: Routledge, 1990) 17.

[27] Freud, "The Uncanny," 360.

[28] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 44.

when some members of an extended 'white' family fear that the white patriarch has left the farm to his bastard son, an Aboriginal man known as "Nugget".[29] The discord is physicalised in a "*vicious and frightening*" fight where Lyle, one of the white would-be-heirs, attacks Nugget with a shovel.[30] Dibs, one of the white members of the family, rips up the will.[31] In *Wonderlands*, Alice's possession of her father's journal, a metonym for her patrimony, empowers her to extol the reasonableness of white man's law. With Jim as her heir protected by a will that Alice is certain a solicitor will certify,[32] Alice enshrines the power of a good white law as an antidote to the depredations of the state, fellow pastoralists or her faraway cousin Lonergan who is likely to challenge any willing of the property to Jim. Young's summation of a concept of Spivak's might illuminate how Alice figures Jim as the saviour of her vision of herself as saviour: "[. . .] the colonized has been constructed according to the terms of the colonizer's own self-image, as the 'self-consolidating other' [. . .]."[33]

Unlike Thomson's Alice, Hibberd's Monk O'Neill in *A Stretch of the Imagination* (1972) revels in his gesture's ironies as he unfolds from a sheep's skull his "last will and testimony" that will return his property to Aboriginal Australia.[34] Monk's self-mockery and malevolent irony suggest that he knows his gift is an empty one, whereas Alice in her benevolent optimism does not 'know' that by projecting her earnest and unfulfillable generosity into the future she is changing nothing.

To calm Jim's well-founded fears that as owners of Ambertrue his family would face hostility from white pastoralists who already call him "a uppity nigger," Alice urges courage.[35] Alice exhorts Jim to share her vision of the future as a "continuum" of peaceful white and black coexistence that she constructs as shared history:

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[29] Rayson, *Inheritance* 75.

[30] Rayson, *Inheritance* 57.

[31] Rayson, *Inheritance* 75.

[32] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 44.

[33] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "The Rani of Sirmur', in *Europe and Its Others*, ed. Francis Barker *et al*. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985) 1, 128. Cited in Young, *White Mythologies* 17.

[34] Jack Hibberd, *A Stretch of the Imagination*, Currency Playtexts (Sydney: Currency Press, 1973) 43-44.

[35] "ALICE. If you reach for the stars and you fall, you fall on clouds. If you reach for the clouds and fall you hit the ground. Old *migaloo* [white] saying." Thomson, *Wonderlands* 45.

> ALICE. All I know is that this [her father's journal] puts us somewhere. My family. And yours. It's our history of our time together. We're part of this. A continuum. It's not my role – or your role – to stop that continuum now.[36]

Sharing the management of the property with Jim and bequeathing it to him are significant acts. Thomson demonstrates the humanity of white pastoralists such as Alice for whose character Thomson drew on documents from actual settlers who treated Aboriginal people with humanity, spoke out against white atrocities against them, and appreciated their culture.[37] Alice, however, is isolated from any situation which would test her beliefs and actions. Although her humanity is admirable, it does not bring "interruption" (to borrow a Derridean term) to a white order that protects and privileges Alice's being. In my understanding of Derrida's speculative 'definition' of his term "*différance*", there can be no understanding of whoever or whatever is deemed to be the 'other' unless there is an "interruption" to "the binary oppositions of metaphysics" that otherwise remain within the "violent hierarchy" of "a classical philosophical opposition".[38] In the absence of "interruption", practice and theory continue "residing within the closed field of these oppositions, thereby confirming it."[39]

If there is a route that would interrupt Alice's ordered world and tumble her down to explore white civilisation's abjected chaos-as-otherness, the white woman does not recognise the entrance. When I asked Katherine Thomson about the title of her play, she explained that it was not until she had drafted the play and decided on the title that she noticed the allusive link between "Alice" and "Wonderlands". Thomson created "Wonderlands" from "wander" and "lands" to convey a sense of wandering through the land as she had on her journey through rural Queensland to research the play.[40]

Although Thomson's Alice in *Wonderlands* believes she has entered a country where she has the power to alter the future without disrupting her past and present, she

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[36] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 37.

[37] See Katherine Thomson, Writer's Note, *Wonderlands*, by Katherine Thomson, (Sydney: Currency, 2004) xii.

[38] See Derrida, "Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta," 40-41.

[39] Derrida, 41.

[40] Personal communication, 20 Feb. 2004.

cannot hear the advice her namesake in Carroll's story receives from the Red Queen:

> Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that [original emphasis]![41]

For Alice in Thomson's *Wonderlands* to "want to get somewhere else" would be to question a self, a father and a law constructed so that any gift to the other must return to the self. Like the Red Queen, Emmanuel Levinas uses a metaphor of going or not going "somewhere else" to illustrate the possibility of expending enormous energy, only to find that one has remained in the same place, where the other is assimilated to the same.[42] Against that possibility, is another – a radical journey that does not return to the same:

> A *work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same* [original emphasis]. To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure.[43]

Levinas argues that Abraham's journey with his son away from the land of their ancestors has the power to disrupt what Levinas calls Western philosophy's traditional "horror of the other that remains other." For Levinas, philosophy from Aristotle to Leibniz has created for itself "a god adequate to reason, a comprehended god who could not trouble the autonomy of consciousness, which finds *itself* again in all its adventures, returning home to itself like Ulysses, who through all his peregrinations is only on the way to his native island" (emphasis added).[44] A work of "what we call quite simply goodness" might furnish the "heteronomous experience we seek," but only if its "movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification, [and] does not return to its point of departure." If a work is not to be conceived in

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[41] Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* 26.

[42] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," trans. A. Lingis, *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 346-48. I am indebted to Young for alerting me to these concepts of Levinas', and for his valuable summation of these ideas. See Young, *White Mythologies* 17.

[43] Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," 348. See Young, *White Mythologies* 17.

[44] Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," 346.

such a way that despite “an apparent agitation of the ground” it remains “identical with itself” and “reduces an alien world to a world whose alterity is converted into my idea,” that work must go beyond the same, beyond the world of one’s father.

To keep faith in the rightness of following her father’s heroic, benevolent footsteps, Thomson’s Alice must stay in the same place. She makes her gift of goodness and equality to a land beyond that place – the future, where Jim will inherit the earth. Because she has no-one to tell her there is no path beyond empire as long as she remains in its garden, Thomson’s Alice is able to die in the dream of the fulfilment of her goodness. Without her good works having to be tested, they remain what Levinas, drawing on Kant, calls "a pure wish."[45]

In her naive innocence Alice cannot live – cannot grow up – because if she did, she would have to face an adult white world which would not have allowed her to gift away the family property to an Aboriginal man. When Carroll’s Alice tries to leave the garden, the Red Queen tells her that “all the ways about here belong to me.”[46]

A skilled dramatist, Thomson does not deprive Alice of all movement, but crafts for her a journey of the emotions. Like Cathy, the wife of the pastoralist who ‘owns’ Ambertrue in the 21st century, Alice becomes the beneficiary of the gift that both white women learn to give – compassion and generosity towards self and ‘other’. Although each has a unique journey, Alice and Cathy both move from ignorance and arrogance and, in Cathy’s case, also prejudice, hostility and fear, to greater understanding. Both journeys unseat each woman’s particular pretence that the status quo of exclusive white control of Ambertrue is just and justifiable.

Alice’s encounters with Indigenous experience jolt her from the mild white arrogance/ignorance of her childhood, to understanding the other as a person like herself who has knowledge and needs. Alice has the openness to learn humility. Alice tells Jim how as a child, when his people were still living a tribal life, Jim’s father

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[45] As I understand it, Levinas’ speculates that “goodness” may furnish us with an experience of the being and meaning of the other (“the heteronomous experience”) but only if “goodness” goes beyond thought and becomes “works, without which goodness is but a dream without transcendence, a pure wish (*blosser Wunsch)*, as Kant put it.” Levinas, "The Trace of the Other." 348.

[46] Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* 22.

reprimanded her for her ignorance of the need to protect the waterhole from her horse.[47] Ironically Alice's physical journey runs in a counter direction to her emotional journey. While she progressively loses mobility as a result of her head injury when she fell from her horse, she moves to greater recognition of the rights of Jim and his people.[48] With the inner light comes the loss of physical sight. Trying to conceal from Jim that she is having trouble seeing, she chooses words which figure the light of the Australian landscape as overwhelming: "Isn't is just… absurdly bright?"[49]

A critical shock comes to Alice when Jim tells her of the government's planned removal of his people. Alice responds: "It might be for the best." Jim's impassioned rebuttal jolts Alice into comprehending the strength of Jim's attachment to the land.[50] In the absence, however, of an Alice who might run fast enough to break through the looking-glass (which always reflects the 'same') and enter the world of "somewhere else", *Wonderlands* has to conceal the inherent contradiction of Alice's world. Within Ambertrue, a world conceived as honest and shared, Alice is protected from confronting the social structures that enshrine her world as her property. The name "Ambertrue" evokes an alchemy of 'gold' and 'truth'. Amber is a rich and beautiful colour one might imagine born from equal parts of black and white. Amber is a substance within which the once living past glows in preserved death. It may be a random act of coincidence, of course, but perhaps the uncanny is at work in the fact that Ambertrue begins with the same letter as Australia and has the same number of letters.

Alice's munificent plan to gift equality instead of alterity to the future cannot be implemented because the contradictions in that gift are repressed. As Derrida writes:

> For there to be a gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift. [. . .]. For there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, no recognition; he or she must also forget it right away [. . .]. this forgetting of the gift must even no longer

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[47] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24.

[48] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 19, 56.

[49] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 53.

[50] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24-25.

> be forgetting in the sense of repression. [. . .]. Repression does not destroy or annul anything; it keeps by displacing.[51]

To prevent Alice recognising the inherent impossibility of her gift, the drama confines her to Ambertrue. The prohibition on movement has "uncanny" consequences. Alice rides her horse too fast and is thrown, even though she is a healthy young woman with a lifetime of riding experience.[52] The horse's name, "Ginger", evokes the same glowing colour as the name of the property.[53] Before she can change her will so that on her death Jim will fulfil his role as her mirror, Alice dies, although not before she has had plenty of time to articulate her wishes and coopt his acquiescence.

Mauss writes that in Maori society, "to give something is to give a part of oneself."[54] By postponing her gift until after her death, Alice holds her gift to herself. Thomson structures her play, however, so that the gift of Alice's and her father's writings to the future does not die, but persists in the play's parallel 21st century scenes. Alice's gift becomes powerful evidence in a challenge to those white characters who seek to deny the presence of the Indigenous past and to prevent the lawful recognition of Native Title to the land. The paradoxes revealed in the text's unconscious actions need to be set against what I have called the 'consciously articulated text' that dramatises the case for Indigenous land rights.

The play's conscious text exposes and excoriates white racism

Wonderlands scourges white pastoralists who transgress against Indigenous humanity and persist in denying a history of white exploitation, massacre and displacement of Aboriginal people. In the play's contemporary time frame the racist viewpoint that Lon represents is soundly refuted by the Yirralong woman Edie. Herself a modest grazier, Edie attends the meeting where the white farmers are expressing their hostility to her people's land claim. Edie tries to calm the pastoralists' fears, explaining that under the Native Title legislation "[n]o one can take your land away."[55]

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[51] Jacques Derrida, *Given Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) 16.

[52] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 44 and 62-63.

[53] For Alice's request to Jim to "saddle Ginger", see Thomson, *Wonderlands* 7.

[54] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (London: Cohen and West, 1969) 10.

[55] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 28.

As the present-day owner of Ambertrue, having inherited it from his father, who inherited it when Alice died, Lon sees his land as the place of his and his family's belonging. As chair of the farmers' meeting, he insists that any traditional Indigenous presence was aberrant:

> LON. With respect, Edie, I think I'm speaking for the entire meeting when I say that the only full-caste Aboriginal ever walked my place was either on their way to somewhere else or lost.[56]

In its enunciations, Lon's 'history' becomes the ground on which he walks – the land where he has lived and worked all his life. History and territory are validated for him by the presence of the superior numbers and power of his fellow pastoralists.[57] To preserve their collective lie of an empty pre-white past and a superior European presence, Lon uses appropriated Darwinism to denigrate Edie and her people:

> LON. [. . .]. It was survival of the fittest and you lost and you're very poor losers. And we survived here. And it kills you. Your families are wrecks and your men bash you senseless and your livers are shot with the drink and you churn out the same old rubbish that the land talks to you or something.[. . .].[58]

Thomson holds to ridicule racism's skill at dismissing evidence that the land was not vacant prior to white arrival:

> LON. [. . .]. A couple of blacks might have shown old Major Mitchell which track led where, but they did not live here. [. . .].[59]

Lon's underhand tactics in his war against land rights include blackmail. As he tells his intended son-in-law Tom:

> LON. Did I ever mention I had some dirt on Edie Jordan? [. . .]. It'll cut the hot air straight out of her. I should of used it from the start.[60]

To his wife Cathy, Lon constructs the Yirralong as destroyers of his identity. He describes his personal mission to vindicate his and his father's lives:

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[56] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 28.

[57] Thomson evokes a hall full of people using just three characters, Lon, Tom and Edie.

[58] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 29.

[59] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 25.

[60] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 40.

> LON. Stopping people from taking away who I am. Figuring a way to stand in front of my father's grave and hold my head up high. [. . .].[54]

Thomson's unpacking of the racist's strategies is thorough. Lon's character is credible and written with understanding. No excuses are offered for his reprehensible behaviour.

The Indigenous characters create a moral counter to racism

The strength, resilience and humour of the Indigenous presence dramatises a persuasive counter to racism, and prepares a path for reconciliation, healing and shared belonging. In the consciously articulated text, Thomson creates a dramatic match for Lon's racism in the character of Edie, with her moral conviction, passion and verbal skills. Her monologues, spoken "*to the old people, in her mind*," populate with her Yirralong ancestors the same stage/ground that the white pastoralist insists was uninhabited.[61] The "old people" represent the "gaps" in the Yirralong family tree that Edie has been unable to fill because the flow of living memories to new generations has been disrupted by forced displacement.[62] Her 'stream of consciousness' to unseen ancestors from her childhood manifests an oral history reaching back generations:

> EDIE. [. . .] Your great great great great great great great … Remember we used to play that game in the back of the car see how far you could go back 'till Dad'd say stick a sock in it.[63]

In monologues and verbal combat, Edie is an educator, as is *Wonderlands* in its metatheatrical guise. In his introduction to the published play, Henry Reynolds summarises the 1996 High Court Wik Case decision "that Pastoral Leases did not normally extinguish Aboriginal Native Title." White landowners in Queensland, Reynolds explains, feared "the possibility that Aborigines with traditional association with the land [. . .] could now claim traditional rights to use the land for traditional hunting and gathering and for ceremonial purposes."[64] Onstage, Edie explains to her ancestors – and potentially to her white audience – that a successful Native Title

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[61] Stage direction, Thomson, *Wonderlands* 12-14.

[62] See Edie's second monologue, Thomson, *Wonderlands* 33.

[63] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 13.

[64] Reynolds, Introduction, ix-x.

claim will greatly strengthen Yirralong spirit and morale because “it’ll say so in whitefella law,” even though it will only allow limited access to the land, such as bringing “the kids onto leases for a camp.”[65] To calm Lon’s fears, that “newspapers” and “National Party members” are “whipping up”,[66] Edie assures him that the native title claim, if successful, will not take his land, but will recognise the traditional owners and specify their responsibilities for visiting the leases.[67]

When Edie acknowledges that the living Yirralong no longer know where to find the rock art that would provide evidence of habitation, her sustaining humour in adversity is another illustration of the skill Thomson brings to her representation of the strengths of Australian Indigenous culture. Edie’s irony continues to inscribe the land for her people, even when the literal path has been obliterated:

> EDIE. [. . .] old Uncle Jim goes on and on about a cave of paintings that he was always told were Yirralong, but he’s taken us to the wrong place that many times in the end Lorraine said, ‘You've been watching that Discovery Channel. Getting yourself mixed up with some other mob. Like Eskimos.[68]

Following Ubersfeld’s study of rhetorical elements in theatrical poetics, Edie’s emotional state – her passion for the land – may be read as a metonym for that land and for the persistence of the Indigenous past in the present.[69] The Yirralong’s eviction, that in the play’s 1930s time frame assumes physical presence in Jim’s collection of ochres, manifests in the 21st century time frame in multiple metonymies that take both material and non-material form. The eviction is dramatised as absence in the form of the “gaps” in Edie’s family tree and as presence by Edie’s passion for the land. Objects, such as the rock art and stone tools that Lon attempts to destroy, function as metonyms for power to interpret the past and control present and future. Because, in Lon’s polarised view, to recognise any Aboriginal inscription of the land would be to defeat his own, he solicits Tom’s help to smash the Aboriginal artefacts:

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[65] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 13.

[66] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 28.

[67] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 47.

[68] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 60.

[69] See Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 22-23, 81-83.

> LON. Some of the old buck niggers gave these to my father, before they went off to Palm Island or whatever resort it was. [. . .] They get a search warrant … they find this, suddenly we're on their beaten track.[70]

The possession and interpretation of 'white'-created objects – Alice's notebook and her father's journal – are sites of contestation too. Alice reveres these records as messages to the future carrying white respect for the black people with whom Ambertrue shares its history. In the 21st century time frame the records function as metonyms for truth – legal proof of the land's Aboriginal past. Lon debunks their value as history: "They were works of fiction."[71] Permitting no scrutiny of evidence, he keeps the documents locked away.

Thomson plots a path for Lon's wife Cathy that leads her to compassion for herself and for Edie, and makes credible her gift of those records to Edie. An irrevocable link between the women comes when Edie inadvertently discovers Cathy's affair with the bank manager and agrees to keep it secret.[72] Edie's offer to Cathy to help circulate a photo of her absconded daughter Tessie opens the way for Cathy to hear Edie tell her about the loss to Indigenous mothers when their children were taken:

> CATHY. My daughter will come home.
>
> EDIE. That's what our people thought.
>
> CATHY. It's not the same.
>
> EDIE. My missing child's more missing than yours? I suppose if that gets you through the night.
>
> *CATHY tries to answer, but can't. Fighting tears, she goes.*[73]

Thomson has powerfully brought Cathy to face her denial of humanity to the 'other' whose grief at the loss of a child she has constructed as "not the same" as her own. I am indebted to Gaita for insight into the action of this exchange. As Gaita puts it in his paraphrase of formulations from white women who similarly do not see the

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[70] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 55. Thomson did not invent Lon's racist insult, but heard "buck nigger" used by a white man in Queensland. Personal communication, 2004.

[71] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 21.

[72] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 33-35.

[73] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 61.

children of the 'other' as having the same meaning as their own: "'Our' children are irreplaceable; 'theirs' are not."[74]

Gaita writes of "meaning" as "distinctive" of the life of human beings.[75] Viewed in Gaita's light, Cathy's shift in consciousness comes when she recognises past and present, and self and other as capable of giving and allowing one another meaning. Cathy comprehends a truth that escapes the net of lies she has woven through her life and the fraught life of her family. She moves from a static death-in-life to the possibility for what Gaita calls a "conversation".[76] Cathy is now able to recognise Edie's humanity and give her the archival documents that are crucial to the Yirralong Native Title claim.[77]

The gift is enacted on stage space meticulously constructed as land to which both black and white belong. Cathy puts into Edie's hands a metonymy of the past. The gift is unspoken recognition of responsibility for wrongs committed against the Yirralong since white settlement began on that same stage/ground. The metatheatrical significance does not escape the audience, who recognise in Cathy's action a counter to the rhetoric and actions of contemporary neo-conservative Australian politics and culture that sever responsibility from truth, and past from present.[78]

In this reading of *Wonderlands* as a model for learning to understand a previously reviled other, the play exemplifies possibilities for healing historic and contemporary conflicts over the land. It dramatises the presence of the past as shared. It presents personally transformative journeys for two of the white characters (Alice and Cathy), but plausibly not for the obstreperous Lon. The play inscribes on the stage the "common ground" of black and white "belonging" to the land, and presents Aboriginal culture as an appreciated source of wisdom.

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[74] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 333. See also 331-336.

[75] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 131.

[76] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 123.

[77] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 65.

[78] See analysis of political and cultural context, Introduction.

It is a reading in accord with the playwright's documented intention. Thomson describes *Wonderlands* as a "work of fiction",[79] that "rose slowly" from her extensive archival and oral research in rural Queensland to find "the dramatic heart of the native title debate."[80] Sharon Verghis reports Thomson's account of her "huge, emotionally and physically demanding journey to find her story." During two years of field trips to rural Queensland, Thomson talked with a spectrum of people, "from elderly black matriarchs to National Party ideologues, from angry, terrified pastoralists to former mission dwellers." From their "living memories" and from archives such as journals and local newspapers, Thomson found "the ghosts", of the past she was looking for: "the ancestors of the local tribes and the few early settlers brave enough to speak out over their extermination like 'native vermin.'"[81]

Thomson's play "rose slowly from this past, and from the voices and hates and loves of those in the present."[82] In the course of her research, she experienced "a profound sense of regret" that the many white voices who made "passionate pleas that 'something be done'" about the extermination of Aboriginal inhabitants "were unable to influence the course of history."[83] In Pamela Luke Watson's research, Thomson encountered the writings of Alice Duncan-Kemp a member of a 19th century frontier family in Queensland:

> As Watson points out in her comparison with other settlers [. . .], the Kemps were singular in that from their first arrival [. . .] the family was open to Aboriginal practice, tradition, knowledge, lore and law, and their lives were enriched accordingly. Needless to say these works were an inspiration for the character of Alice in this play. [84]

With its model for reconciliation that draws on the many white voices of the past who were, as Thomson's writes, "open" to Indigenous people, *Wonderlands* may in the

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[79] Thomson, Writer's Note, xi.

[80] Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[81] Verghis 12.

[82] Thomson, reported in Verghis 12.

[83] Thomson, Writer's Note, xii. Thomson quotes a squatter who described with horror "'cold blooded cruelty on the part of whites," xi. Quoted by Thomson from Gideon Scott Lang, *The Aborigines of Australia, In Their Original Condition and in Their Relations with the White Man*, Melbourne: Wilson and Mckennon, 1865.

[84] Thomson, Writer's Note, xii.

21st century do what those 19th century writers could not – contribute to a changed national consciousness. As Verghis reports, *Wonderlands* constructs the "common ground" that Thomson encountered in rural Queensland beneath "the fear and suspicion":

> Both sides – the [Indigenous] aunties who see their ancestors in the warp and weft of the land, and the white farmers who have worked it for generations – have a genuine sense of belonging. Perhaps, she says, there is hope for a reconciliation of sorts in this fact alone.[85]

The acclaim accorded *Wonderlands* mingles praise for its art and its message.[86] In the "Foreword" to its publication, Bob Munn, a Gunggari Native Title claimant, lauds Thomson's achievement in tackling the "damning, divisive and socially damaging subject" of Native Title, and creating, moreover, a play that "people like." Thomson empathises with the first Australians, portraying them as "a cultural icon with specific rights under law to challenge the landholding class in Australian society."[87] The play makes accessible the complex legal issues of Native Title and Pastoral Leases and "highlights the convenience of racism as an argument instead of proper discussion."[88]

Munn points to the political significance of *Wonderlands*: "Katherine Thomson has an understanding of the motivation behind the need to lodge a native title claim."[89] His words suggest that in Indigenous people's experience such an understanding from white people is all too rare, and that when understanding is encountered, it is important to attest to it. Munn welcomes the veracity with which Thomson "reflects [white] resistance to change, [and] the folly of some [white pastoralists'] actions."[90]

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[85] Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[86] *Wonderlands* has received significant recognition:

New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Play Award, 2004: shortlisted.

Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Louis Esson Prize for Drama, 2004: shortlisted.

AWGIE Awards, Stage Award, 2004: shortlisted.

Rodney Seaborn Playwrights' Award, 2003: winner.

Source: AustLit Database. http://www.austlit.edu.au/ Accessed 14 Dec. 2004.

[87] Munn, "Foreword," *Wonderlands*, v.

[88] Munn, "Foreword," *Wonderlands*, vi.

[89] Munn, "Foreword," *Wonderlands*, vi.

[90] Munn, "Foreword," *Wonderlands*, vi. Munn does not state (from politeness?) that the people in *Wonderlands* who are resistant to change and who engage in the folly of attempting to destroy evidence of Indigenous occupation of the land are *white*, but I infer that that is what he meant. The

Although Munn does not illustrate, “folly” is evident in Lon’s attempt to blast rock art to bits lest it prove traditional Aboriginal occupancy.[91]

Having commended Thomson for understanding Indigenous Australians’ compelling relationship to the land; showing her audiences an accurate reflection of racism and folly in white resistance to native title; and, reflecting “the huge need for mutual understanding,” Munn adds a final tribute:

> If more people followed this lead, the reconciliation process may well be outdated.[92]

Munn’s use of “if” and “may” renders hypothetical the play’s power to effect the longed for transformation of Australian society. Yet *Wonderlands* seems to have been received as a modern political-morality play mapping a path to the much needed “mutual understanding” between black and white, as exemplified by the understanding that develops between the white pastoralist Cathy and the Yirralong spokesperson Edie. As Munn’s conclusion suggests, *Wonderlands* models moral conduct with potential power beyond the theatre to hasten desired personal and political change.

Although, unlike Munn, theatre critic Colin Rose does not specify potential political outcomes, Rose’s analysis of *Wonderlands*, which he praises for “an attention-grabbing clarity, velocity and strength of purpose,”[93] does contribute to a reading of *Wonderlands* as a blueprint for a modern Australian morality. The scenes where the (white) pastoralist Alice tries to convince the (black) stockman Jim that “she wants to share the management of the farm with him,” are described by Rose “as portraying black and white coexisting positively.” The attempt by Lon, “whose racism erupts like a scalding geyser,” to destroy Aboriginal rock art is, in Rose’s words “an astonishing

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character of Lon is an embodiment onstage of those people Thomson described in her interview with Verghis as “angry, terrified pastoralists.” See Katherine Thomson, interview with Sharon Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 14 July 2003, Metropolitan: 12.

[91] Thomson told me she had not invented the story of pastoralists attempting to destroy Aboriginal rock art. During her research in Queensland she had been told of this happening. Personal communication (2004).

[92] Munn, “Foreword,” *Wonderlands*, vi.

[93] Colin Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," *Sun-Herald* 20 July 2003, Metro: Metro: 5.

and literally explosive act of cultural vandalism."[94] The subtext, here and in the play, is clear: this is reprehensible conduct and racism is in itself reprehensible.

Rose has some criticisms, arguing that *Wonderlands* is not as "subtle and complex" as Hannie Rayson's *Inheritance*, where "the hot-button issues of racism and native title" are also central concerns. "Thomson does tend to see things [. . .] in high contrast black and white."[95] Such a reading appears to reinforce the perception that the play is a guide to ethical/political conduct. A clear delineation of good from bad would seem a virtue for a morality play. Although Rose qualifies his praise by indicating a lack of subtlety and complexity, *Wonderlands* on its surface does not simplistically assign 'good' and 'bad' to particular groups or individuals. For example, although she is a white pastoralist, Alice is respectfully aware of Aboriginal culture from her first appearance. As Stephen Dunne confirms, "Thomson wants to remind us that there is another narrative of Aboriginal/settler relations besides shootings, syphilis and poisoned flour."[96] Nor does *Wonderlands* ignore the complexity of relationships within Aboriginal Australia. "The play has a few digs at Aboriginal politics," writes Dunne, though the "real spite" is revealed in Lon's racist tirades against Aboriginal people.[97]

Wonderlands' morality is not premised on a war between irreducible binary enemies where good/god can only triumph if evil/devil is obliterated. In an allegory of the futility of war, Thomson creates an exchange where Alice and Jim witness a buzzard fighting an eagle:

> ALICE. [. . .] Who won?
> JIM. No one.[98]

'Good' in *Wonderlands*' world comes not from the unwinnable violence of open battle, but from the process of discovering and recognising the 'other'. Munn applauds this

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[94] Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," Metro: 5.

[95] Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," Metro: 5.

[96] Stephen Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," *The Sydney Morning Herald* 24 July 2003, Metro: 17.

[97] Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," 17.

[98] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 30. Dunne considers this story so important he uses it to begin his review. Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," 17. (Dunne misnames Jim as "Jack").

"mutual understanding." Rose names it "coexisting positively." Thomson does not confound 'bad' with a particular race, as racism does, but reveals 'badness' as a destructive presence in violence, coercion, lies and the denial of cooperation, whether carried out by group, state or individual. Dunne sites the play's 'goodness' – its moral purpose – in its compassionate subsuming of binary differences:

> The play skilfully and warmly stresses the vast areas in common over the differences. This is, eventually, a play of compassion rather than the simple spite so common to the argument.[99]

Dunne's words return us to Rose's appreciation of the play's example of positive coexistence. Modelling positive or morally/politically desirable conduct does not stop *Wonderlands* from being an enjoyable play. Although he has some reservations (that the play is "low on surprise and its climactic scene is rushed") Rose calls *Wonderlands*: "a rattling good yarn;" "a marvellously gripping drama;" and, "great entertainment, grabbing hold like a thriller and with plenty of political and emotional bile."[100]

Dunne attests to Thomson's effective combination of meta-theatrical political significance and audience pleasure: "It's a wonderful play, and especially important given the current cultural contestation about versions of Australian history."[101] Dunne praises Thomson's insight into the consequences of white failure to represent truthfully to itself its own history:

> The so-called black armband view of our country's history has undertaken a battering lately. Thomson's excellent and important work finds the more truthful drama inherent in the devastating effects of wearing a white blindfold.[102]

For historian Henry Reynolds, Thomson's "great achievement" is similarly inseparably political and theatrical:

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[99] Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," 17.

[100] Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," Metro: 5.

[101] Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," 17.

[102] Dunne, "Social Truths Come Home to the Nest," 17.

> She humanises an otherwise abstract struggle over land and human rights and has turned it into compelling drama. We are all therefore in her debt.[103]

To pre-empt any readers who believe it is contradictory to state that "a fine political play" can be good art, Reynolds makes it clear that the *Wonderlands* is not didactic. He points to "the fact that some of the most successful plays at the moment in the West End and on Broadway are about political issues" and the confronting moral dilemmas that arise. I am curious to know what plays Reynolds is thinking of, but on this occasion he does not leave a footnote.[104]

Reynolds writes that Thomson's characters are "autonomous and believable individuals with a past that we can readily imagine, well grounded in time and place."[105] Munn and Reynolds both recognise Thomson's empathy for the other. Munn writes: "The play does not treat anyone unfairly and is not a parody."[106]

In the light of this praise for *Wonderlands*' dramatisation of the political and personal case for non-Indigenous Australians to recognise the truth of Australian history and bring about reconciliation, it seems churlish to persevere with my investigation of Thomson's narrative as reinscribing in the cultural discourse a colonized 'other'. Faced by the public recognition accorded the play's conscious actions to repudiate racism's cruelties, my discovery of unconscious counter-representations that privilege white desire and white design, morphs into a fantastical and irrelevant mind-sport. It seems far more sensible to adhere to the interpretation of people like Reynolds who have acclaimed *Wonderlands* for its "empathy" and understanding".[107]

Impasse. Then in the small hours of the very morning I am to deliver a work-in-progress paper designed to help me clarify my argument, desperation teaches me to try a new question: What is it about *Wonderlands* that my critique of its representations of the 'other' is refusing to flow? An image comes. A rock. Katherine Thomson's play *Wonderlands* has made a rock of essential goodness. No fire from

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[103] Reynolds, Introduction, x.

[104] Reynolds, Introduction, ix.

[105] Reynolds, Introduction, ix.

[106] Munn, Foreword, *Wonderlands*, vi.

[107] Reynolds, Introduction, x.

hell, or chaos, can pass. Indeed, its goodness sings in its audience's united hearts, and we brush away a gentle and redemptive tear.

Reynolds is right. It is a "very good" play.[108] Of Germanic descent, the English "good" derives from a theorised base that meant "bring together, unite."[109] That is exactly what *Wonderlands* does with black and white love of the land. Moreover the play is everything else that is good: "commendable," "morally excellent," "agreeable," "amusing," "wholesome," "favourable," "laudatory" and "useful".[110] With the play's goodness named, the next question becomes: What happens to the chaos displaced by the 'good'? There is support to be found for asking such a question. Pointing to the "brutality" of Australia's history where "well meaning, sympathetic pastoralists" did not prevail, John McCallum indicates his concern that the tone of the play is too light:

> Both Thomson's script and Marion Potts' production are oddly gentle, given the material. The performances have some of the self-conscious colourful quirkiness of television soap opera, in which everything is suffused by a vaguely compassionate warmth.[111]

To create a good and ordered world Thomson's play controls chaos

Unlike Ariel Dorfman who eschews "benign closure" for its failure to address "the limitations that power and history objectively place upon rebellion, aesthetic and political, in our times,"[112] and unlike Howard Barker who deplores "the sort of theatre in which the morality was fixed in advance, and the writing, and the narrative was a means to an end,"[113] Thomson closes *Wonderlands* through an act of white generosity that repairs a fractured Australian history while sidestepping major confrontation.

Playwright Tony Kushner argues for a dramaturgy that is both emotional chaos *and* a "yearning" for a utopian alternative to the current repressive order: "A good play I think should always feel as though it's only barely been rescued from the brink of

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[108] Reynolds, Introduction, ix.

[109] *OED*.

[110] The list of 'meanings' of the word 'good' are from *OED*.

[111] John McCallum, "Lamenting Unfinished Business," *Australian* 21 July 2003: 7.

[112] Dorfman, Foreword, viii.

[113] Barker, *Arguments* 78.

chaos [. . .].”[114] In its vision of a well-ordered utopia, Thomson’s play holds back from posing the speculative big questions and taking the risks that Kushner urges:

> To make political art is always to risk pretentiousness, because you can only ever fail to formulate answers to the questions you pose, if those questions are big enough – and really, if they aren't, why bother posing?[115]

Rutherford quotes a passage from Lacan that presents a challenge in the field of psychoanalysis similar to the challenge Kushner throws to political playwrights to widen the risks by posing bigger questions: “If we receive the answer we are expecting, is it really an answer?”[116] Our question now becomes: ‘Is *Wonderlands* too ordered, too safe, in the questions that it asks of the path to a utopian ending?’ It may be that the “empathy” for which Thomson has been rightly praised is too easily won for her characters.

In Kushner’s terms, a politics “that seeks to retrieve a history from a violently enforced forgetting” needs writers “capable of extravagance”. Kushner locates his utopian dream in the daring *search* for knowledge of inside and outside, self and other, and for the relationship between that knowledge and society’s structures. He proclaims a politics “that seeks a synthesis between desire and transformation, [and] that seeks some union between the deepest recesses and cavities of the human heart and body and soul, and the sacrifices and responsibilities” of building communities, movements and power.[117]

Thomson’s characters give empathetic voice to both white and black ‘belonging’ to the land. Yet the chaos below the surface of the confrontation between inside and outside, self and other is often constrained. Though the exchanges between Edie and Lon are heated and tense and Lon’s insults are vile, they remain debates, where neither loses control.

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[114] Tony Kushner, "On Pretentiousness: The Keynote Address of the 5th Annual Outwrite Conference, Boston, March 3, 1995," *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (London: Nick Hern, 1995) 61, 71.

[115] Kushner, "On Pretentiousness," 67-68.

[116] From Lacan, *Ecrits* (French edition) (Editions du Seuil, Paris 1966) ch. X1X. Quoted in Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 189.

[117] Kushner, "On Pretentiousness," 78.

A close analysis of two juxtaposed speeches indicates that, despite appearances, Edie and Lon are not actually granted equal personal weight as creators in their own lives of a personal "meaning" (Gaita) or "extravagance" of desire (Kushner), or "tygers of wrath [that] are wiser than the horses of instruction" (Blake). Edie's speech comes first of the two, and attests the truth of her people's connection with their land:

> EDIE. Nothing is stronger in my heart, and everyone I represent, than this. We know our rightful country. We've got no choice except to look after it. And sit there, and *be* [original emphasis]. And listen to what it has to say and get guidance. We're not well unless we can do that.[118]

Oddly, Edie's speech abounds in negatives. She opens with one: "Nothing". An emphatic word, in itself "nothing" is an empty beginning for what is a declaration of love. Twice more there are negations: "We've got no choice [. . .]," and "We're not well [. . .]." Edie presents her passion as compulsion and obligation as if the strictures came from a cultural sensitivity manual. Trapped in modern managerial vocabulary such as "everyone I represent", "rightful" and "guidance", Edie gives no detail that feels the land as a place with dimension and texture. In his counter-offering Lon names his relationship with the land, not as a social theory of wellness and *be*-ing, but in sensory and vivid language as an impressionistic extension of his body:

> LON: [. . .] My boots aren't on the soil, they're of the soil. Like those clouds scudding across that huge, awesome sky, that country scuds through my veins. Pulsing like a bass guitar. And you and your ilk, you shit on that from a great highest. You're the only ones who can feel. You're the only ones who can connect.[119]

In the discrepancy between what one might call the 'groundedness' of these two speeches, there is a clue to the play's deflection of chaos: Edie's speech is crafted from intention, not desire. The core of the Aboriginal people's living experience of chaos that results from their physical displacement from the land is not brought onstage. Although Lon's misrepresentation of her people's intentions and rights and responsibilities under Native Title law is deflated and dismissed by Edie's skilful well-informed rebuttal,[120] the play does not bring to the centre performing bodies who

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[118] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 48.

[119] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 48.

[120] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 46-49.

express the chaos (pain, rage, self-destruction, violence, despair, madness) that Lon's racist Australia inflicts on Edie's people and on their earlier generations represented in the 1930s frame by Jim.

White racist aggression is neutralised rather than confronted

White aggression's greatest attack, directed at works of art, takes place with no Indigenous witness.[121] Although Lon's insults and verbal threats when he is face to face with Edie are vile and malicious, his white-hot aggression against Aboriginal Australia has its greatest dramatic impact when he attempts to explode into dust Yirralong rock art whose beauty he himself has recognised.[122] When Tom declares that the cave of paintings that Lon wants him to blast is a "site of significance", Lon rationalises his planned act of destruction, claiming his motive is a greater good – the future of his family: "Don't get me wrong, it's a beautiful spot. I love going up there. But it has to go. [. . .]."[123] Because Edie never finds out about the attack on this metonym for her people, there is no opportunity for her to counter the chaos of white racism by loosing her "tygers of wrath."[124]

On its surface the play speaks out unequivocally against white denial of a history of violence against Aboriginal people. In the text that is portrayed by the performing bodies and by the gaps and silences, the play repeats, however, the act of hiding white racist violence from public view. There are no witnesses to the offstage violence attempted by Lon and his unwilling accomplice Tom when they try to blow up the Indigenous rock art. There are no repercussions. Even as Tom is there bleeding with his hand blown off, Lon urges him to lie about happened: "Anyone asks, we were blowing rocks for a dam."[125] Cathy has been lied to about the purpose of the gelignite, but she does not confront her husband about what he and Tom were doing. The narrative's concealment of the violence beyond the moment of its enactment, uncannily re-inscribes the failure of the centre stage of contemporary

[121] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 62-63.

[122] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 57-58.

[123] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 57.

[124] Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Proverbs of Hell," 126.

[125] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63.

Australian politics to bear unmediated witness to white violence against Aboriginal people, and to initiate public accountability for the devastation that results.

Through an act of fate whose uncanniness remains subtextual (i.e., unmarked in dialogue), Lon's attack on the cave paintings misfires of its own accord, taking Tom's hand with it. The pain that must go somewhere settles on the relatively innocent Tom, while the aggression rebounds upon Lon, attacking his heart (offstage) and delivering him back onstage, tamed, into a wheelchair.[126] Thomson's finely-honed skills in planting the seeds of these acts of chance render the 'accidents' plausible. Although Lon conceals from his wife the purpose of explosives, Cathy warns Tom: "You should find out how long he's had that gelignite sitting in the shed."[127] There is no hint that this is prescience. Cathy gives the precautionary advice of a canny woman who knows men and their farming tools are prone to accident.

Safely confined, and muzzled by an oxygen mask, Lon and his aggression are pushed off the stage by a laconic Tom whose "heavily bandaged" arm with its hand missing is a visible metonym of the play's re-ordered world where aggression is marginalised as an aberrant failure.[128] *Wonderlands* shows its audience the face of racist aggression under circumstances where it is safe to do so without an excess of distress. The damage racism inflicts is allowed to be talked about, because its full impact is concealed and bandaged.

With particular reference to the Holocaust, and building on the work of Camus in *The Plague*, Felman explores literature's ability to open the reader to "the imaginative capability of perceiving history – what is happening to others – *in one's own body*, with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement" (original emphasis).[129] The power accorded here to literature – to present a stimulus to imagination and perception that may open a visceral and insightful understanding of the lived experience of others – is a power that belongs to theatre as well. It is a power that would appear to have drawn a dramatist such as Katherine Thomson to use her craft to open the audience to insight into often hidden

[126] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 59.

[127] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 59.

[128] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63-64.

[129] Felman and Laub 108.

trauma of Australian history. Drawing on Camus, Felman suggests that where history is rendered an "abstraction" whose proffered ideological, statistical or administrative picture renders death "invisible", it is the artist's role to demolish that deception "by *bearing witness to the body*" (original emphasis).[130] Where "people failed to believe in the reality of the gas chambers," testimony, to be effective, must be not merely referential, but literary:

> [. . .] If the failure to imagine out of which history as Holocaust proceeds stems, precisely, from the witnesses' failure to imagine their own implication and their own inclusion in the condemnation, Camus' own literary testimony must, above all, wrench the witnessing away from this historical failure of imagination. Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a Holocaust.[131]

A major impetus to Thomson to research and write the play came from what she calls the "emotional faultlines" of the contemporary struggle over land rights, and from the white nation's forgetting of its history of invasion that precipitates and fuels that struggle:[132]

> As a non-Aboriginal Australian I have no choice but to understand our history in all its inspiration and shame. If we've missed out on 'being told', as we mostly have, then we're the losers if we don't make the effort to find out. Flexible minds will always triumph over hardened hearts.[133]

There is something odd here. While Thomson gives fellow non-Aboriginal Australians a welcome reminder of the value of finding out about Australian history that "we" are not "'being told'", her concluding precept that appears to give the head the power to rule the heart, seems to keep the response to that concealed history and its brutalities confined to a cognitive sphere, and partitioned from the affective.

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[130] Felman and Laub 108, footnote 9. Felman cites Camus, "Le Témoin de la liberté ["Freedom's Witness"] (1948), in Actuelles 1, 188 et 191; *Oeuvres complétes* (sic) *d'Albert Camus*, Vol. 5, Paris: Gallimard and Club de L'Honnête Homme, 1983. [Felman's translation].

[131] Felman and Laub 108.

[132] That impetus is revealed in the play and its didascalia. See Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[133] Thomson, Writer's Note, xii.

By framing itself as a work set to demonstrate "flexible minds" triumphing over "hardened hearts", Thomson's play sets itself a difficulty if it is to be a witness to what Reynolds calls "the brutal conflict that had so often accompanied the establishment of the pastoral industry."[134] If Felman's thesis is right, bearing witness to a forgotten or denied history requires an act of the imagination and the body, rather than merely reference to that history as abstraction.[135] Resonance is needed "*in one's own body"* (original emphasis)[136] in order to overcome the failure to understand a history that has inflicted horrors on the 'other'. Thomson's skill as a dramatist demonstrates that she 'knows' the difficulty, if not impossibility, of effecting a shift in the texture of the heart as a result of orders imposed by the head. Thomson's character Cathy makes her shift in consciousness away from the closed mind of racism because she confronts in her own body and her own imagination the witness Edie bears to the sufferings of people from the taking of their children. In that moment Cathy sees the pain of what she has done to herself by her denigration of the 'other'.[137] Yet Thomson takes the white male pastoralist offstage where he cannot be a witness to his wife's transformation. This action seems counter-intuitive to Thomson's stated intention to explore Australia's "emotional faultlines."[138] Because Lon has left the stage before the most important decision that is taken in the play – Cathy's decision to support Edie – neither he nor Cathy have to confront their deception of one another, a web of lies which the play quickly establishes as mirroring the lies they tell one another about Australia's Aboriginal people. The drama uncannily 'punishes' "the hardened heart" of Lon and his hapless accomplice Tom through accident and illness, but it avoids confronting, or even recognising, the mystery of its own uncanniness.[139] Lon's

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[134] Reynolds, Introduction, x.

[135] Felman and Laub 108.

[136] Felman and Laub 108.

[137] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 61.

[138] Thomson, reported in Verghis, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[139] Laub, in studying "the silenced memory of genocide" as revealed to her through the testimony of children of Holocaust survivors, argues that the memory of trauma, whether recognised or not, "finds its way into their lives, unwittingly, through an uncanny repetition of events that duplicate – in structure and impact – the traumatic past." Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," Felman and Laub, *Testimony* 64. Laub's insights into the processes through which trauma manifests,

hardened heart receives its greatest shock through a heart attack that takes place offstage. Lon's heart does not have to face the consequences of actions carried out by it and by the other hearts for whom it figures, those of his fellow pastoralists and of the unnamed "Prime Minister" who sent his message of support to the pastoralists assuring them that they would not be put off their land.[140]

The morality enacted in *Wonderlands* accords with the fantasies of "the national good" that Rutherford, working with Lacanian psychoanalysis, identifies in Australian literature and culture.[141] The acts of fate that render *Wonderlands*' contemporary white males wounded or sick enable the stage/ground to be cleared for what, to borrow from Rutherford, becomes "the desired state – Australia, the multicultural and feminist utopia [. . .]."[142] Rutherford's identification of "a critical confusion" between "the desired state" and "the social and political reality" illuminates my understanding of why I have found what is happening in *Wonderlands* so disturbing, and so disturbingly at odds with its surface:

> Different laws, different voices, different fantasises do not have equal regulatory power in Australia, and the fantasy that they do only serves to perpetuate this fact. It does so in a way that is endemic to white Australia, via a fantasy of Australia as the site of a privileged and realised good.[143]

The *Wonderlands*' "utopia" illustrates Rutherford's thesis: In the fantasised "good and neighbourly nation" whose practice is "a sustained aggression to alterity both in the self and other," racist aggression is presented as much less dangerous than in reality.[144] With the would-be perpetrators 'punished' in secret by fate, and none of the characters questioning what it might mean that aggression is being banished from

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unhealed, even when there are strong efforts to push it out of memory, are invaluable in understanding what is happening in Thomson's play.

[140] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 26.

[141] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 151. My analysis of *Wonderlands* has been enriched, deepened and encouraged through reading Rutherford. Dr. Nicole Moore of Macquarie English Department alerted me to Rutherford's work after hearing my work-in-progress paper (19 Nov. 2004) in which I argued that *Wonderlands* has made of itself a rock of essential goodness that resists a critical interrogation of its representation of Aboriginal Australia.

[142] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 15.

[143] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 15.

[144] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 11.

the stage, Australia's 'bad' history is cleansed and redeemed. There is no messy confrontation, confession, apology or public trial under the law. Stage-ground becomes happy space where the law is just, while the locus of the nation's 'real' power to frame and implement laws is removed from the play's fantasy. The healing exercise of original white generosity (metonymically inherited from the first white pastoralist in the form of Alice's father's journal) passes into female hands.[145] The white woman Cathy who passes the gift of a benign white-enfolded past to the Yirralong woman Edie achieves a redemptive closure that rescues whites and blacks (in that order) from an anguished past/present without confrontation being required.

As the moment of climax – redemption – approaches, Cathy asks Edie to check that Lon is indeed out of sight, because he must not find out that she is giving Edie evidence for the Yirralong Native Title claim to the land that Lon considers his.[146] Even in utopia the furies are already always there and will not stay forever where you push them, whether underground, or offstage in their dramaturgically convenient wheelchair. As a perverse tribute to the strength of *Wonderlands'* "feminist utopia" I have to point out its pole-changing shift from the work of Aeschylus. *The Eumenides* (circa 450BC) exonerates the male, Orestes, of any "blood-guiltiness" for the murder of his mother. It is the female principle in the form of the Furies, the Eumenides, who are banished underground "to the deep of the earth" from whose caverns they "must" bring blessings of fruitfulness, including making sure "armies of brave sons be born to guard their peace."[147] In *Wonderlands* it is the female who is awarded centre stage while punishment and banishment go to the male perpetrators of attempted metonymic murder of the Yirralong through the attack on their rock art. Instead of a martial regime, one of peace is installed, predicated on the displacement of male violence and aggression beyond the frame of consciousness. Reversing an old suppression, however, does not vanquish the severance of the self that suppression entails. Cathy does not speak of what she fears would happen if Lon were to know of

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[145] Cathy is able to obtain the documents Lon has been keeping in a safety deposit box, without having to get the key from her husband, because she is having an affair with the bank manager. Thomson, *Wonderlands* 65. See also 33-35 for Edie's discovery of Cathy's affair.

[146] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 65.

[147] Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, trans. Philip Vellacott 1956 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1969) 173-77.

her gift to Edie. Cathy's fears, like Lon's rage, are pushed away. Cathy and Lon's mutual bond of silence and lies that remains challenged at the end of the play recalls the bond between Wakefield and Elizabeth in *Holy Day* who connive to be "silent about what has passed."[148]

Although the white male pastoralists and "the [unnamed] Prime Minister" who sent a message of reassurance to their meeting,[149] are symbolically rendered marginal, sick or wounded and moved offstage at the end of the play, they remain at the centre of the nation's stage. The play ends with no indication that the white pastoralists are relinquishing their opposition to Yirralong occupation of the land. The 'real' contest for the Yirralong must still take place, beyond the space/time of the stage, in the white courts.

A favourable outcome is not a foregone conclusion for a Native Title claim, as attested in Andrea James' *Yanagai! Yanagai!* that premiered in the same year as *Wonderlands* (2003). James voices the emotion of her people the Yorta Yorta at the loss of their Native Title claim.[150] In 2002 the High Court of Australia upheld the 1998 decision "that the Yorta Yorta people had failed to make their native title claim over one hundred and thirty-three thousand hectares of land and water in the NSW/Vic Murray River region, because they had 'lost' their traditional connection to the land."[151] In the white man's court in *Yanagai! Yanagai!* the Indigenous characters interpose their bodies between the law and its vision of itself as just. Although the law wins and the Yorta Yorta people are denied their connection with the land, the performing bodies of the Yorta Yorta enact resistance to unjust law. A closing chorus sings their defiance:

> And I am not your judgment.
> I am not your 'Exhibit A'.
> I am not your servant.
> I am Yorta Yorta.
> We are Yorta Yorta.

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[148] Bovell, *Holy Day* 63. See Chapter One, 47.

[149] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 26.

[150] James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!*

[151] "Aunty Dot Collard, Traditional Games and *Yanagai! Yanagai!*," *Awaye*, 26 Sept. 2003, ABC Radio, <http://www.abc.net.au/message/radio/awaye/stories/s950869.htm> accessed 23 Apr. 2005.

> And…
> WE…ARE… HERE.[152]

In contrast *Wonderlands* creates an expectation in Edie that "white man's law" is just and its shortcomings minor: "People are reasonable" is a mantra of Edie's that she says thrice when talking to the old people in her mind.[153] Because the Yirralong court case is displaced into an untested future, Edie is not called upon to resist white law or to challenge her view of its reasonableness. In *Yanagai! Yanagai!* that law is exposed as authoritarian and racist *at its foundation*. The white law's imposition on Indigenous people as portrayed in Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* is a horrifyingly different beast from the benign law evinced in *Wonderlands*.[154] Indigenous characters in many works by Indigenous playwrights struggle against white law. Introducing an anthology of new writing by Black playwrights each of whom has a community impacted by a punitive and prejudiced white law, Justine Saunders reports that "[. . .] the early Aboriginal plays were written in prison", among them Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers*, 1968.[155] In *Murras [Hands]* (1988), Eva Johnson's character Wilba, incensed by a mining company bulldozing his people's land, illustrates in a speech to his mother his resistance to white man's law and some of the reasons for his people's perception of that law as bad:

> [. . .] Those politicians, mob of ignorant *wudjellas* [white people]. I'm sick to the gut of their false promises of self-determination. Sick of their shit lies, their corrupt laws, their diseases, their gaols . . . yeah, their chains, this chains. They handcuffed me, my *murras* [hands], to a *wudjella* cop. The bastards . . . a *wudjella* pig.[156]

In *Wonderlands* confrontation between Indigenous people and white law is discussed as a problem for Jim's people in the 1930s, but neither Alice nor Jim mount a challenge to that law. Indeed, there are aspects of *Wonderlands* that position the play as a sweetness for white Australia that settles its conscience, but does not demand action to change any of its structures. The 'horse *ex machina*' in the 1930s that kills

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[152] James, *Yanagai! Yanagai!* 54.

[153] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 12-14.

[154] See Chapter Four.

[155] Justine Saunders, Introduction, *Plays from Black Australia*, by Jack Davis, Eva Johnson, Richard Walley and Bob Maza, (Sydney: Currency, 1989) vii.

[156] Johnson, *Murras*, 104-5.

Alice before she can finalise her new will in order to leave Ambertrue to Jim, creates an historicised redemption for white Australia. From within the fantasy of the fair and just nation, the longing to counter guilt-inducing black armband theories of history is soothed by Alice's actions: 'The white landowners really wanted to share the land with the Aboriginal people. It was only happenstance, or accident, that prevented them.'

If the heart- and mind-opening shift in the two white women, Alice and Cathy occurs within a framework that is unable to disrupt a white-created hierarchy of mind over heart, is it possible that, wittingly or not, the play would lend auspice to the authority that it seeks to change? I suspect that in asking such a question I am too insistent on making from postcolonial theory its own dragon of certainty.

Helen Gilbert appears more sanguine. While acknowledging there is much argument about whether postcolonial studies should consider works from settler cultures, such as in Australia, Canada and South Africa, "given their past and ongoing role in the colonisation of Indigenous populations," Gilbert recognises that "such oppressions trouble both settler and Indigenous playwrights alike [. . .]." In giving her reasons for including works by playwrights from settler cultures in an anthology of postcolonial plays, Gilbert shows a humanity that welcomes exploration of empire's impact from multiple viewpoints:

> [. . .] their [the white playwrights'] engagement with imperialism, however ambivalent, is none the less valuable to an understanding of the field. Moreover, to exclude these texts would be to suggest that colonial relations impact only on the dispossessed, which, judging by the wealth of settler theatre that engages critically with imperialism, is clearly not the case.[157]

The ambivalence I am encountering in *Wonderlands* has its own value – as a reminder of the difficulties of writing the other and a warning of the dangers of any viewpoint's dragon of certainty. Gilbert's reminder of the impact of empire on the 'possessed', as well as on their antonym, the "dispossessed," is pertinent for *Wonderlands*.

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[157] Helen Gilbert, ed., *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology* (London: Routledge, 2001) 3. Included from Australian settler culture is: Louis Nowra, *Inside the Island* (1980).

The play's finest writing is arguably its dramatisation of the disintegration of the contemporary white pastoralist family. The family's runaway daughter Tessie is a negative image of itself who never appears onstage. Her father Lon views her as 'possessed' by madness as she abandons her family and their possession of the land. When at last her fiancé Tom insists Lon tell him the truth about where she is, Lon conjures failure to locate oneself in space as a metaphor to describe her condition: "[. . .] She gets… stressed or something. Loses her way."[158] When Cathy tells Lon their daughter needs space to find herself, Lon counteracts that she has "thousands of square miles she can wander at will. She's mad. [. . .]."[159]

Cathy and Lon weave into their hearts and personal relationships a net of lies that mirror and magnify the lies they tell themselves and others about Aboriginal occupancy of the land. The central lie of an unoccupied land for the whites to use as they wish enters Cathy and becomes her way of being. Her own body, her family's bodies and the landscape are, for her, blank spaces on which she inscribes her own lies. She lies to her husband, to her prospective son-in-law Tom, and on the phone to her absconded daughter Tessie. The imagined connection of her voice with her daughter brings into the performed present Cathy's experience of the pain of lying.[160] Moreover, Cathy lies to herself that she is not really lying, but following the only course to ensure that her daughter and Tom write themselves on the landscape as her and Lon's heirs. To watch Cathy suppressing anguish as she creates new lies to convince the steadfast Tom that Tessie is coming back, is to witness a finely dramatised allegory of white Australia's suppressed anguish as it tells and retells its own myth about the imminent return of its innocence, while denying, regardless of any evidence to the contrary, that innocence has ever been lost.

When Cathy lies to Edie, however, the Yirralong woman refuses the imposition of Cathy's invented world.[161] Coaxed by Edie's straightforward wisdom into unfamiliar acts of truth, the white woman lets go of her myth and sees herself, Edie, family and

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[158] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 56.

[159] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 42. As Rose points out, in both *Wonderlands* and Rayson's *Inheritance* (2003) also set in rural Australia and concerned with farm ownership, there is "the suspicion that in small isolated communities, people can slip quietly into madness." Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," 5.

[160] See, for example, Thomson, *Wonderlands* 17-19, 43-44 and 59.

[161] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 33-35, 59-61and 65.

landscape with a hitherto impossible clarity. As the play moves towards its close following Lon and Tom's botched firing of the rock art, and, in the parallel 1930s time frame, Jim's realisation that Alice is dead, Cathy, her mask abandoned, has a monologue that bursts from her heart:

> *[. . .] CATHY appears wearing a slip. Silence except for the sound of cockatoos.*
>
> CATHY. I know… I know… I know… I do know… I do know…[*Calling*] I know you! I know you, Tessie, I know you won't come back. And I know this place, I know. We'll disappear in the topsoil. All of us in a willy willy, swirled up in the debris and the dust. Scattered. Gone.[162]

Here a 'privileged' white woman pastoralist faces what she has not expected to face – her fear of her failed relationship with her daughter. She discovers in this moment of truth the mirror of that relationship in her own, her family's and her culture's fear of the landscape. They have emptied the landscape (as they have emptied their daughter) and now in its anguish the land will blow them all away.

Fighting loose of the lies that have tried to maintain order, desire demands expression without the invention of habit, reason or theory. It becomes a wild cockatoo-echoed cry with unrestrained repetition of the words "I know". It speaks her body's hitherto unrecognised truth with unpredictable results. It overturns her view of herself. It allows Cathy to solicit Edie's help to find her missing girl and to weep when she recognises the truth of her loss and her need for help.[163]

At the beginning of the play each of the 21st century characters has a monologue – a direct address to the audience – in which each marks her/his place in the landscape. There is irony in the transient quality that Cathy's opening words give to her relationship with the property that she and Lon 'own' and from which the original inhabitants have long been excluded: "When you open the gate to leave [. . .]."[164] Cathy's pleasure in that vast landscape is focused on the minutiae of some plants that, like her and her family, did not originally belong there. At her chosen place of transience on the boundary of her 'property' Cathy marks her secret joy in a familiar

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[162] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63.

[163] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 60.

[164] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 2.

skerrick of weedy beauty – a metonym for herself. Insignificant and often trampled by her husband and daughter, the weeds manage to flower in that "scratched and scraped" landscape.[165]

It is a different Cathy with a new understanding of landscape and self who at the end of the play comes to live in town and surprises herself by accepting with merely an exclamatory "Oh …" Edie's news that she will have Yirralong among her neighbours.[166] Rich in subtext, Cathy's exclamation reveals in its release of her long-held tension of prejudice how ongoing change within her is opening her to sharing common ground with Indigenous people. The difficulty I have here is that Cathy's finely crafted emotional journey from problem to redemption, desirable though it is, is not tested by actual encounters between the new neighbours. The drama does not need it to be. In the play's re-ordered imaginary, Cathy and her Yirralong neighbours are now the 'same'. 'Otherness,' if that could be defined as the centre's view of those who would disrupt its order, has lost its mouthpiece. It has been sent offstage in the excluded weakened body of Lon from whom Cathy's new benign order is concealed.

The personal tensions created within the bodies of the modern white pastoralist family through the need to suppress the truth of the land fuel the narrative. Cathy drives the action through its final stages to climax and closure, where her tension is released and transformed. For most of the narrative until she takes over, Cathy's unruly desire alternates with that of Lon to create action, until the well-disguised *deus ex machina* of ill-fortune usurps Lon's narrative power and removes him and his naïve accomplice Tom from the stage. By granting power to drive the action to a combination of white characters and a god of white order, *Wonderlands* has to deny the power of desire to its Indigenous characters. In this unnoticed denial lies the next and final ambivalence I want to explore regarding the play's trajectory towards a vision of a good and fair Australia:

Unruly white desire drives the action, while black desire is contained

Black desire is held to a ruly demonstration of the case for Indigenous rights. To interpret *Wonderlands* as privileging white desire may seem absurd. As Munn and

[165] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 2.

[166] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63.

Reynolds affirm, *Wonderlands* enacts Indigenous Australians' desire for human rights and land rights as inherent in their being, morally right and at long last legally recognised, at least in part, as Native Title.[167] Edie's fight to convince the white pastoralists of the validity of her people's claim to the land appears to drive the narrative, while Lon and Tom's actions to thwart that claim appear as a response to her initiative. It is tempting to enter *Wonderlands*' performed 'truth' about how racism can be eschewed and an honourable sharing of the land achieved. It feels good. To borrow a process from Merleau-Ponty, that "we find in texts only what we put into them," it is as if one is "recognizing" in the playtext what one has been "waiting for."[168] *Wonderlands*' optimistic 'truth' can be inhabited in the imagined inner world of a privileged white such as myself, as anodyne for privilege's (guilty) coexistence with the 'real' world where Indigenous people suffer prejudices, deprivations, cruelties and tragedies in extreme disproportion to the rest of the population.

To investigate how *Wonderlands* holds its black characters subservient to its white-driven narrative, the allure of living inside that narrative has to be resisted. Viewed from within, the narrative deals its black and white characters parity of dramatic cards. Where white characters have stronger suits in legal rights, land 'ownership' and material wealth, black characters have stronger hands in moral qualities and personal skills, including truth, wisdom, wit and determination to fight for the needs of their community, culture and land. From outside the narrative, a differently coded message becomes visible. While the white characters are allowed (up to a point) the unruliness of desire, the black characters have to keep their desires / bodies well-behaved. It is a disparity that is not witnessed cognitively through what the characters say, but through an affective impact on the audience in the theatre in response to the performing bodies and the images those bodies create.

Alyson Campbell argues that Kane's "'*experiential*'" theatre demands the question, "'what did this theatre *feel like*?'" rather than "'what is this play about'" (original emphasis)?[169] Campbell describes the "searing indictment" of particular policies of

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[167] Munn, Foreword, Reynolds, Introduction.

[168] Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Thomas Baldwin, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004) 64.

[169] Campbell draws on "a vocabulary of 'affect' from Deleuzian philosophy." Alyson Campbell, "Experiencing Kane," *Australasian Drama Studies*, 46 (2005): 80-81.

the British Government in Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* as coming not from "'meaningful' political speeches" but "from a different stage landscape that allows the spectator to experience the world of the suicide, rather than intellectualise and separate oneself from this experience."[170] Thomson's technique is very different. Meaning is controlled within a conventional narrative. Thomson's dialogue (to borrow from Campbell's description of what Kane does *not* do) couches in elegant dialogue the message "expounding the problems".[171] Onstage experience of the black pain that the message of the play is designed to assuage is avoided.

In her feisty, law-abiding campaign for her people's rights Edie pours forth her love for her son, her land and her ancestors and her distress at their pain, but no untidy unpredictable uncontrolled "experience" of that pain comes to the stage. Edie gives a moving account of her daily efforts to protect from suicide her son Steve, who is "on the edge," but Edie does not speak in the immediacy of crisis.[172] The passion of her son is kept offstage. *Wonderlands* makes Edie not only the wise and always for/giving shelter for her son, but for the audience as well. Through her efforts, the audience are spared witness to her son as sovereign subject in the charged moment of being on the precipice. Edie saves her witnesses (her audience in the theatre and her interlocutors within the diegesis – the white characters) from the explosion of chaos that rages in the offstage body and spirit of her Yirralong son. Following Rutherford, I suggest that "the social and political reality" suffered by the absent son is too easily mitigated through its attenuated refiguring as the wise and resilient mother.

When Jim in the 1930s frame collects pieces of his earth, his land – ochres – and puts them into a sack, he articulates the sorrow of his Uncle who is being shunted onto a far-away reserve, but Alice does not have to confront the rupture her occupation of the land is bringing Jim's people.[173] Because he enacts his offstage Uncle's desire, not his own, Jim is present only as attenuated desire. To borrow terminology from Bhabha who cites a litany of Euro-techniques for maintaining

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[170] Campbell, "Experiencing Kane," 81.

[171] Campbell, "Experiencing Kane," 81.

[172] See Thomson, *Wonderlands* 61.

[173] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24, 61.

dominance, the emotion of the man about to be evicted is “quoted” onstage, but the potential force of his exile’s pain is “encased” offstage out of reach of the audience.[174] As nurturing peacemakers for white Australia, Edie and Jim contain their bodies within what Bhabha calls “the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination.”[175]

Edie’s subservience is masked by the passion with which she adopts the black-woman’s burden of teaching the white man morality while parrying his racist insults. With saintly forbearance Edie explains to the aggressive Lon that white law created pastoral leases in the 1850s to allow Aboriginal people to “co-exist” on the land:

> EDIE. He [Lord Earl Grey] said clearly in legislation, the cattle and the cultivation can't deprive the native of the right to water and to hunt -
>
> LON. I don't need a history lesson, thanks -
>
> EDIE. It’s *all* you need. Which is why leases had restrictions in them. A moral obligation [original emphasis].[176]

White characters receive greater opportunity to perform inner conflict. When he bullies Edie, or pressures Tom to do his destructive bidding, Lon performs his struggle over how much to conceal or reveal his aggression. Edie in contrast must go *offstage* to face her troubled son when Lon threatens to tell him that his mother had wanted to abort him.[177] Edie reports back onstage, not to Lon, but to Cathy, and only *after* having solved the problem by telling her son the truth. The actor playing Edie has the power to fill her words with passion, but the crisis has passed. The narrative has emptied those words of matter.

Edie’s monologues to her ancestors are witty, morale-boosting requests for reassurance.[178] Loaded with well-masked exposition, these speeches boost the argument for the Yirralong land claim, explain its legal, cultural and community significance and create a metonymic ancestral Yirralong occupation of stage/ground. These speeches do not perform the suffering. These speeches do what Campbell

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[174] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," *The Norton Anthology* 2391.

[175] Bhabha, 2391.

[176] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 48.

[177] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 51.

[178] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 12-14, 33.

describes Sarah Kane trying NOT to do in her work – that is, to present "a request for the audience to make meaning". Instead, argues Campbell, Kane tries to reach the audience physically through "images" and, borrowing playwright Phyllis Nagy's term, an "'image structure [that] is generated by the language, the behaviour of the characters and its metaphor working together seamlessly.'"[179] Thomson cannot, as Kane does, present a "demand for her audience to set active meaning-making aside; to allow the asignifying power of the work to take over."[180] To do so would be to feel how the non-verbal physical behaviour of the bodies in *Wonderlands* creates a metaphor of black and white disparity that is at odds with the play's spoken language of black and white parity. The robustly articulated case for Indigenous land rights is disturbingly at odds with the non-verbal behaviour of the performing bodies: in the play's physicality black bodies serve white bodies who suffer pain. Black pain and black death is *reported*, talked about, remembered and historicised. White pain and white death is made visible in its moment of experience. It is a white person (Tom), not a black, who stands on stage bleeding from a wound. It is a black person (Edie) who asks solicitously of Tom how he is.[181] For all the 'talk' of black deaths, it is a white person (Alice) that the audience watch suffer and die onstage.[182] It is a white person (Lon) who appears in a wheelchair, ill.[183]

When the black characters witness white pain, their bodies perform succour. Each of the black characters performs that subservient role for whichever white character has most power over their fate.[184] Tom, presented as white for most of the play, is

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[179] Campbell, "Experiencing Kane," 80. Campbell quotes Phyllis Nagy from a citation in Graham Saunders, '*Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 161.

[180] Campbell, "Experiencing Kane," 80.

[181] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 64.

[182] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 23, 53, 62.

[183] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 64.

[184] Lon's malign power over Edie is bodily removed from the stage before the climax, leaving behind Cathy as the one to decide Edie's future. In Cathy's hands 'bad' white power transfigures into generosity. Alice's power, inherited from her benign father, needs no great transformation to be good, and she quickly learns to use her power with generosity. Jim's fate once he loses white patronage on Alice's death, is left indeterminate, but if he cannot find a new white employer he is vulnerable to eviction like the rest of the Yirralong.

revealed to have Indigenous ancestry while he is pushing Lon's wheelchair with his one remaining hand.[185] Edie aids Cathy in a search for her absconded daughter.[186] Edie gives Cathy permission to proceed to her tryst with the bank manager on the secluded river bank, safe in the knowledge that Edie will not betray her.[187] Unlike Cathy, Edie is not made 'present' as a desiring body, but endures unremarked what Rutherford describes as the "perverted sacrifice of desire to duty."[188] Adept at words and passionate of voice, Edie controls her body's reactions, including her rage, even when Lon's verbal terror tactics target her sexual history from 20 years earlier.[189] Even Edie's joy is curtailed. When in the closing moments, the Indigenous past is restored to her hands enabling her to lodge the land rights claim, the hitherto articulate Edie becomes the passive and speechless recipient of that gift.[190] The narrative does not allow time for her body's response. The playwright deflects the audience's emotion away from Edie's emotional vacuum onstage by a simple stage direction: "*Music.*"[191]

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[185] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 64-65.

[186] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 61.

[187] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 34.

[188] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 199. For discussion of Patrick White's Indigenous character Dubbo in *Riders in the Chariot* whose "desire follows its own law" outside "the domain of the Australian good," see 199-200.

[189] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 50.

[190] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 66.

[191] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 66.

Image 1: Gwyneth Price as Alice and Isaac Drandich as Jim.[192]

After Jim's "boss" Alice dies onstage, Jim bears her body away.[193] The widely used production photograph (Image 1) shows Jim cradling the stricken white boss and holding a white cloth to her head.[194] It recalls an apocryphal image from white Australian history, the death in 1848 of Surveyor Edmund Kennedy:

> Jackey-Jackey an aboriginal of Merton District who was Mr Kennedy's sole companion in his conflict with the savages and though himself wounded tended his leader with courage and devotion worthy of remembrance supporting him in his last moments and making his grave on the spot where he fell.[195]

Yes, the syntax is unnerving. Unnerving too is *Wonderlands*' reinscription into cultural memory of the image of the mid-nineteenth century 'good Aborigine' who works to protect the 'good' whiteness of his boss from mortal dangers that lurk in the Australian landscape.

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[192] Photo: Jules Boag. Gwyneth Price as Alice and Isaac Drandich as Jim, *Wonderlands*, by Katherine Thomson, dir. Marion Potts, assoc. dir. Wesley Enoch, HotHouse Theatre, at Butter Factory Theatre, Albury Wodonga, 13 June 2003. Courtesy HotHouse Theatre.

[193] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63.

[194] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 23.

[195] Commemorative tablet erected by Executive Government of Colony of New South Wales: "Kennedy Edmund Besley Court," Undated, Tablet, St James Church, King Street, Sydney, <http://www.stjameschurchsydney.org.au/> accessed 1 May 2005.

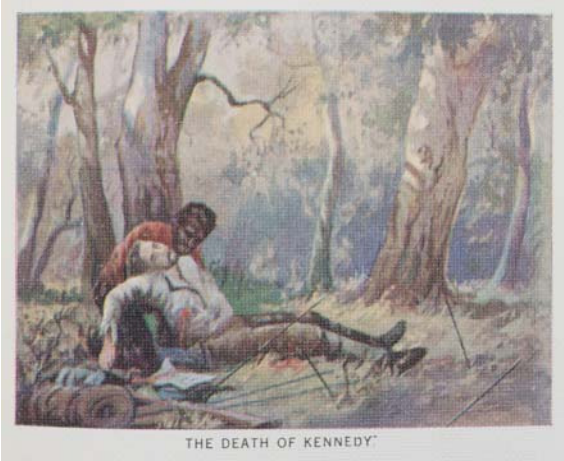

Image 2: John Allcot, The Death of Kennedy.[196]

Image 3: Tablet in Memory of Surveyor Kennedy, 1818-1848.[197]

In the images of the death of Kennedy (Images 2 and 3) danger comes from the dynamic right of the frame. The white man's body, like that of Alice in *Wonderlands* (Image 1), faces towards the right – the perceived future. The black man faces left of frame towards the past. In Alice's 1930s world, spear-throwing "savages" have gone, but white demand for the black body to be intermediary between whiteness and landscape has not. Mortal wounding still comes to white Australia. For Alice the

[196] John Allcot, *The Death of Kennedy*, reproduced in: *An Historic Retrospect on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of the Founding of Australia. 1788-1938*. Held in Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Courtesy R.J. Allcot.

[197] *Tablet in Memory of Surveyor Kennedy, 1818-1848*, NSW Government Printing Office Collection, State Library of New South Wales, 1932. Courtesy Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

menace, uncannily, is an extension of her body as invader. Her horse rejects her when she rides at speed into the landscape.[198]

'Good' white co-opting of 'good' black protection is constructed as a reciprocal gift. While he serves the white man, Jackey-Jackey receives conditional protection from return to 'savagery'. In *Wonderlands* the savagery from which Alice protects Jim is, ironically, white law. His surrogate white status as stockman saves him and his wife and children (but not his Uncle) from forcible eviction.[199] Alice's present to Jim of her father's and her gratitude transforms the derogatory colonial category of hostile "savages" into a positive one of "black saviours." To conform to such a narrow criterion for being human, the Indigenous characters in both the play's time frames nurture white desire and assuage white pain rather than express a fullness of desire and pain in their own bodies.

Thomson's feminised utopia dislocates from the stage masculine pain or rage, whether black or white. The potentially messy and not necessarily winnable Yirralong Native Title case is displaced beyond the frame. Although on the surface *Wonderlands*' good white characters learn to give back to black people dignity and rights, the imagery of the performing bodies may be very different. To heal the pain that Alice, her ancestors and her heirs have caused and keeps causing to self, family, other and landscape, the 'good nation' of *Wonderlands* needs the 'good Aborigine' to salve the wounds from which it is afraid of dying.

The disparity in *Wonderlands* between the power of the black and the white bodies has to be overlooked by a receiver of the play if she/he wants to enter the drama's fantasy of a fair and good Australia where the nation's abhorrent racist past and present is transcended with no great effort or distress / catharsis. It is a disparity that, as far as I am aware, has not been spoken of publicly by anyone involved in the production, including the Indigenous participants. As Gilbert makes clear, theatre is a collaborative art and texts by white writers often have extensive input from Indigenous and non-Indigenous theatre practitioners.[200] *Wonderlands* premier production included in its creative team Wesley Enoch, Associate Director, who

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[198] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 7, 23.

[199] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 24-25.

[200] Gilbert, *Sightlines* 51.

brought as a director of and in its cast Isaac Drandich as Jim and Pauline Whyman as Edie.[201] My hypothesis is that people agreeing to participate in bringing *Wonderlands* to the stage, or to write material to accompany its publication, would have a deep commitment to Indigenous rights and would do their utmost to ensure the play's success as drama, as showcase of the skills of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cast and as promulgation of a forthright and well-articulated case for the repudiation of racism and the according of full rights for Indigenous people. From within that commitment, it would be very difficult to point to a disparity of power between black and white characters that is imbricated in the drama's frame. Far better, I would think, to get the play on and the book out. After all the problem does not need to be noticed if one keeps focus on the excellent surface that the play has given its Indigenous characters. Thomson's fine writing offers rich opportunity to actors to project that surface with passion, vigour and wit, while the written text provides a valuable educative resource with its meticulous historic detail and its eloquent argument for Indigenous land rights under native title legislation.

Why then does the disparity matter? Why does it matter that the white characters are allowed unruly desire, while the black characters are confined (without exception) to a ruly predictable desire? The matched pairs of white and black characters – Alice and Jim, and Cathy and Edie – appear to be performing the "hope for a reconciliation" that their author saw might be possible through a "genuine sense of belonging" to the land. That belonging is shared by the Indigenous people whose ancestors used to live there *and* by the white farmers who have been working the land "for generations".[202] What happens, however, to the 'truth' of that scenario if the emotional range available to all characters is curtailed, and if there are particular limits enforced on the Indigenous characters? It would seem that the reconciliation becomes a feint because it is built on air. Michael Horsburgh quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "'You can't have reconciliation unless you know the truth.'"[203]

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[201] *Wonderlands*, by Katherine Thomson, dir. Marion Potts, assoc. dir. Wesley Enoch, HotHouse Theatre, The Butter Factory Theatre, Albury Wodonga, 13 June. 2003. Toured to SBW Stables Theatre, Sydney, 16 July 2003.

[202] Thomson, "Journey to the Red Earth," 12.

[203] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, ABC Radio National, Sunday 28 Dec. 1997. Cited in Michael Horsburgh, "Reconciliation at St James'," *The Writing on the Wall: A Discussion Paper*, Revised,

2001, Parish Church of St James, King Street, Sydney, <http://www.stjameschurchsydney.org.au/Parish_Council/Papers/dwm_discussion_paper.asp> accessed 2 May 2005.

Chapter 3:
Transformation of Trauma: Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House*.

> And hearing Rachael [Kohn] recounting the Genesis story of the Garden of Eden, I was reminded of Aden Ridgeway when he'd first been appointed a Democrat Senator, and he turned up at a very flash meeting in Geneva which was probably full of all sorts of post-modernists, and there he was, and he told a story. He said, 'Well, we've always known of course that Adam and Eve were not Aboriginal.' They said, 'Oh yes, is that so?' 'Yes, because if they were then they would have eaten the snake.'
>
> Frank Brennan.[1]

> The Garden of Eden is the founding myth of the colonist, the self-justificatory notion which permits those who seized the land from its inhabitants to extract from their fathomless guilt a story of primordial innocence.
>
> George Monbiot.[2]

> There is something very different about acting in a play written and directed by Black Australians, compared to acting in a play written and directed by whites. For a start, you don't have to explain things to other black actors. We know what it is like living in white Australia. We are also much more forgiving to our people as characters. Whites have a tendency to make moral judgments or use us as vehicles for messages, rather than treating us as people.
>
> Justine Saunders.[3]

Where Chapters One and Two explored witness to Indigenous pain in works by concerned white playwrights, Andrew Bovell and Katherine Thomson, Chapters Three and Four explore representations of trauma on stage in plays that fire from the belly, intelligence and imagination of playwrights who have experienced that pain themselves, Tammy Anderson and Richard J. Frankland. As Indigenous people they are directly impacted by a legacy of dishonest nationhood where dispossession, cultural shredding, poverty, ill-health and violence are exacerbated by contemporary myths of government that there can be the practice of reconciliation without symbol,

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[1] Frank Brennan, "Gardens of Eden: 2003 Adelaide Festival of Ideas," *The Spirit of Things*, 14 Sept. 2003, Transcript, ABC Radio National, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/stories/s941319.htm> accessed 8 May 2005.

[2] George Monbiot, "Gardens of Eden.

[3] Saunders, Introduction, *Plays from Black Australia* ix.

health without respect, head without heart and policing of privilege's borders, internal and external, without cruelty.

In her brilliant essay on the consequences for Australian society and the arts of the Howard government, Robyn Archer argues the promulgation of a mythical view of an egalitarian, homogenous Australia "encourages fantasies about those who are *not* part of the mainstream" (original emphasis):[4]

> Regarding other human beings as 'minor', or not quite as human as 'we' are, is a time-dishonoured method of giving the 'mainstream' permission to persecute and discriminate at home, or declare war on them abroad. It is a process of brutalisation.[5]

To a "mainstream" society kept fearful and quiescent lest others take what it has, Archer offers art that will "rock the boat and floor the soul."[6]

> I counterpoint this [the fear] with the idea of courage, epitomised in the kind of art in which people have the courage to do what they most believe in and to stand up in public and allow their lives to be examined in detail through their work.[7]

This daring is evident in the autobiographical playtexts by Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* (2001) and Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead* (2002). Each represents a truth about the self. Each work performs the writer's response, body and soul, to trauma with which she or he has been walloped. I am not suggesting, and neither does Archer, that for art to resist conservative power it must carry a message, or be autobiographical, or confine an artist to a raced and gendered box with designated subject matter.

My task is to examine the differences in the representation of Australian indigeneity by two 'black' and two 'white' playwrights who share apparent common ground in seeing theatre as a way of exposing and challenging "mainstream" Australia's silence on the suffering of Indigenous people. Where the performance texts of *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* variously construct bodies of Indigenous characters out of displaced or

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[4] Robyn Archer, *The Myth of the Mainstream: Politics and the Performing Arts in Australia Today*, Platform Papers, ed. John Golder, vol. 4 (Sydney: Currency, 2005) 2.

[5] Archer, *Myth* 3.

[6] Archer, *Myth* 14.

[7] Archer, *Myth* 5.

subdued desire – pressing those characters into an ongoing displacement and subduction, the plays by the Indigenous writers craft their characters from desire. Desire is alive onstage because its writer has built desire into the bones of the characters. From that strength, that grounding, Indigenous witness to suffering cannot be rendered mute, even in death or its symbolic imposition, such as rape, imprisonment or deprivation of voice-identity-self. Their work performs and transforms pain.

Desire that is alive in performance does not have to be pretty or polite. On the contrary. Australian Indigenous performer Justine Saunders has criticized white playwrights' "tendency to make moral judgments or use us as vehicles for messages, rather than treating us as people."[8] The sanitisation of Indigenous desire in *Wonderlands*, as discussed in Chapter Two, constrains those characters and enforces a metaphoric severance of idealised intention from living body that plays against those characters' verbal championing of Indigenous rights. This rendering of black bodily desire as non-threatening has parallels in the sentimentalization and infantilization of (white) female desire that Denise Varney analyses in Elizabeth Coleman's *This Way Up* (2001). Varney cites Coleman's text as exemplifying a "reactionary conservatism" in Australia's cultural imaginary that reinstates "the conservative white national imaginary."[9] Tammy Anderson's text is far removed both from the saintly construction of the mature Indigenous woman Edie in *Wonderlands* and from what Varney identifies in Coleman's play as "the whiting out and infantilization of the feminine subject [that] presents a curiously reactionary figuration: an immature and unworldly white woman naturalized as the ordinary Australian feminine subject."[10] Coleman, Varney argues, "favours the conservative line" by constructing "the feminine/home/family as reasonable and good."[11] Although in Thomson's play, Edie offers a complex cognitive political critique of white appropriation of Aboriginal land and expresses deeply moving concerns about her offstage son's suffering as a result of Indigenous marginalisation, through

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[8] Saunders, Introduction, ix..

[9] Denise Varney, "White-Out: Theatre as an Agent of Border Patrol," *Theatre Research International*, 28 3 (2003): 326-27.

[10] Varney, 333.

[11] Varney, 333.

constructing an unshakeably "reasonable and good" female Aboriginality, *Wonderlands* creates a safe image of the 'other' that may be reassuring to the conservative 'mainstream'.[12]

Stories that Anderson performs reveal no such delicacy. Riding with "me best mate Cory" on a borrowed BMX, stealing from shops and clotheslines, chucking rocks on roofs at night, or getting "really stoned" and spinning out "heaps",[13] Tammy enacts girls unconstrained by what Varney describes as "the standard trope of middle class western suburbia" -- "the white picket fence".[14] Coleman, Varney contends, portrays life within that fence as "white", "feminine", "placid" and "innocent", but the production of *This Way Up* coincided with the conservative conflation of that innocence with the "barbed-wire" fortification of Australia against the non-white 'other'.[15]

Tammy Anderson resists the pretence of a good suburbia – Rutherford's "good white Australia" – where desire is sanitized, power structures concealed and hatred of the other denied, while the dispossessed victims are constrained to keep secret the violence and hatred directed against them.[16] Anderson does not accept the silencing of the victim that is inflicted on Obedience in Bovell's *Holy Day*.[17] When "'Dickhead'", a boyfriend of Tammy's mother, "picks up [Tammy's] brother and throws him up the passage to his room," Tammy is not silent:

> Leave him alone, you cunt! I hate you, I fuckin' hate you![18]

Anderson's expletive-rich rage as she performs her desire for life and safety – "I want to kill the fucker" – does not mean that 'black' desire swings from the anodyne of the white picket fence to an opposite pole where a fearful white settlement freezes its excluded other as ugliness and savagery. Anderson characterises her and her

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[12] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 51.

[13] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 65.

[14] Varney, 330.

[15] Varney, 330. Varney reproduces a John Spooner cartoon, courtesy of *The Age*, published shortly before the premier of Coleman's play (2001), that shows the Prime Minister, John Howard, as "a short-sighted bespectacled garden gnome dwarfed by a barbed-wire fortified white picket fence and defending his home with a garden rake."

[16] See Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder* 18. For discussion of Rutherford's ideas see Chapter Three.

[17] For the silencing of the invaded characters in *Holy Day*, see Chapter One.

[18] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 65.

family's performed selves as fully human individuals. Whether they happen to be 'black' or 'white', they are complex beings. Each is made present moment by moment. Anderson's power to portray each emotion as it shifts in response to inner need and external circumstances creates each self as its own truth.

Anderson does not regard *I Don't Wanna Play House* as a story pertaining to a designated race. As interviewer Sophie Best records, Anderson sees her story as a "'universal'" one of "'heartache and loss.'"[19] Offstage, Anderson continues her onstage challenge to those who cast particular (undesirable) behaviours as characteristic of a particular (and by implication disparaged) race and class:

> The typical response is, "it's an Aboriginal story, because you are Aboriginal". No, stop right there. My father was black, my mother was white. It doesn't matter if you are black or white, it doesn't matter about class.[20]

In Best's paraphrase, "Racism and poverty are, however, central to the story." In Anderson's words, as quoted by Best:

> My mum would be called a coonf---er by the white men; the black guys would call her a slut and a moll. [. . .] Dispossession, domestic violence, the taboo subjects that happen. Always the new kid at school - new house, new man, same shit.[21]

Anderson's challenge to "the typical response" to her work that would designate it "Aboriginal" is salutary. While unreservedly praising *I Don't Wanna Play House*, reviewer Helen Thomson categorised it as "Aboriginal theatre."

> Altogether this is a marvellous show, superbly directed by John Bolton. Anderson's story deserves to become as much a classic of Aboriginal theatre as Jane Harrison's *Stolen*.[22]

One has to ask why Helen Thomson did not cast Anderson's and Harrison's work as worthy of "classic" status in 'Australian' theatre. Tony Birch writes that "Europeans

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[19] Anderson, quoted in Sophie Best, "Life Stories Coming from Somewhere Deep," *Age* 15 Feb. 2002, The Culture: 4.

[20] Anderson, in Best 4.

[21] Anderson, in Best 4.

[22] Helen Thomson, "Different but the Same: Tales of Young Survival," *Age* 15 Feb. 2002, The Culture: 4.

continue to 'make' and 'unmake' Indigenous people."[23] Anderson's work challenges the myths and assumptions that maintain the boundaries that serve to confine and control.

Edward Hills discusses how the telling of "secret stories" by the Garadjadi people from the Bidjadaga community at La Grange in white Australia re-wrote "official history" of frontier conflict, and debunked the ongoing espousal of 19th century white myths that fix the character of the Aborigines as savages. Hills exposes "the vested interests of powerful white settlers" in maintaining such myths:

> By caricaturing blacks as ferocious and treacherous, the genocidal clearing of Aborigines from their traditional lands to make way for the development of the white economy, could be seen as justifiable and acceptable.[24]

In *I Don't Wanna Play House* Anderson unfixes racist stereotyping's see-saw of 'savagery' and 'sentiment'. There is no trace in Anderson's work of the "doctoring and censoring" of experience that Hills identifies in Sally Morgan's autobiographical novel, *My Place* (1987), where "Aboriginal experience is assimilated, sanitized and sentimentalized," and where "secrets and denials replace exposure and affirmation as organizing principles."[25] In illustration Hills quotes the restrictive words of Morgan's grandmother, Nan: "I'm taking my secrets to the grave."[26]

Anderson's Nan could not be further removed. Fearless and witty, she yanks the throne from underneath suburban silence and concomitantly from the male abusers who prey on Tammy's mother Lesley:

> NAN. The first fella she had was a dickhead, and then she went out with this other fella. He was a bigger dickhead. And the one she's with now, well, he's the biggest dickhead of 'em all ….[27]

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[23] Ian Birch, "'Nothing Has Changed': The Making and Unmaking of Koori Culture," *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. Michele Grossman (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne U P, 2003) 153.

[24] Edward Hills, "'What Country, Friends, Is This?': Sally Morgan's *My Place* Revisited," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, XXX11 2 (1997): 102.

[25] Hills, 104, 106.

[26] Sally Morgan, *My Place*, (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987) 163. Cited in Hills, 104.

[27] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 60.

Anderson's affirms her disparate characters and their desire. On first reading the play, before I had seen it performed, I marvelled at Anderson's imagined but as yet unseen skill in performing the rapid movements between the physicalities of all fourteen characters. In performance, on an unadorned stage where "the set is a black box",[28] Anderson snap changes from role to role and "takes on the physicality of the characters as she tells the story."[29] Music is an essential part of the performance. A musician accompanies Anderson as "a sequence of memories are told through storytelling and song."[30] An infinite emotional range is available for Anderson. Anderson starts the following sequence in the voice and body of herself as Child. She becomes other characters as she demonstrates through her body the "hair pulling and pushing, punching, kicking" and "battlefield" destruction when her Mother is under attack from a boyfriend, Titman:

> TAMMY. He punches Mum. Pop comes in and says 'You can't hit women'… Bang… He punches Pop into the wall. Pop says, 'You're fuckin' mad,' and he's off over to the phone box across the road. Titman runs up, grabs Pop, and pulls him to the ground, and he's kickin' the fuck out of Pop. Mum's friends [sic] on the door step, she runs across the road and lies down on top of Pop and says 'Get off him you weak cunt! Leave him alone!
>
> Titman's in the phone box and he's pulling it apart.
>
> Mr Walsh works for Telecom, he's our next door neighbour, he says, 'You can't do that to Telecom property!' Bang, he punches Mr Walsh out cold.
>
> My uncle's running up the street and Titman chases him. Nan comes screaming out of the house in her petticoat yellin' 'If I get a hold of you ya mongrel bastard!', then Titman turns and chases Nan and she's running the other way.[31]

The mayhem in the telling delivers the cartoon humour of the escaping Nan who makes the vicious Titman look foolish by "running the other way." Then Anderson snaps to play her mother. The frantic power of her cry allows a return to recognition of the horror and seriousness of what is happening:

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[28] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 40.

[29] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 57.

[30] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 40.

[31] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 59-60.

MOTHER. Where's me kids?!

Anderson snaps back to herself as child:

TAMMY. The neighbours are looking out their windows. 'Help us, somebody help me' … I can hear the cops, the ambulance coming. Titman goes and gets on his Harley and kicks it over and says 'You say anything and I'll be back with a petrol bomb,' and then he's gone.

TAMMY hums the sound of a Harley engine. She stands up stage centre and observes the destruction all around her. [. . .].

Mum's sitting on the front doorstep. Her eyes are punched shut and her blonde hair is all red.
Pop's on the ground not moving.
Mr Walsh has a black eye and a big bump on his head.
The kids are standing there screaming and crying. They're cold and their feet are blue.
The ambulance takes Mum and Pop to the hospital.
Nan yells out to me, 'come and sleep in with me, Tam'.[32]

Anderson is a consummate performer. As critic Chris Boyd writes:

She [Anderson] doesn't just relate stories of violence and abuse, she enacts them with a shocking and deeply affecting intensity. She gives us a glimpse of the face of evil. But don't be put off by that.
[. . .].
No props, few effects, just a body in space. Anderson is more than a mimic. She is a chameleon.[33]

Her polyvocal monologue gives her body power to perform her own and others' bodies and, by so doing, to make her performing self the measure of survival. In *Holy Day* the separate bodies of victors and victims reinscribe the survival of the punishing hierarchy and its enforcement of a policy of secrecy to hide the victims' stories.

In *I Don't Wanna Play House* in two consecutive scenes Anderson performs herself as a small child, and the Man – the men – who sexually abuse her. In the first of those scenes Anderson performs her sister as well.[34] Tammy mimes the man "*putting gaffer tape on the eyes of one child and on the mouth of the other.*"[35] Blindness and

[32] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 60.

[33] Chris Boyd, "In Search of a Sense of Belonging," *Herald Sun* 18 Feb. 2002: 89.

[34] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 51-52.

[35] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House* 51.

silence are visited on the children, but the Man's actions reflect back at him his craven self-blindness and emptiness. The secrecy he imposes as brutal game is undermined even as it is performed because the survivor is 'telling':

> MAN. [. . .].
>
> This is our secret game. . . don't tell *anyone*. . . Tell anyone and I'll fuckin' hurt you real bad. . . You hear me. . . SECRET, SECRET, SECRET. . . Now git. . .
>
> *He's ripping off the tape and untying them.*
>
> Go on, get out of here. . . Fuck off!
>
> *Let the beast settle. . . a slow transformation.*
>
> *Change. TAMMY continues the story.*
>
> TAMMY. We sat on Nan's doorstep and ate our mixed lollies. I was seven.

"Autobiographical story," writes Hills, "can politicise history by focusing the impact of history on the individual life."[36] Drawing on the experience of the Garadjadi people, Hills identifies a double power of storytelling:

> The articulation of unspoken stories not only challenges the official [version] by proliferating the perspectives but it also provides marginal communities with the means to lay claim to their own particular histories.[37]

Anderson's telling, unlike Bovell's, does not allow the voices from the margins of white society to be assimilated untransformed into what Hills calls "the exclusive and totalizing tendencies of the dominant mode" of discourse-making. Drawing on the work of Sneja Gunew, Hills argues:

> If each discursive practice transforms as well as reproduces, then the telling of oppositional stories will contribute to the transformation of the system of values that underpins the genre.[38]

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[36] Hills 102.

[37] Hills 102.

[38] Hills 102. Hills cites Sneja Gunew, Introduction, *Striking Chords*, eds. Sneja Gunew and Katerynja O. Longley, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992, xx.

As the sexual abuse scenes in *I Don't Wanna Play House* make clear, Anderson does not offer a comfortable white audience the pretence that what happened is not serious, nor does she allow the behaviour that produced the assault to be reinforced. Here is the Man's opening gambit in the second of the abuse scenes:

> *Playing hide and seek, counting.*
>
> MAN. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10.
> Here I come ready or not.
> I can hear someone.
> I'm getting warmer.
> I can hear someone.
>
> *He sees TAMMY hiding. He approaches, playing the game Hide and Seek. He's telling her to be quiet.*
>
> Shhh… sshh…
>
> *In mimed action and words, he's telling the child to shut up or he'll slap her. Shut the fuck up [. . .].*
>
> [. . .].[39]

The scene is detailed. Anderson mimes the Man's actions and the child's body. When the Child tells what The Man does, she uses not "he" or "his", but the plural pronoun, "they" or "their". The child's language that describes what "they" do is in short bites, like slaps. Voice, body and face reveal the Men's power and the child's hurt. The child's horror. The child uses the second person pronoun "You" to describe herself. Her self becomes someone else she is watching over. From that watchfulness her fear finds words that interrupt the imposed rhythm of cruelty like a mantra:

> You feel afraid. Afraid to cry. Afraid to move.[40]

Naming the fear allows the child and the adult body performing the child to name herself, in the rhythm and breath of herself. Fear is reinscribed as the preservation of the self – as resistance.

When it is over the voice and body for the predator that began the scene does not return. "They" have gone, but "they" are always present:

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[39] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 52-53.

[40] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 53.

They're nice to you. They're nasty to you.

The adult Tammy interposes with another mantra, one that echoes the silence that the men have imposed on the Child even as it overturns that silence:

SECRETS, SECRETS, SECRETS…[41]

Safe because the Man has gone, and safe forever because she is now inside the protection of her older self who is speaking out the reality of what happened to her, the Child reverts to the first person pronoun to tell now what she could not tell then:

I smell. I'm hot. I'm sweaty. I'm dirty. I can't tell no one.

I'm sore. I'm red. I'm swollen. I'm numb…[42]

Because in performance Anderson is prey and predator, child and attacker, female and male, black and white, she is able to enact the pain inflicted, but the agonistic element cannot triumph. Because the attacker is only present when an imaginary version of him is brought into being by the body of his survivor, the usual power relationship of the rapist / raped binary refuses to be reinscribed as unchangeable reality. Where there might have been a 'victim', there is a self. Unlike in *Holy Day* where the coloniser carries onstage the body of the Indigenous woman he has raped as a passive broken trophy for which he is rewarded, the destroyer in *I Don't Wanna Play House* is allowed no physical presence with which to gloat.[43]

The rape scene in *I Don't Wanna Play House* segues into Tammy singing *If I Could See the World Through the Eyes of a Child*. The soft guitar dissipates the pain. Through juxtaposing the lyrics, made famous by Patsy Cline (1958), with the reality of her own childhood, Anderson's counter-hegemonic irony unsettles the fantasy of childhood as a place of safety and goodness:

If I could see the world
Thru the eyes of a child
What a wonderful world this would be

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[41] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 53.

[42] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 53.

[43] Bovell, *Holy Day* 65. See Chapter One of this thesis for further analysis – Goundry blames the rape and mutilation on unseen blacks, characterising them as savage. He is rewarded by Nora restoring to him possession of the boy Cornelius whom he has subjected to great cruelty.

> There'd be no trouble and no strife
> Just a big happy life [. . .].[44]

"Black women's autobiography," writes Helen Thomson "declares its gender and race marginality, and likewise claims the truth-value of subjectivity.[45] Anderson's work continues the reclaiming of the self that Helen Thomson identifies in texts from the late 1990's by such writer-performers as Leah Purcell, Deborah Mailman, Ningali Lawford and Deborah Cheetham:

> The staged female autobiography embodies a powerful 'talking back,' a de-colonising act.[46]

Hélène Cixous speaks with more lustre:

> Write yourself: your body must make itself heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. Finally the inexhaustible feminine Imaginary is going to be deployed.[47]

It is as if Cixous, writing in 1975, foresaw Anderson:

> [. . .] She doesn't 'speak,' [. . .] she lets go of herself, she *flies* [. . .]. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. [. . .]. Her speech [. . .] is never simple or linear or 'objectified,' generalized: she draws her story into history" (emphasis added).[48]

As the performance of *I Don't Wanna Play House* is drawing to an end, Tammy describes the play's genesis which came from her body and its relationship with the body of her child:

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[44] Sammy Master, Richard Pope and Tex Satterwhite, "*If I Could See the World through the Eyes of a Child*: As Released by Patsy Cline," 1958, Lyrics Depot, <http://www.lyricsdepot.com/Patsy-Cline/if-i-could-see-the-world-through-the-eyes-of-a-child.html> accessed 9 June 2005.

[45] Helen Thomson, "Aboriginal Women's Staged Autobiography," *Siting the Other: Re-Visions of Marginality in Australian and English-Canadian Drama*, eds. Marc Maufort and Franca Bellarsi, Dramaturgies, No. 1 (Brussels, Belg.: P.I.E.-Lang, 2001) 23.

[46] H. Thomson, "Aboriginal Women's Staged Autobiography," 35.

[47] Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways out/Forays /," *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997) 169.

[48] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *The Norton Anthology* 2044-45.

> TAMMY. I was giving my daughter a wizzie one day and it all came back to me…
>
> I started writing stories and I wrote pages and pages and pages. I couldn't stop.
>
> SECRETS, SECRETS, SECRETS.[49]

This 'wizzie' [sic], a benign action where Tammy mimes whirling her daughter in the air holding her by the ankles, revokes an earlier malign version where the child Tammy is spun by a character called Workman who exposes her body to lewd scrutiny. The Workman's masks his and his workmates' lechery by offering the experience to the child as fun: "You like wizzie."[50] Anderson's body in performance actions marks the Workman's actions for what they are – mockery, sexual abuse and the denigration and silencing of the child's experience of her own body. Because the adult Tammy mimes the action there is no actual child's body onstage to be offered to the Workman's scrutiny as his victim. Instead, through replacing the predator's masked version of history with the performed truth of her own experience, the predator's action is exposed to scrutiny.

There are parallels between Anderson's performance of a young person whose gaze locates responsibility for pain inflicted, and the work of the artist Galactia in Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*. Where in Chapter One, I describe dissimilarities between the work of Barker and Bovell, here I find similarities between Barker and Anderson. On her imaginary canvas, as described by the Sketchbook, Barker's artist Galactia uses the figure of a young sailor, "huddled against an abandoned cannon and staring with an expression of disbelief at the violence" of the battle, to create a "diametrical opposition" with the towering figure of the Admiral whose face has a "fixed and callous stare."[51]

Where *Holy Day*, as discussed in Chapter One, creates in its concluding tableau a superficially similar opposition between a youthful figure subjected to violence (the

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[49] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 69.

[50] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 46.

[51] Barker, *Scenes from an Execution*, 280-81. Galactia is later gaoled by the Venetian state for painting "callousness" where the authorities wanted "nobility" that would celebrate the triumph of the battle against their enemies. 292-94.

mutilated black girl Obedience) and a powerful adult (the axe-swinging Nora) who takes no responsibility for the youth betrayed to atrocity, Bovell allows Obedience, whose stare is twice described in the didascalia as "*vacant*",[52] no gaze with which to carry out the exhortation that Barker puts in the mouth of Galactia: "Locate responsibility."[53] The gaze of the young sailor in Galactia's imagined painting is described to the audience by the Sketchbook. His face, "in almost a religious manner, acts as a barometer of human incomprehension" that draws attention to the "mayhem".[54] With Obedience trapped at the end of the play in an authorial frame that removes all of her earlier power to 'see' or speak, *Holy Day* leaves her unable to bear witness to her body's pain or draw the attention of those culpable to what they have done.

Although like Bovell's punishing characters (Goundry, Wakefield, Elizabeth and Nora), Barker's Admiral and Anderson's Workman decide not to 'see' the pain they inflict, Barker's and Anderson's dramatic strategies for locating responsibility differ markedly from Bovell's. Unlike Bovell, Anderson and Barker each creates a perspective for the youthful 'victim'. Like Barker's Galactia, Anderson's art gives the abused child and her adult self power to overcome the abuser's insistence on secrecy and reveal his culpability.

A case could be made that by closing on Obedience as a young black female victim reduced by rape and mutilation to vacancy (nothingness) and unable to affect the abusing white adults' grip on stage power, *Holy Day* offers the audience evidence with which to decide culpability without their gaze needing further direction from onstage. I would suggest, however, that in *I Don't Wanna Play House* the raped and abused body's active witness to its own pain offers a very different experience to the audience. Anderson performs emotions which remain trammelled in *Holy Day*. The hurt body feels pain. Anderson's performance empowers the hurt body to express what it knows. The healing body laughs.

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[52] In the penultimate scene in *Holy Day* the stage direction, "*her stare vacant*" is used to describe Obedience when her rapist/mutilator brings her back to Nora. Nothing changes for Obedience in that scene or the closing one. The published playtext repeats the same description of her to end the play as she stands facing the audience, "*her stare vacant*" . Bovell, *Holy Day* 66 and 67.

[53] Barker, *Scenes from an Execution* 266.

[54] Barker, *Scenes from an Execution*, 280. See also the description of the Admiral's figure, 264.

Anderson's whirling movement, holding with outstretched arms the imagined presence of her daughter as she "flies" (Cixous), is a many-layered metaphor for the transformation from victimhood to selfhood. Anderson reclaims for herself and her daughter physical and sensual delight. The spiralling motion makes visible the looping of time that revisits the past and garners its many strengths for the present, among them music, singing, humour, creative imagination, love, family and belonging. It is the body that makes time visible. Spinning in and out of time past lets the body that lives in the present take that knowledge back into time where the lived horrors are replayed in new contexts and from multiple perspectives that privilege not the pain and its silencing, but the body's journey to tear the cover from that pain and find a way to heal. From the safety of the present, the non-linear narrative enables the body to return to the past where it can recognise, perform and release the flailing it received from sexual abuse, racism, poverty, violence and silence without allowing those actions and their perpetrators the favour of an unchallenged reenactment. By dethroning the Workman's logo-centric history where he names his abuse as something pleasant for the child ("You like wizzie"), Anderson exposes history constructed by the invader to be a lie. Anderson's performance refuses official white male history's self-administered balms that would exclude from consciousness the feeling bodies of others – and themselves – on which suffering is being inflicted. Anderson's abusers are laid bare in their strenuous and insatiable repetitions of their pathology. The abusers' mockery that would construct the people they exploit as wanting or deserving the abuse, is scrutinised and rejected.

Anderson's fluid use of dramatic time to enable the forcibly silenced body to express what it knows has many antecedents. As Tompkins writes:

> Unconventional uses of time [. . .] become a vital dramatic form which empowers both the Aboriginal and feminist discourses. By devising new temporal strategies, both groups emphasise their independence from conventional Western, naturalist, bourgeois male-dominated theatre, and also free themselves from powerful controlling and silencing influences [. . .].[55]

[55] Joanne Tompkins, "Time Passed/ Time Past: The Empowerment of Women and Blacks in Australian Feminist and Aboriginal Drama: Version of a Paper Presented at the Australasian Drama Studies Association Conference, Bathurst, New South Wales, July 1990," *Australasian Drama Studies*, 19 (1991): 21.

Dramatists like Anderson are not only freeing themselves from a controlling silence, they are profoundly affecting their audience. Tammy Anderson keeps a journal in which she has asked the many people who have seen her play and wish to talk with her, to write their responses. Anderson's journal is overflowing with people's stories that her performance releases into speech.[56] Here is astonishing vindication of the power to change lives that Robyn Archer somewhat tentatively claims for art:

> Contact with art can sometimes have an effect that results in change or challenge. It is not necessarily always art with a message that does this. Contact with sheer beauty can often do it. It may very well send a strongly affected audience member careering off the path of so-called mainstream values on a hunt for the individual self.[57]

Anderson's performance is beauty. It has invited many to strength. Her work has not, however, met with everybody's approval. Alison Barclay quotes Anderson's account of attempts by government officials to censor her play when she tours to schools:

> When I did start going out to schools, people from the Education Department were concerned; I think there are 1500 swear words in the show. They said, 'Could you tone down the language?' I said, 'No this *is* the language, every second word these days is a swear word [original emphasis]!' It's not the words, anyway – it's the issues![58]

To those people who indicate concern when they find out that Anderson allows her two children, who go on tour with her, to watch the show, Anderson responds:

> But it's the truth! It's what happened. They talk about it and it's a good thing.[59]

Along with honesty and courage, laughter is another of Anderson's gifts to her audience. Tammy takes the audience into a dramatisation of the prelude to the child's discovery of the white imposition of a definition upon her body. The body performs the irony of the white law insisting on inspecting it to determine its place in the world.

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[56] Personal communication, 2003.

[57] Archer, *Myth* 4.

[58] Anderson, quoted in Alison Barclay, "New Girl in Town," *Herald Sun* 11 Feb. 2002: 84.

[59] Anderson, in Barclay 84.

Tammy becomes her mother Lesley calling the children to come “in here”. Each time she is more insistent, until the third time there is no further back chat from them. When Tammy with the other imagined children enters the kitchen, she find the servants of the state occupying her family’s space. The children’s resistance to their mother’s control is forgotten in the face of invasion:

> So we go inside and standing in our kitchen was these ladies. There was a big brown lady with a nice smile and a white lady with a funny haircut. They told me and me brother and sister to stand in a line and lift up our t-shirts.… So we did…Then they looked at each other and nodded and said…’You are Aboriginal’ ….[60]

It is a determination which leads to the family getting a Housing Commission house at Ravenswood: “A blackfella house. Cos I'm a blackfella!”[61] Laughter defuses the government-imposed definition of the body. The desiring body refuses control by proliferating a multiple vocabulary of difference and commonality – community – that denies the denigration implied in the government’s categorisation:

> We ran outside and told all our friends… we're Aboriginal… we're Aboriginal… They called us dog shit, niggers, coon, boong and dumbfucks… But I'm real smart… We get these three-buck cheques from the government. My little sister doesn't, ’cause she’s white. My dad’s a blackfella and my mum’s white, and my mum gets called a coon fucker ’cause she's got black kids. The blackfellas call her a mole ’cause she’s white… So we don't know where we fuckin’ fit in [. . .] (62-63).

Heidegger says:

> To discuss language, to place it, means to bring it to its place of being not so much language as ourselves: our own gathering into the appropriation [*Ereignis*].[62]

That is what Anderson is doing – bringing language “to its place of being not so much language as [herself] ourselves”. Language is her gathering into the event [*Ereignis]*. It is not only in language that she appropriates herself for herself. Where Caliban uses the gift of language to curse the oppressor, Anderson is using hers to laugh.

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[60] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 62-63.

[61] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 62.

[62] Martin Heidegger, "Language," trans. Albert Hofstadter, *The Norton Anthology* 1122.

The penultimate moment in *I Don't Wanna Play House* is laughter, as the adult Tammy gets together with her family:

> [. . .]. We fight and argue… OOOH YEAH…and we love laughing! When us women get out the backyard and laugh we sound like kookaburras…Oooo-haaaaa-hahaha… We love laughing! And we *love* our country *and* western [original emphases]![63]

The moment segues into Tammy and the Musician singing *It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels*. Anderson allows the body to be outrageous, irreverent, iconoclastic and self-mocking. The body tells what it knows, not what is expected, permitted or genteel. Moving into the persona of her Mother, Lesley, Anderson sings her version of *Today I started loving you again* in which the anger at the man who has left her with four kids to feed, no money and a house where he has kicked holes in the walls, becomes an expletive-rich foil to the soppy romantic lyrics.[64]

Varney contrasts Elizabeth Coleman's reinforcement of the myth of goodness and reasonableness in the feminine home in suburbia with Anderson's images of Mother at home:

> In the [Anderson's] narrative, her Aboriginal father is lost to alcohol and her white mother, who vacuums in a bikini, moves the family through a succession of homes filled with danger, violence, sexual abuse, poverty, and just occasionally, a sense of belonging. Anderson's unsafe homes are located far from the orderly streets of mainstream middle-class life in whose interests the nation governs.[65]

Although there is something awry in Varney's reduction of the play to "narrative", which I will come back to in a moment, Varney rightly points to the importance of Anderson's narrative in giving the lie to middle Australia as representative of the nation. If *I Don't Wanna Play House* is ever on in Kirribilli I'll send the Prime Minister the money to buy himself a ticket. The Howard Government needs to know that the alcoholism of Anderson's father came out of a childhood, youth and adulthood wrecked by dispossession, poverty, a draconian and racist 'welfare' system, lack of opportunities and gaol, compounded by head injuries from a falling tree when he and fellow prisoners were called out to fight a bushfire.

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[63] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 69.

[64] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 61.

[65] Varney, "White-Out," 333.

Describing the “orderly streets of mainstream middle-class life” as if they are the centre – a place called “here” – Varney sets Anderson’s work in a non-locatable place called “far” – a constantly moving no-place of danger where, paradoxically, somebody real lives, somewhere out there. In performance, however, I suggest that Anderson’s narrative kicks holes in space and time and shifts the centre from far to near. It is Canberra and Kirribilli that become nowhere. In Anderson’s play those neat streets *are* mythical. Their status as the centre of attention is subverted. Yes, the political and economic power of those suburbs is not mythical. Subverting that power will take a little longer, but for Anderson and her audience the liminal – the excluded – is, in the moment of performance, always and forever the centre. This is where Varney’s argument slips. Grounded in Anderson’s performing body in the centre of its own stage, “belonging” is not occasional. It permeates that centre and makes its existence possible. “Belonging” disrupts the narrative and in so doing disrupts the mainstream’s vision of itself as the arbiter of mores. “Belonging” allows the performance of abuse and disconnection to be interspersed with embrace and laughter. From that position of safety the horror of the abuse can be performed, its power scrutinised and its ugliness named. The performing body, that suffers the abuse and exposes it for what it is, is the same body that ridicules the tormenter and transforms the damage and pain into healing. For example, after Anderson has performed through mime the child self being given the abusive ‘wizzie’ by the Workman, she becomes herself again and tells a story of a place where her family lived near an old, cold swamp:

> TAMMY. [. . .]. There were rats runnin’ around.
> It was a real fuckin’ dump.
> We had an old blue Morris Major on the front lawn.
> It didn't go.

While singing *If I Could See the World Through the Eyes of a Child*, Tammy mimes getting into the car with her siblings and ‘driving’:

> I used to take me brother and sister on magic car rides. We’d sit up in the front seat. My little sister had this beautiful big smile and shiny white teeth and her little fat legs just made it to the edge of the seat. She looks just like Dad. She’d look up at me with her round fat face and smile. My little brother’d hold her hand real tight and I’d say, ‘Are you ready?’ And they’d say, ‘Yeah’. And we’d drive and drive for hours.

> And I'd say, 'We're nearly there, close your eyes'. And then I'd say, 'We're here', and we'd wind down the windows and smell the beach…
>
> *She continues the song.*[66]

In his musings on language, Heidegger imagines a logician, who "thinks of everything in terms of calculation" and whose thinking is therefore likely to be "overbearing". Such a thinker would regard "as an empty tautology" the proposition it gives great delight to Heidegger to make: "Language is language."[67] Heidegger, performing like Anderson, a dialogue between poles, lets the logician within ask

> Merely to say the identical thing twice – language is language – how is that supposed to get us anywhere?

To which Heidegger replies:

> But we do not want to get anywhere. We would like only, for once, to get to just where we are already.[68]

Is this a key to understanding something of the divergence between the autobiographical work of Anderson and that of Bovell and Thomson? The two white playwrights each construct a story about black and white Australia, not from the story's own desire but from their own perception of what that story's morality 'ought' to be. Anderson builds her story from its own bones, from how it feels, from where it is, not from where received opinion believes it should go. In telling that story Anderson and her audience perform the truth of getting "to just where we are already."

The myth of what Jennifer Rutherford in *The Gauche Intruder* calls "the Good Australia" has had great success in keeping hidden the truth of felt experience.[69] As explored in Chapter Two, that myth flourishes in Thomson's play, where 'goodness' is extended to embrace patronage to a sanctified and feminised Indigenous people.

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[66] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 46-47.

[67] Heidegger, "Language," 1122.

[68] Heidegger, "Language," 1122.

[69] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 196.

Wonderlands coopts its Indigenous character in its 21st century time frame, saintly Edie, into policing the narrative to keep white aggression away.[70]

Bovell's play inverts the myth to nightmare. The Aboriginal characters onstage are tortured and their people offstage are massacred and the survivors represented as doomed. Opportunities for getting the characters who represent an imaginary white Australia to look at the truth of "just where we are already" are squandered.

Pain in *I Don't Wanna Play House* is not hidden but made into truth about where we are already. Tammy Anderson's Dad, is, as Varney says, "lost to alcohol", but the tragedy of that loss is not lost:

> TAMMY. I talk to Dad every now and then. We never know what to say.[71]

[70] See Chapter Two.

[71] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*.

Chapter Four:
The Rage inside the Pain: Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*

> I see more responsibility and maturity in a pre-school than I do in parliament. We have immature, childish leaders who are – mostly – immoral men. Access points to wealth and power are controlled by their attitudes. If I was a political leader, I'd resign because I'd be ashamed to be a part of it.
>
> Richard J. Frankland.[1]

Where *I Don't Wanna Play House* moves the shabby dwellings of itinerant poverty to the centre of the stage, Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* (2002) makes the centre of Australia the sinkhole of the gaol. As Chris Cunneen, Director of the Institute of Criminology at University of Sydney Law School wrote in the programme notes: "Brutality, neglect and racism continue to be hallmarks of the criminal justice system."[2]

The play's protagonist, Jack, is tearing himself apart as he tries through his work for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody to stop his people, his family and himself being sucked into the vortex of grief, anger, violence and death that the gaol at Australia's core is generating – and has generated since the nation began.

Frankland's play came from the anguish of his own experience when he took a job as an investigator with the Royal Commission with the task of liaising with the families of Indigenous Australians who had died behind bars.[3] The work so traumatised Frankland he lost his relationship with his partner and his children.[4]

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[1] Quoted in Diana Simmonds, "Speaking Frankland," *Sunday Telegraph* 27 July 2003: 114.

[2] Cunneen, "Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Background Notes, 7 July 2003," Programme for *Conversations with the Dead*.

[3] Kerry O'Brien, "Indigenous Playwright Delves into Dark Memories," *7.30 Report*, 28 May 2002, Mick Bunworth Mick Bunworth, ABC TV, <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/s566701.htm> accessed 17 Dec. 2003. Reporter. Mick Bunworth.

[4] Adamson, "Lost Voices: Ninety-One Lives, One Play and a Nation's Shame," Metropolitan 5.

Image 1: Wayne Blair as Jack: "Imagine seeing that much death and grief."[5]

Some of the exhaustion with which the protagonist Jack must contend is evident in Image 1. In the suit he must wear for his work, but with his tie undone and surrounded by the 'no-man's-land' of the gaol, he must make extraordinary efforts not to lose himself. *Conversations with the Dead* makes no gift to the audience of the passive spectatorship that Connor calls "the folded self-absorption of dramatic performance."[6] Instead of offering his audience the self-congratulatory safety that might be found in a theatre of good taste, or in Howard Barker's words a "self-limiting" theatre, "protecting the audience from experience by reproducing the ethic of drawing-room society,"[7] Jack opens the play by ignoring the frame that separates pretence from reality:

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[5] Photo: Heidrun Löhr. Wayne Blair as Jack, *Conversations with the Dead*, by Richard J. Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July, 2003. The line from the play quoted as the caption for the image comes from early in the play. Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 2. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 222.

[6] Connor, "Postmodern Performance," 118. Connor quotes Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience:* 'We are not pretending that you don't exist. You are not thin air for us. You are of crucial importance to us because you exist [. . .]'."

[7] Barker, *Arguments* 76, 96.

> JACK. (TO AUDIENCE) I'm looking for hanging points, 'cause every morning when I wake up I talk myself out of killing myself. But I go through the motions, I find the hanging points in my house, start off in my bedroom and then work my way through the lounge into the backyard.
>
> I don't think I'll ever do it, but I try different stuff out … like different ropes and socks and things I learnt from those fellers who died.[8]

The sounds of "Wind, Crow and Music" that come in as the speech ends amplify the pain.[9] To speak truth to pain is to locate responsibility. Whereas Thomson's *Wonderlands* in its occasional use of monologue follows the convention that there is a stream of consciousness a dutiful audience 'overhears', in Frankland's play Jack elicits from its similarly mostly white audience a task:

> JACK. Imagine that you're a Koori, that you're in your mid-twenties, that your job is to look into the lives of the dead and the process, policy and attitude that killed them.
>
> Imagine seeing that much death and grief that you lose your family, and you begin to wonder at your own sanity.[10]

There is no pretence from the stage that the audience are not implicated in the pain of their fellow citizens. Unlike *Wonderlands* which, to borrow a term from Barker, offers white members of its audience "flattery" in the form of 'good' white characters who exhibit risk-free and pain-free generosity towards 'good' Aboriginal characters, *Conversations with the Dead* is built from Jack's opening premise that invites the audience to imagine that they are not separable from the people on the stage, as people.[11] Such a theatre, Barker argues, is "honouring [. . .] an audience by refusing the simple satisfactions of reiteration, affirmations, congratulation."[12] Frankland invites his audience's active and transforming witness to the horror that the failure to

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[8] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 2. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 264.

[9] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 2.

[10] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 2. In the published play whose prologue depicts the coming of Captain Cook, this dialogue appears in the second scene, 221-22.

[11] For discussion of *Wonderlands*' idealisation of the black and white characters who triumph, see Chapter Two.

[12] Barker, *Arguments* 78. Barker writes: "An honoured audience will quarrel with what it has seen, it will go home in a state of anger, not because it disapproves, but because it has been taken where it was reluctant to go. Thus morality is created in art, by exposure to pain and the illegitimate thought." Barker, 47.

imagine the experience of the Indigenous people has built into the core of the white-conceived nation. For an audience member to enter such a relationship of witness is to put the self at risk. The "outcome" of the task Jack sets his audience is as "unknown" and dangerous as the journeys of actor and writer Barker extols in a theatre "unafraid of tragedy".[13]

In an interview for *Koori Mail* Frankland describes his experience of travelling into the unknown to create a play to express Jack's tragedy as a journey of urgency, fear, daring, exposure and insight:

> *Conversations with the Dead* was a maturing piece for me. It was confrontational and scary because it is undoubtedly one of the most revealing pieces I have ever written and therefore a major catalyst for me reaching a larger understanding of my own writings.
>
> To me, the play takes you on an amazing journey and *you don't know where you will end up*. Jack's character is fascinating because he keeps getting up when life slaps him down, yet he is insightful enough to realise that sometimes staying down is OK.[14]

Barker consecrates "theatre without a conscience" where "tragedy restores pain to the individual."[15] Frankland's theatre re-consecrates as feeling selves people on whom colonisation imposes its theatre of denial. The denial of pain is so fixed in Western thought that when Barker seeks a metaphor for a place of danger where theatre may escape modernity's self-congratulation of denied trauma, he imagines the writer undertaking "a journey without maps whose destination might be an intemperate zone, a place of fear and little comfort."[16]

It is worth visiting Barker's trope of "an intemperate zone" for its illumination of white Empire's view of itself that is challenged in Frankland's play. Although Barker makes it clear that he is re-imagining a vigorous theatre from Europe's own past, where "the actor in historic periods was banned, even in death, from hallowed ground because "[h]e sins for the audience", manifesting "the forbidden action" and "the forbidden

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[13] Barker, *Arguments* 77.

[14] Frankland, quoted in "Sydney Debut for 'Conversations', *Koori Mail*, 30 July 2003, 40.

[15] Barker, *Arguments* 19. For Barker's essay, "Theatre without a conscience", see 72-78. This essay was given as a paper at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, 6 October 1990.

[16] Barker, *Arguments* 77-78.

life",[17] Barker's geography locates that theatre outside Europe. "[A]n intemperate zone" evokes unmapped southern latitudes that temperate European colonisers and their modern guise, the global corporation, invade in a fevered chase for treasure. Although Barker does not conjure this alluring savage territory as a source of material plunder, his tropes offer that forbidden zone as an unmappable El Dorado of the spirit essential to a 'North' overfed and dulled by commodities and ideology. In that "wildness" beyond the thrall of urbanity, Brechtian didacticism, redemption, education and "the moral consensus of humanism", Barker imagines a theatre whose "sole and riveting power lies in its barbarism."[18]

While Barker offers surgical deconstruction of the social conformity of humanism and of a theatre that is "a willing collaborator in the enforcing of moral regulations,"[19] his siting of the desired savagery beyond rather than within civilisation, repeats the metaphors of the colonial binary even as it inverts them. To deconstruct the metaphors of empire while relying on their imperial evocations for their impact, as Barker appears to do, may unexpectedly uphold the split colonisation makes between self and feeling, and between the head-governed centre (the North) and the body-ruled nether-regions (the South). It is not an accident, I think, that north is the tidy top for the European map-maker while the nether-regions of the body are Europe's untidy source of regeneration.[20] Importing desired "wildness" from Barker's "intemperate zone" may momentarily restore to view the pain kept hidden behind modernity's masked theatre of itself, but the tropes which feed this separation of the centre from what Barker calls "barbarism" doom the centre to re-severance of itself from its own and others' pain.[21]

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[17] Barker, *Arguments* 77-78.

[18] Barker, *Arguments* 78.

[19] Barker, *Arguments* 76

[20] For an understanding of carnival and the grotesque as a means of regeneration through celebrating the nether regions of the body as a "bodily and popular corrective to [. . .] idealistic and spiritual pretence," see M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana UP, 1984) 20-22.

[21] For insight into whiteness's representation of itself as standard against a raced (and, I would add, gendered and en-spirited) other, I am indebted to Ingram, "Racializing Babylon: Settler Whiteness and the 'New Racism'," 157-76. See Chapters One and Two of this thesis for the links between gender and empire in *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands*.

In *Conversations with the Dead*, Frankland demonstrates the paradox of the 'white' centre's insatiable longing to be reunited with lost feeling (Barker's "pain" and "wildness"). Jack's work for the Royal Commission makes him a suit-clad cultural acquisition for non-Indigenous Australians who gather around him at their "*white upper middle class party*" as if he is "*The Messiah*".[22] In her study of how Aboriginal artists disrupt the essentialism of white imaginings of Aboriginal culture as "Stone Age" and "doomed to extinction", Marcia Langton draws attention to colonialism's history of a "hunger" for collecting Aboriginal cultural production, interpreting it from within white narratives, while displaying the purloined or purchased objects and, where possible, their makers.[23] Colonialism created "a fascinated audience" for Aboriginal art among Europeans "who had long become accustomed to their assumed centrality in imperial history." For the Europeans "'primitive'" art represented "the starkly alterior."[24] In the twentieth century "Aboriginal art was voraciously collected (as were Aboriginal skulls in the nineteenth century)."[25] By the end of the twentieth century the bulk of Aboriginal cultural work had been "recruited to the task of interior decorating and the constructions of a national subjectivity" that made Aboriginal art emblematic of "an imagined community of Australia that now prided itself on being 'multicultural' and 'tolerant'".[26] *Conversations with the Dead* exposes the failure of that imagined 'tolerance' to translate into the unprejudiced, honest and fair society that Frankland outlines in programme notes:

> [W]e don't want sympathy, we don't want welfare or handouts, we don't even want people to feel guilty, what we do want is a fair go.
>
> An opportunity to have the past recognised for what it truly was, a fair go in planting a proactive seed here in the present for the future.[27]

Learning from Langton and extrapolating from Barker's failure to read the white male superiority in his own metaphors that make "power" synonymous with masculinity,

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[22] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26. See Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 266-69.

[23] Marcia Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. Michele Grossman (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 2003) 81-91, 203-04.

[24] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 81.

[25] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 81.

[26] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 82-83.

[27] Frankland, "Writer's Note."

and separate "pain" and "wildness" from Europe,[28] I suggest that in the scene where Jack as "'Messiah'" is besieged by wildly partying whites, Frankland connects (at least) four threads in non-Indigenous Australia's construction of a false "national subjectivity": (1) white Australian avidity for making a trophy of Aboriginal pain;[29] (2) white "hunger" for collecting Indigenous artists' "symbolically represented insights on the world" and for refiguring those insights as proof of the all-encompassing "benefits of colonialism";[30] (3) white essentialist exclusion of blacks from its self-definition that "*white is normal [and] the ultimate condition towards which the grand narrative of evolution, progress, civilisation edges*" (original emphasis);[31] and, (4) the failure of 'whiteness' to see how its metaphors hide from its constructed self the reality of pain and death.[32]

The white Party-Goers who gather around Jack to touch and question are performed by black cast members wearing flamboyant wigs that represent temporary 'whiteness'. Jack's black body is like a magnet for white desire. One of the White Women flirts/fawns as she introduces herself. As Jack confides to the audience: "She wants to sleep with me. She wants a coffee-coloured baby."[33] Rather than attempting to stop Bruce who is "*pawing at Jack's shirtfront*" in an attempt to expose "man scars" that will prove Jack is "a real Aborigine", the other 'white' Party-Goers gather round.[34] This voyeuristic obsession with ritual pain relegates Aboriginality to white plaything and reduces Indigenous culture and black manhood to self-inflicted scar. In his hunt for satisfaction through belittling someone else's 'pain' and 'barbarism', the voyeur

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[28] Empire's view that superiority is inherent in the male is reinforced by Barker's choice of metaphor when he writes of theatre having lost "power" because "it has wilfully chosen to emasculate itself" by imitating rival forms of communication whose purpose is education and debate. Barker, *Arguments* 76.

[29] Reynolds reports from his research into the 19th century Australian frontier: "How frequently we will never know, but heads were cut off and skulls were put on open display on some stations; even ears and fingers were sometimes kept as mementos of murder." Reynolds, *Frontier* 59.

[30] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 81-82.

[31] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 83.

[32] Langton makes clear the power of colonialism's "narratives of Progress, Education, Science and so on": "The counterfactual (the death, exploitation, and misery of millions in the colonies) did not in any significant way subvert those principal themes of the grand narrative." Marcia Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 81-82.

[33] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26

[34] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 269.

refuses to see his own aggression, or the pain and death his society as gaoler forces on the people represented by the man who stands before him and whose white shirt he is trying to tear away.

The removable bewigged 'whiteness' of Bruce and the other Party-Goers offers an ironic counter to the inability of those characters to see that the metaphors they use to rationalise their power are not fixed but mutable. As Helen Gilbert writes in her investigation of "whiteface" in recent Indigenous theatre: By making obvious the "performativity of race alongside the enormous power (still) invested in skin color [sic] as a categorizing and stratifying tool," the "whiteface performance" serves to "destabilize the fixity of race and elicit its malleability while still exposing the very real consequences of racism."[35]

Pushed to the edge by Bruce and the daily brutal reality of the gaol for which Bruce's verbal and physical goading is a metonym, Jack cannot accept the advice of Lilly, whose magic realist 'black' presence urges him to avoid trouble:

> BRUCE. Come on, if you're a real Aborigine you'll have them scars.
>
> LILLY. Just ignore him walk away [sic]
>
> JACK. I gave him a scar he'd never fuckin' forget.
>
> I gave him a scar he'd never fuckin' forget.
>
> I gave him a scar he'd never fuckin' forget.[36]

Earlier in the scene, Jack directly addresses the Party Crowd in response to their volley of questions that reveal their anxiety about, and ignorance of, Aboriginal people's lives. Langton links "the quintessential postcolonial Australian racial anxiety about Aboriginality with the paradox of non-Indigenous Australians' "high

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[35] Helen Gilbert, "Black and White and Re(a)D All over Again: Indigenous Minstrelsy [sic] in Contemporary Canadian and Australian Theatre." *Theatre Journal*, 55 4 (2003): 679 and 96. Gilbert draws on the work of Susan Gubar and Dorinne Kondo. Writing prior to Wesley Enoch's direction of the 2003 Belvoir Street production of *Conversations with the Dea*d, Gilbert discusses the performance of "whiteface" in earlier work by Enoch, including his concept of "pentimento". See particularly 682, 685-689, 696-697.

[36] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 27. In the published play this exchange is not enacted but theorised in direct address to the audience. See Frankland, Conversations (Currency/Playbox) 269.

consumption of ideas *about* Aborigines as against their failure to know any actual Aborigines" (original emphasis).[37] Turning on a "*posh voice*", Jack parodies a pontificating black academic paraded as the educator of whites who appear to hang on his every word but do not listen:

> WHITE WOMAN. Hey, Jack, look we're real interested in this Aboriginal stuff, THEY OWN THE LAND AND EVERYTHING, you know like that book about the MUTANT messenger [original emphasis]. Do those people really exist?
>
> *The Party Crowd gather around and all look at Jack 'The Messiah':*
>
> JACK. (*To audience)* Here we go again … Got my degree in Aboriginality, gotta fork it over again.
>
> *Jack turns back to the Party Crowd.*
>
> JACK (*In a posh voice*) Although we make up only 2.7 per cent of the population there is a disproportionate level of angst and anxiety surrounding our existence.
>
> The majority of the Australian population chooses to remain ignorant about their history, denying the thought processes necessary to distinguish the museum representations of my peoples and the reality.
>
> Therefore, you hold on to romanticized images of Aboriginal cultures and people, which ultimately divides us into the 'real' and the 'mutant' devaluing our survival and contradicting our contemporary existence.
>
> Hence, you're continuing to support the dominant paradigm not by choice but through ignorance.[38]

Ironic layers multiply. On stage space that is the gaol, blacks pretend to be celebratory whites with drinks in hand. The 'whites' gawp at their invitee, a black man who pretends to enact their fantasy of the Aborigine who wants to be just like a white, suit/ably dressed and "*posh*".[39] His 'lecture' demonstrates how his 'white' audience – on- and off-stage – could disrupt their support of "the dominant paradigm" by refusing its metaphors, if only they were listening. Onstage, Jack's audience "*lean forward*"

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[37] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 91.

[38] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26. The earlier version of the speech stresses the indoctrination that results in ignorance of history and failure to understand contemporary issues. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 269.

after his lecture eager now for his answer to a question from one of their number whose subtextual denigration of blackness as "mutant" stirs their approval. As the gaol setting reminds the eye, the metaphors of the "dominant paradigm" are enforced by state power. The 'white' wigs on the black bodies make visible the absurdity of the performed 'white' characters' assumption that 'whiteness' is humanity's essence and 'blackness' their tame savage and their saviour. While I find these destabilizing layers riveting in performance, I will leave the jury out on whether Barker (or anyone else) would condemn Jack's 'lecture' as a didactic enemy of theatre's power as "art". For Barker theatre is "play" in the "world-inventing" way of a child, "requiring no legitimisation from the exterior":

> The great play is immune to discussion, the play eliminates debate, it is not about arguments, it replaces arguments.[40]

Jack steps from the Party scene out of parody and into delivering a eulogy at yet another funeral for a young man dead in custody.[41] *Conversations with the Dead* reveals the pain that Barker demands from what he calls a "theatre of catastrophe": "The unspeakable is spoken."[42] Barker construes the audience who become witnesses to the tragic enactment of horror as having "recourse only to silence".[43] In that "silence of pain", Barker postulates "a pathos which is perhaps a kind of self-pity permitted to a hero who finds himself (sic), at last, alone."[44] From within a metropolitan culture he perceives to be exhausted, Barker allows art no power to galvanize an audience out of their silence.[45]

Far from silence, Frankland's play opens to conversation a litany of metaphors that prop up the recurrent denial of pain. From the intimacy of a culture of resistance Frankland gives art a power that contradicts Barker's pessimism and implies not an

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[39] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26.

[40] Barker, *Scenes from an Execution*, 75.

[41] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 28. In the published play the eulogy scene appears in a different sequence, 242-244.

[42] Barker, *Arguments* 78.

[43] Barker, *Arguments* 78. See also "The deconsecration of meaning in the Theatre of Catastrophe," Barker 79-84.

[44] Barker, *Arguments* 78.

[45] Barker, *Arguments* 19.

isolating of the individual within the anomie and silence of their own pain but a connection between art, voice and action:

> When you have art you have voice, when you have voice you have freedom, when you have freedom you have responsibility.[46]

In programme notes where he reflects on his experience with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Frankland names "attitude, societal and individual" including "those that hold the wealth and power" as the prime cause of the horrors perpetrated against his people.[47] *Conversations with the Dead* challenges the immutability of "attitude" and the language, metaphor and power structures with which it is intertwined. Frankland offers speaking truth as the antidote to the attitude that is killing his people:

> I say, learn about my people for fifteen minutes a week because that is one hour a month Aboriginal people don't have to justify themselves collectively and individually to the world. Then when you've learnt what makes us cry out in anger and pain, go and tell a dozen people and tell them to tell a dozen more. Tell everyone.[48]

Where Barker abhors acts of 'telling' in the theatre,[49] Wesley Enoch who directed the Belvoir Street production (2003) of Frankland's play suggests that where Indigenous theatre tells biographical and, in the case of *Conversations* autobiographical stories, the "authenticity" of those stories layers the "universal themes" that are at the core of all good theatre with "an historical truth that is inescapable":

> [. . .] there is this role for our [Indigenous] theatre that's about reading onto the public record our stories and perspectives and returning authorship of our experiences to Indigenous 'writers'. So much of our theatre when written by us is about documenting our survival through our extraordinary past and attempting to dispel the romantic notions of our spirituality. Hence it's the hard issues that get dealt with; stolen generations, deaths in custody, domestic hardship etc…as if somehow

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[46] Richard Frankland, "Promotional Website for an Evening with Richard Frankland at the Studio at the Sydney Opera House. Fri 23 & Sat 24 May," MESSAGE STICKS 2003 - SYDNEY OPERA, <http://www.abc.net.au/message/radio/awaye/ms_opera/richard_frankland.htm> accessed 20 May 2003.

[47] Frankland, "Writer's Note."

[48] Frankland, "Writer's Note."

[49] Barker, *Arguments* 78.

> by sharing the story we are sharing the burden or even through the telling of a personal story a collective truth is expressed.[50]

In an interview with Judy Adamson for *The Sydney Morning Herald* Frankland was "adamant" that the play "is not about him. It's about those who died: he investigated 99 'accepted' deaths [in custody], all of which are in the play in one way or another. The cast also has an 'ownership' of the work, he says, from their own families' experiences of death, jail and assimilation."[51] Frankland and his colleagues did not need to invent the emotional turmoil of the characters, nor the horrors inflicted by a law that behaves towards Aboriginal people with an unfettered criminality that smashes lives. In programme notes for *Conversations*, Chris Cunneen gives examples of deaths, police killings, abuse, neglect and disproportionate incarceration rates that are part of the criminal justice system's "brutality" and "racism" against Indigenous people whom "two centuries of colonial policies of dispossession and racism have forced [. . .] into the margins of the dominant society." Because "[b]y and large it is the poor and marginalised who end up in custody", Indigenous people are directly and adversely impacted by "'tough on crime' policies", that result in governments "locking-up an ever expanding number of prisoners" whose "experience of incarceration is rarely rehabilitative" as a result of "[o]vercrowding and the lack of all kinds of training and services."[52]

With lived reality as the raw material Frankland and his collaborators use their creative imagination to bring their already known trauma to an 'unknowing' white audience. To expose the dominant society's metaphors and attitudes that impose that trauma while concealing its impact from consciousness, the performance is designed to unseat the established theatre's traditional linear narrative that replicates those metaphors of control. Like the strong body of Indigenous work on which it builds, *Conversations with the Dead* uses structures and dramatic strategies that have not come from any one tradition, borrowing freely from their own and other

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[50] Wesley Enoch, "Director's Note," Programme for *Conversations with the Dead*, Company B Belvoir, Sydney, 2003.

[51] Adamson, "Lost Voices: Ninety-One Lives, One Play and a Nation's Shame," 5.
For discussion of Lou Bennett's experience of performing in *Conversations*, see Introduction, 34-35.
See also Best's discussion of Bennett's work, "Singing out the Stories of the Dead," 6.

[52] Cunneen, "Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Background Notes, 7 July 2003," n. pag.

traditions such as postmodern, classical and magic realism.[53] To bear witness to felt horrors and to the white denial of black feeling that under/lies those horrors, Frankland and the team use whatever elements they want, such as the performed presence of the dead, ritual cleansing, storytelling, music, song, parody, character-driven drama, monologue, myth and the re-membering of the classical unities of time, space, place and theme. Gilbert and Tompkins could have been describing *Conversations with the Dead* when they argue that a contemporary play that departs from realism's techniques and assumptions "stretches colonial definitions of theatre to assert the validity (and the vitality) of other modes of representation."[54]

In the Belvoir Street production (2003) mesmerising projected shadows of swallows swooping and looping on the gaol wall became a visual incantation from another world, as if the land was alive and sending its welcome black shadow to unravel the gaol.[55] As Gilbert and Tompkins suggest, "stylised ritual languages can undermine the authority of imperial discourse and avoid its reliance on semantic logocentricism."[56] Frankland's use of a recurring visual 'rhythm' that allows another reality to undo the gaol, contrasts with what happens structurally in Thomson's *Wonderlands* where the white woman Alice attempts to awaken a ritual language of the Aboriginal people whose stolen land is now her pastoral property. Her clapping together of stones to replicate the "stone chatter" she heard from the original inhabitants as a child, fails to jog the memory of the young Aboriginal stockman Jim who cannot remember his family's vanished traditional life.[57] Because the scene focuses on Alice's need to collect and praise Indigenous experience and because there is no driving action from Jim able to invest the chattering stones with a metonymic power that could serve his life, the ritual lapses. It sinks into one of those

[53] I am indebted to: Casey, *Creating Frames*. Marc Maufort, "Aboriginal Encounters: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on First Nation Drama," *Transgressive Itineraries: Postcolonial Hybridizations of Dramatic Realism* (Brussels, Belg.: P.I.E.- Lang, 2003). Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, "Performing Hybridity in Postcolonial Monodrama," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, XXX11.1 (1997).

[54] Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. 54.

[55] *Conversations with the Dead*, by Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Company B. Belvoir, 2003.

[56] Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. 64.

[57] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 14.

"museum representations" of Aboriginal people about which Jack lectures his uncomprehending 'white' Party-Goers in *Conversations with the Dead*.[58]

The organising principle for Frankland's play is the emotion that drove the writing – the desire to tell the pain. Time and space keep coming back to the same place – the gaol – because that is where the body is, where the pain is. Frankland's work is unique. The "composition" of the work, to borrow a term Milan Kundera uses in *Testaments Betrayed* is Frankland's own creation, not a category imposed by someone else's nomenclature:

> The composition (the architectural organisation of a work) should not be seen as some pre-existent matrix, loaned to an author for him [sic] to fill out with his invention; the composition should itself be an invention, an invention that engages all the author's originality.[59]

Frankland uses dramatic elements to connect inside and outside, now and then, life and death, self and other, spirit and flesh, into the same realm, the same space, the same time. With conventional boundaries dissolved on stage the hope is that the emotion is communicable across what Gaita calls the "conceptual structure of [. . .] racist perception."[60]

The Dead with whom Jack holds conversations haunt the space of the gaol where they died. That space is morgue, family home, 'white' Party, and the space where Jack visits Aunty for a cup of tea and a moment of attempting to get support to carry on. She does support him, hugely, but the problems are too big. He can't go on. He can't quit. And more deaths keep happening.

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[58] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 26. See Thomson, *Wonderlands* 14.

[59] Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, trans. Linda Aster (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) 172.

[60] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 335.

Image 2: "I keep seeing you lying in that morgue."[61]

David is at once a corpse on a trolley in the morgue (Image 2) and a manifest spirit able to visit Jack and communicate with him.[62] As Jillett and Prior write, "the corpse becomes the comforter, reassuring Jack that as an investigator he did all he could to help."[63]

The set in the production at Belvoir Street Theatre transformed not only the stage but the auditorium into a gaol, as if the audience were held there too.[64] A balcony level above the stage evoked a walkway within a tiered and barred prison and served as playing space for the musicians and singers who were able to move from there down to the main playing space to engage as characters in action with Jack. With brush

[61] Photo: Heidrun Löhr. Wayne Blair as Jack, Kirk Page as David (foreground), *Conversations with the Dea*d, by Richard J. Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July, 2003. The dialogue used in the caption is from Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 10.

[62] See for example Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 8 and 10-11. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 224-232.

[63] Neil Jillett and Sian Prior, "Voices from Beyond the Grave," *The Sunday Age* 3 March 2002, Agenda: 9.

[64] Ralph Myers, designer, *Conversations with the Dead*, by Richard J Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 28 Aug. 2003.

and bucket one of the cast painted vertical bars on the wall. As a physical reminder of the desperate futility of Jack's efforts to keep people out of gaol and end the ongoing mutilating and dying, the gaol grew visually as the audience watched. Yet, instead of the expected sounds of the gaol, music came from guitars played by the cast.

Where Anderson may use music and lyrics in *I Don't Wanna Play House* to parody romanticism, or to play against brutal action, or introduce a new emotion that will take the action in another direction (not an exclusive list), in *Conversations with the Dead* the songs are a ritual that plays across, and transforms, the boundary between life and death. The songs take an emotion from the action, such as grief or anger, and extend its expression so that the space is haunted with death, its fury and its lullaby. Paradoxically, although the music of guitar and voice is a means of relief from the intensity of Jack's struggle, the haunting sounds and the lyrics with their repetitive refrains and image-filled stories of young people who die in custody intensify the audience's experience of his pain. Sung words that live in the memory help carry the emotion beyond the time and space of the performance:

> I can't forget all the places that I've been,
> I can't forget all the things that I've seen,
> I can't forget all this hurtin' deep inside,
> I won't forget all the tears in my eyes, in my eyes.[65]

[65] The refrain from "No Way to Forget", Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 14.

Image 3: Jack having washed David's body and his own.[66]

Earlier the 'white' party-goers, Woman and Bruce tried to make Jack take off his shirt so that they could 'own' his body for their own purposes. Jack now bares his own torso for his own need. His action deconstructs the suit he has had to wear and reclaims his self for himself.

With white ochre Jack washes the body of a man who died in custody.[67] He washes his own body. The experience is creative and mysterious. The cleansing releases sorrow and rebirths possibility. With ceremonial ochre transforming his head and upper body, but still clad in the black suit trousers of public office, Jack's body makes palpable the tension between his life-spirit and the white man's law. In their study of traditional performance elements in contemporary plays (1996), Gilbert and Tompkins suggest that by traversing "the human/spirit divide, the ritual body confounds the rational processes of imperial discourse and thus refuses capture and

[66] Photo: Heidrun Löhr. Wayne Blair as Jack, Kirk Page as David, Conversations with the Dead, by Richard J. Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July, 2003.

[67] In the Belvoir Street production (2003) the washing began the play's final sequence. Reviewing the original production, Carlton Courthouse (2002), Jillett and Prior describe Jack's washing of David's body as closing the first act: "one of the most moving scenes [. . .] witnessed in a theatre for a long time." Jillett and Prior, "Voices," Agenda 9. See Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 259-62.

containment."[68] In *Conversations with the Dead* I suggest that Jack performs "the ritual body" and its "capture". He is metamorphosis and confinement. His body lays bare the pain and rage of a feeling self called upon by a imperial regime to mitigate horrors resulting from 'rational' processes it is apparently unwilling to question.

Gilbert suggests that "the more radical expressions of Aboriginality are often located in the extralinguistic signifiers of these texts as performance pieces."[69] Maufort emphasises Delbaere's argument that magic realism "serves to designate a 'fracture in the real,' a sense of crisis".[70] Frankland's play honours Jack's power to fracture the 'real' world of the gaol. His ability to cross its walls and to refuse its containment brings to a crisis the gaol's suppression of experience, a role it has had since the arrival of the British colonisers in 1788. Postcolonial concepts of magic realism have much in common with Felman and Laub's concept of testimony as a performative crisis that opens the walls to in-sight. Laub describes a woman survivor of Auschwitz testifying "to resistance, to the affirmation of survival, to the breakage of the frame of death."[71] Frankland breaks that frame.

At the climax of Frankland's play 'magic' and 'reality' collide in fury. The spirit inside Jack has enabled him to survive.[72] He has helped the people he could help and mourned the people he could not. As Jack's being faces unbearable crisis, his spirit takes magic form beyond his body as wind and waves. On a cliff edge in a storm with his torso painted, the pain that roars in his body manifests as wild elements that he must face. He stares out towards "Denmear, the island where my people go on the journey to the dreaming." The spirits are his failure and his success. They are his hope and his destroyer.

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[68] Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* 62.

[69] Gilbert, *Sightlines* 52.

[70] Marc Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries: Postcolonial Hybridizations of Dramatic Realism*, Dramaturgies, No. 9 (Brussels, Belg.: P.I.E.- Lang, 2003) 24. Maufort draws together theories of Linda Hutcheon's concept of the "'ex-centric'"; Theo L. D'Haen's examination of "similarities between the 'destabilising' cultural agenda of postmodernism and magic realism"; and, Delbaere's theories of magic realism.

[71] Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," *Testimony* 62.

[72] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 48-50. For the published version see 283-286.

In his rages Jack spurs the spirits to throw their worst at him:

> JACK. [. . .].
>
> You failed me.
>
> [. . .].
>
> C'mon … give me more … you lie, it's all lies … everything that you mean is lies you're like them.
>
> Just like them.
>
> [. . .].[73]

Jack's fever of pain, revealed through his body and his monologue, taunts the spirits for the weakness of their elemental smashing of wind and water against his body: "You're nothing. You're nothing". At the climax of his battle of land and body against the spirits' raging in from the ocean as if they would destroy him and the cliff he stands on, Jack tears head-on into the darkness and storm as if he is running with "a thousand warriors" screaming at the spirits. With a rush, Jack "flies" out towards the audience.[74] The 'fall' is reversed.

The play closes with a speech of sorrow that is counter-pointed by the physical transformation of Jack's body. Jack has encountered so much misunderstanding and opposition he no longer has the strength to ask the audience to "imagine". Instead he wonders if they, the audience, the metonymic presence of the Australia that maintains the gaols that lock up and kill his people, are still out there, still listening:

> JACK. Sometime I wonder about all of the people around me going on with their day to day lives and I wonder what they would do if they knew what I know and what most Koories [sic] know. We live in a storm, a storm that rages all around us, in us. This storm that rages all around me, I wonder if it can possibly match the storm inside me. I wonder if anyone can see the tears on my face or will they think it's the rain. I wonder if the storm will ever end.[75]

In an interview with *Koori Mail* Frankland describes the tragedy Jack's faces:

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[73] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 49.

[74] In performance he is tethered for safety to a platform. Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 50.

[75] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 52.

> [. . .] how can he be true to his brothers, his past, when the white world for which he works doesn't understand the subtleties, the strength, the pain, the rage of the people whose deaths he is investigating?[76]

I have to confess that the first time I saw the play I did not understand. I could feel myself resisting Jack's pain. In my head I remonstrated with him for not behaving in a way deemed emotionally sensible: He has no right for it to hurt that much. His children are in the next room. His wife wants him to go and hug them. Surely he could do that. Later I realised I had been sitting in judgment of trauma from which my own privileged whiteness protects me. I had been denying him the right to feel a pain that was outside my own experience. It was a racist denigration. I'm glad that it only happened in my head, that I came to see what I was doing and that while I was in that mindset I did not use my privilege to denigrate the play. On the way out of the theatre I overheard an audience member remark: "I hope the next one I go to is happy."[77]

Brecht offers an insight into the material basis for the failure of perception:

> The emotions always have a quite definite class basis; the form they take at any time is historical, restricted and limited in specific ways. The emotions are in no sense universally human and timeless.[78]

In exploring the racism of those who find it "unintelligible" that someone from a denigrated race could feel grief and pain as they do, Gaita posits that this denial of the emotion and with it the humanity of the other, is part of the conceptual structure of racism. Within that conceptual space the sense of who the self is has been formed by excluding the group designated 'other'.[79] There is a commonality here with Langton's argument outlined earlier that the "racial anxiety" in Australia has at its core the paradox for the majority of Australians of the "contiguity" of "the glut of Aboriginal images and metaphors" and the "distance" of not knowing "any actual Aborigines.[80]

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[76] Frankland, quoted in "Sydney Debut for *Conversations*," *Koori Mail* 30 July 2003: 40.

[77] Overheard, Belvoir Street Theatre, Saturday 1 August 2003 following 2.00pm performance.

[78] Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett, 1st ed. (New York; London: Hill and Wang; Eyre Methuen, 1964) 75.

[79] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 331-41.

[80] Langton, "Introduction: Culture Wars," 91.

The second time I saw *Conversations with the Dead* (the same production, 2003) I tried to let go, yet again, of Euro-imperial notions that "I" and "we" are white and therefore civilised and everyone else is either lack or excess. This time I saw Jack's and his Wife's reality. Onstage there are two people, both Aboriginal, with two realities. They clash. Both experiences are the truth. Neither speaks out of desire to say the right thing to please the audience. There is no concession here to what Robyn Archer identifies in *The Myth of the Mainstream* as pressure from marketing departments to create art that will "play into the pleasant groove of a tidy city life". Instead, here is the work that will "rock the boat and floor the soul":[81]

> JACK. I seen a woman with her throat cut out today.
>
> WIFE. Little Jack won most [of] his races today.
>
> JACK. (TO WIFE) She put fifty stitches in each arm and round her neck.
>
> WIFE. You said you'd be there, Jack. Do you want something to eat?
>
> Do you want this or not. Go and say good night to the kids.
>
> JACK. I can't, you know I can't.

The dialogue continues with rhythms of rising anger that drags with it the weary repetition of emotional positions that cannot be solved from within as long as the external situation remains unchanged. Jack flips away from his impossible struggle with his wife's pain to a stream of consciousness:

> JACK. (To audience) See when I go to hold the kids I feel like I'm suckin' the life out of 'em.
>
> Well I know I am, 'cause you can't see the grief and death I have and not be touched by it.
>
> I had to push my little boy away from me the other day.
>
> Daddy, he says, dad can I have a cuddle? Dad can I have a cuddle?
>
> No I says, I'm too busy.
>
> She has no fucking idea what I'm seein' out there.

[81] Archer, *Myth* 14.

> She's like the fucking rest of 'em. Doesn't want to know. No cunt wants to know.
>
> This fucking suit. I held that girl in my arms and clear fluid from her neck seeped down my suit and stuck to my body. I have to shower to get it off.
>
> JACK. (To Wife)
>
> Gunna [sic] have a shower honey, wash this woman's life fluid off me.[82]

Whatever Jack does can never be enough – for him or for his fellow Aboriginal people. In a later scene without dialogue his Wife smashes against the wall the uneaten meal she has prepared for him.[83] Her home, Jack's home, their children's home is held within the playing space of the gaol – a place of pain, fury, suffering, grief and rage, turned inwards into mutilation and suicide, and outwards into violence and murder. Gaol has become society. The hurt intensifies as Jack tries to stop the deaths and the self-inflicted mutilations:

> JACK. [. . .]. Some mob have scars that go all over their body. I reckon some mob have scars that go all the way to their soul.[84]

Jack has to mutilate himself emotionally and physically to bear the hurt of not having been able to see his kids any more. He takes off his shirt and asks his friend Bear to make the cut for him:

> JACK. Sorry scar for my kids, they may as well be dead.
>
> [. . .].
>
> JACK. Gotta let some of the hurt out. Gonna [sic] cut it out.

Paradoxically, it is the immensity of the pain Jack suffers that forces / enables him to break the silence. The protagonist's release of the story under pressure has parallels with his creator's work. Once he started writing, Frankland, like Anderson, was unstoppable, writing the play in two days.[85] The performed play speaks pain whose problems are not solved at the play's resolution. Thrown back by the wind that "cradles" him as it brings him back from his flying leap from the cliff, Jack is back on

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[82] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 21.

[83] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 30.

[84] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 23.

[85] O'Brien, "Indigenous Playwright Delves into Dark Memories."

the land of his people, “blood falling from [his] lips”. He is protected by that landscape:

> I see the stars uncovered by the clouds, a heavily leafed branch falls from the tree and covers me as a blanket would.
>
> A darkness and I sleep the sleep of the exhausted.[86]

It is a different reality from the alien darkness of the Australian landscape against which Nora fights in Bovell’s *Holy Day* and which sees her at the end of the play driving the axe through a piece of tree reduced to kindling, while Obedience stares at nothing, bleeding from a mouth that has no tongue.[87] In *Conversations* the Chorus of the black cast sing the “exhausted” Jack a lullaby, “Warinor”. Partly in an Indigenous language, and partly in English, the music and lyrics offer a “dream” of gentle sleep with “no more fighting, no more wars” and the knowledge of being loved.[88]

Jack’s epilogue, spoken from inside the bloodied exhaustion and its dream of love, asks the audience not to go away satisfied that the problems are over, but to “wonder if the storm will ever end.” Jack’s body, as depicted in Image 3, makes visible the white Party-Goers’ mockery of Indigenous pain.[89] His trousers are the white man’s suit, conveying the business authority whose colour empire has stolen, unacknowledged, from the ‘savage’ it tries to destroy. Jack’s upper torso and head are the Indigenous man’s self and ceremony, painted in white ochre that allows the alternating patterns of spirit and body to have, be and contain both colours, the light and the dark, the pain and its acceptance and transcendence.

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[86] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 50.

[87] See Chapter One, 55-59.

[88] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 51.

[89] See image 3 in this chapter, 172.

Conclusion: towards an understanding of witness to the trauma of invasion

> TOM. They weren't a match for us, of course. I often think about that. Spears. Versus guns.
>
> Katherine Thomson, *Wonderlands*.[1]

> In the anguished, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes within us [. . .].
>
> Antonin Artaud, May 1933.[2]

Four Australian plays of the new millennium have been examined here for the witness they offer to anguish and catastrophe that white invasion has brought and still brings to marginalised people in Australia and to Aboriginal people in particular. The aim in concluding this study is to review the similarities and disparities in the writers' construction of witness to Australia's black and white history and its legacy, and to seek an understanding of what is revealed about the unresolved Australian trauma of invasion. It is important to note here that what I suggest about the plays examined in this study is *not* intended to be a generalisation about work by white or black writers, nor a creation of exclusive categories of writing badged by essentialist criteria. Some comparisons will be drawn in this concluding essay with a work for performance by a non-Indigenous writer that constructs a powerful witness to Indigenous desire, Julianne Schultz's libretto for the opera, *Black River* (1993).[3]

The stories told in each of the four plays reveal – while they resist – the discriminatory legacy from Australia's colonial origins. That inheritance is a double helix. On one strand empire seeks to perpetuate a hierarchy of privileges and punishments, superiorities and servitudes, backed by constructions of race, gender, class and, in one of the plays (*Holy Day*), religion. On the other (interlinked) strand lies the need of empire and its descendants to belong in a land whose people they have dispossessed using fearful weapons, while constructing justifications for fearing the people they kill/devastate, as they fear the land itself. This fear and its unresolved

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[1] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 21.

[2] Antonin Artaud, "Theatre and Cruelty," trans. Victor Corti, *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: John Calder, 1977).

[3] Julianne Schultz, libretto, *Black River*, music by Andrew Schultz, dir. Kevin Lucas, Lucas Productions, 1993: 26. First stage production by Sydney Metropolitan Opera, 1989.

confounding of people and land as hostile and savage would appear to be a significant source of the divergences in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers' representations of Indigenous desires and Indigenous witness to the trauma of Australia's history. Recognition of the way that fear is structured into the narrative in the plays by the white writers may offer an understanding of how it can have happened that two white writers, Bovell and Thomson, each of whose plays contain strong speeches and actions repudiating racism, have created narratives that trammel the desire of the Indigenous characters. I suggest that in the plays by the two non-Indigenous writers, Bovell's *Holy Day* and Thomson's *Wonderlands*, the Australian landscape kills. In the plays by the two Indigenous writers, Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* and Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House*, the land heals. This argument will be elaborated, but here is a taste of the dangers lurking in the landscape that white characters foreshadow early in *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands.* Nora's words in *Holy Day* endow the landscape with a deadly intent:

> The storm has passed but we're still here. Look at it. Endless fucking plain. Soon a thousand flowers will bloom. It's a bastard to trick us like that. To make us forget what easy death lies out there.[4]

In *Wonderlands* Lon, who loves the land dearly, makes a much milder, but none the less wary, personification of the land as having a combative will that puts the farmer at risk. Here are Lon's kindly meant words to his prospective son-in-law Tom, whose hard work he admires:

> You work like I did at your age. You know this country. You can anticipate what it'll throw at you, only way you can approach it. [. . .].[5]

Although the didascalia describe Lon as being in his "40s or 50s",[6] an age not generally considered old for Australia's white population, Lon confides to Tom what he cannot tell his wife, that he has been "warned" about his health and could suddenly "drop dead".[7]

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[4] Bovell, *Holy Day* 12.

[5] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 4.

[6] Thomson, *Wonderlands* ix.

[7] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 4.

The relationship that each play creates with its staged ground – the land – is fundamental to an understanding of how these four plays represent relationships between black and white Australia. Before expanding this argument, it is important first to recognise and review what the plays have in common in their compelling critique and condemnation of atrocities, injustices and abuse inflicted on 'black' Australia by 'white' Australia.

When brought together, the plays' depictions of harm being inflicted, particularly on Indigenous people, but on other marginalised people as well, present an impressionistic chronicle of an indictable imperial history that Justices Gaudron and Deane have described in the High Court Mabo case as:

> the conflagration of oppression and conflict which [. . .] spread across the continent to dispossess, degrade and devastate the Aboriginal peoples and leave a national legacy of unutterable shame.[8]

Taken together the plays reveal the European conquerors and their contemporary avatars to be forging their own laws, history and myths that sanction their use of force and their culture of racism to dispossess the original inhabitants. Indigenous survivors are depicted having to deal with extremes of discrimination, poverty and despair on the margins of society, where the ferocity of the overshadowing gaol (represented in *Holy Day* by a chaining to a tree) replicates itself in violence, abuse and self-harm/suicide.

On *Holy Day*'s mid-19th century frontier Bovell's invading European characters are revealed to act with impunity, undisciplined by a remote white law, as they kidnap, massacre, chain, falsely accuse, rape and mutilate the original land owners into silence. Using "free" black labour, the invaders mark and reframe the land in their likeness as the "proud" white Australian nation, while fabricating its recorded history and construing as savages the Indigenous people butchered in the course of nation building.

In *Wonderlands*' rural Queensland setting, Thomson's 'good' black and white characters expose and repudiate a brutal colonial government and a lawless pastoral industry that ignores the voices of humanitarian protest. Past methods of 'clearing'

[8] Mabo and Others V. Queensland. HCA 1992. Cited in Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 3.

the land of Aboriginal people, such as poisoned flour, shootings, forced relocation of Aboriginal communities and removal of children, are revealed and objurgated. In the contemporary time frame the Indigenous character, Edie, battles a bullying white racism and the destructive consequences of displacement and discrimination that threaten her son: addiction and suicidal despair. *Wonderlands* brings together onstage white and black voices, past and present, who oppose racism and its cruelties. The benevolent white pastoralist is represented in the 1930s by Alice and her memories of her pioneer father who wrote letters to newspapers protesting "'the colonial invasion.'"[9] Reconciliation is foreshadowed early in the play when Alice gives her Aboriginal employee Jim the news from Sydney that "they've joined the arches on the Harbour Bridge."[10] At play's end contemporary white Australia becomes the spiritual heir of the humanitarian pastoralist of colonial times. Like the hundreds of thousands who crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge and other bridges in cities around the nation in 2000,[11] the 'good' white shepherd Cathy crosses a symbolic bridge to leave behind racism and fear, demonstrate her support for Indigenous people's rights to the land and bring reconciliation to black and white Australia.

Tammy Anderson's autobiographical *I Don't Wanna Play House* reveals racism's legacy in itinerant contemporary suburbia. Dispossession and poverty bring to her father disaffection from school, petty theft, sojourns in boy's homes and an adulthood of thuggery and thieving, gaoling, recidivism and alcoholism.[12] The white law and white "Welfare", meticulous in their division of child Tammy and her siblings into racial categories based on skin colour, do not protect the family against poverty, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

In Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* a punitive legal system scoops up and destroys a greatly disproportionate number of Aboriginal people. Gaolings, deaths and self-mutilations in custody tear people, families and community with grief, pain and anger. Each horror generates further fury that devours itself in despair or in violence against self and others. Employed by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal

[9] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 36.

[10] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 6.

[11] See Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 4.

[12] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 44.

Deaths in Custody that the Australian government established in 1987, Frankland's autobiographical protagonist, Jack, has the task of liaising with the families of the dead and mutilated. The play, premiering in 2001, a decade after the Commission delivered its Report (April 1991), exposes the government as incognizant of the personhood of those whom it tallies as dead. White law, as Jack makes plain, fails to rectify its failure to protect Indigenous people from its own injustices:

> JACK. [. . .] The report covered 124 deaths in custody only 99 were investigated.
>
> None of the central recommendations have been implemented and no police were charged as a result of the Royal Commission.
>
> Every death had a report. Each death, each person their own story.[13]

Although the four plays in this study could be read as a collective indictment of racist 'white' Australia's treatment of 'black' Australia (as a concept) and 'black' Australians (as people), that reading shifts into a different pattern and a different understanding when one focuses on how the plays construct two crucial aspects of Australia's history: the witness by Indigenous characters to the catastrophe of dispossession; and, the relationship that is constructed between the characters, white or black, and the land. Major disparities have been found in the way the onstage worlds of the 'black' and 'white' writers represent Indigenous desire and the land in which the plays are set.

In the plays by the Indigenous writers, Anderson and Frankland, 'black' characters (and in Anderson's play also poor 'white' women and children) are grounded in desiring bodies. The feeling body performs the experience that the coloniser-abuser's acts of annihilation seek to hide. The black writers create from within personal knowledge of the traumatic experience of receiving or witnessing punishment meted out because of dispossession, poverty and discrimination. For the black writers that personal experience has been lived and is ongoing for their community. The experienced horrors are altered by performance, a transformation as reverberating as water into wine, or, rather, ashes into phoenix. Frankland writes of his own fight against soul-death when compelled to be the voice of his people in the Royal Commission into deaths in custody. Anderson writes of a marginalised, impoverished

[13] Frankland, *Conversations (Belvoir Script)*, 2.

community where thieving is sustenance, boys' homes, gaol and alcoholism leave her father wretched, and a succession of angry men pound their bodies against the nakedness of women and children. Frankland and Anderson expose the stuff of tragedy, but the performance is inseparable from the knowledge that writer and community have survived to bear witness, creative witness. This knowledge moves from spectator's head to belly and heart.

Anderson and Frankland make use of polymorphous dramatic forms that flout the closed orders of an imperial narrative. Time, space, performing bodies, music, song, parody, polyvocality, magic realism and ritual are figured to counter and disrupt narrative structures that sustain racism, sexism and empire. The centre of the stage opens to testimony that is "'*sans reserve* [unqualified]'" (Camus, in Felman).[14]

Bob Maza's 1995 description of black playwrights being in "free flight" unrestrained by "standards and procedures" of a European theatre resonates in the work of Anderson and Frankland.[15] Where other Indigenous plays have often used dance as one way of refusing Euro-empire's construction of itself as natural/ism, *I Don't Wanna Play House* and *Conversations with the Dead* use an experience of flight to transcend trauma and re-connect with spirit and land.[16] In her play Anderson mimes herself whirling her young daughter in the air. Her action releases her writing from the silence imposed by her abusers. Anderson re-grounds self and family in the "backyard", laughing and singing "country *and* western" (original emphasis).[17] Frankland's protagonist Jack jumps in anguish from the cliff where he floats in the air before returning to a protective earth whose strength counters the inner and outer storm his people endure.[18]

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[14] See Chapter One, 57. Quoting from Camus' *The Plague*, Felman argues that for testimony to bring insight into the realty of another's experience it must be "'*sans reserve* [unqualified].'" I am using Felman's translation here. See Felman and Laub 104-5. For Felman's discussion of the Holocaust as a "catastrophic and unprecedented" event whose nature makes the witness "absent", see 194.

[15] Maza, "Aborigines and Theatre," 14. I have cited this in Chapter One.

[16] For a study of the "counterdiscursivity" of the dancer in such work as Bob Maza, *The Keepers* (1988); Jack Davis, *The Dreamers*; Eva Johnson, *Murras* (1988); and, Jimmy Chi and Kuckles, *Bran Nue Dae* (1990), see Gilbert, *Sightlines* 66-81.

[17] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 69.

[18] Frankland, *Conversations (Belvoir Script)*, 50, 52. Frankland, *Conversations (Currency/Playbox)*, 285.

In the plays by the non-Indigenous writers, Thomson and Bovell, the desire assigned to the Indigenous characters, despite its passionate expression, remains qualified (i.e. restricted). Indigenous characters' witness to bodily experience stays trapped within a white-directed narrative that closes, in *Wonderlands*, on a feminised and utopian Australia, and in *Holy Day*, on a masculinised and dystopian version.

Underlying the disparity between the freedom the plays by Anderson and Frankland give to Indigenous desire, and the constraints upon that desire in Thomson's *Wonderlands* and Bovell's *Holy Day*, there is another: *within* both *Wonderlands* and *Holy Day* there is a disparity so profound that each play has two self-contradictory texts that fail to recognise one another. On each play's 'consciously articulated' track, dialogue, monologue, action and body language produce strong Indigenous characters who resist atrocities, abuse and deprivation of rights. In each play's other text, expressed by the same performance but not acknowledged by it, the metaphors that 'irrupt' unconsciously, into the dialogue, into the physical positioning of the performing bodies and into the action, reveal the Indigenous characters to be created from within a white paradigm that curtails their desire and their defiance, controls their fate and coopts them as agents of the hegemonic order and its perpetuation.[19]

Acknowledging that "since Freud and probably even before him," it has become commonplace to observe that "there is in every act of communication information given involuntarily and unconsciously," Ubersfeld observes:

> We can say of theatre what we can say of other forms of art: the richness of the signs and the extent and complexity of the systems they form go infinitely beyond any primary intention to communicate.[20]

Because neither *Wonderlands*' nor *Holy Day*'s purposeful or 'conscious' text recognises a contradictory 'unconscious' that is playing against any 'conscious' representation of Indigenous desire as strong, neither play allows the contradictions to interact in ways that might disrupt the trapping of Indigenous desire within a paradigm that marks it as inferior to white desire.

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[19] See Derrida, "Interview with Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta," 42.

[20] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 21.

In *Holy Day*'s fictional representation of a nascent Australian nation on its mid-19th century frontier, white empire's racist, sexist, bigoted and hierarchical paradigm is unremittingly malign. It crushes with little delay or qualm any benevolence or dissent. In *Wonderlands*' fictional world the controlling paradigm that spans the generations from the founding of the pastoral industry in Queensland in the late 19th century to the present day is fundamentally decent. The bad pioneer pastoralists who saw the original inhabitants as savages to be exterminated are denounced and their image overlaid by that of the good pioneer (Alice's father) whose bequeathed documents and memories celebrate white sharing of the land with Aboriginal people who are framed as wise "black saviours".

The goodness of *Wonderlands*' paradigm has the might of Euripides' Zeus, the *deus ex machina* who plucks Medea and the bodies of the children she has killed into a chariot drawn by dragons to save her from Jason's retribution.[21] In *Wonderlands*, an unseen deity renders retribution irrelevant. An abrupt shift in the action results in the removal of the perpetrators of destruction without their aggressive deed having to be exposed. When the contemporary white male pastoralist opponent of land rights attempts his attack on the Yirralong rock art – metonym for the people and their timeless and ongoing connection with their land – the gelignite misfires, the heart of the aggressive pastoralist, Lon, is struck with the sickness he himself presaged at the beginning of the play. The hand of his reluctant young helper, Tom, is blown away. With the source of its wounding henceforth concealed and unexamined, aggression retreats from the stage. Unlike Medea's rescuer Zeus, whose invisible presence is made palpable through the action, dialogue and Chorus, the god of *Wonderlands* exists only as unnamed, unrecognised, ungendered mishap. The effect of this unacknowledged trope on the action is far-reaching. While too canny to reveal its presence to the onstage players, the guardian deity acts with uncanny skill to banish aggression from *Wonderlands*, leaving white benevolence to control the outcome. The imaginary "good Australia," that Jennifer Rutherford identified in *The Gauche Intruder*,[22] is achieved without the new benevolence having to be put to the test. The closing words of *Medea* apply:

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[21] Euripides, "Medea," trans. Philip Vellacott, *Medea and Other Plays*, eds. Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1963) lines 1316-419.

[22] See Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder*.

> CHORUS: [. . .]
> Many matters the gods bring to surprising ends.
> The things we thought would happen do not happen;
> The unexpected God makes possible;
> And such is the conclusion of this story.[23]

Whether white empire is figured as a place where evil triumphs and good is silenced, as in *Holy Day*, or where good vanquishes evil, as in *Wonderlands*, the Indigenous characters are the losers. With no power in either play to express a fullness of desire, the Indigenous characters in *Holy Day* are defeated in defeat, while in *Wonderlands* they are defeated in apparent victory. Although in its 'conscious' text, Bovell's *Holy Day* creates Indigenous characters who are vigorous in their defiance of white tyranny, the racist and sexist metaphors that irrupt into the dialogue of the young Aboriginal woman Linda reveal that her defiance is not a positive resistance to tyranny, but a negative that turns on itself.[24] Through the language and actions with which she condemns the other Aboriginal character (Obedience) as well as her own (offstage) Aboriginal community, Linda's defiance functions, unremarked, to reiterate and reinforce empire's racist formulations of Aboriginal people. Traditional Aboriginal culture is marked as savage, and the dispossessed people as powerless, disconnected limbo dwellers devoid of future. Although Aboriginal defiance is noisy, visible and feisty in *Holy Day*'s 'official' text, in the unidentified parallel text, Indigenous desire is co-opted into a Bovellian myth of Aboriginality as an agent of racism and sexism.[25]

In *Wonderlands*, despite a robust, well-researched and brilliantly articulated case for Indigenous lands rights, the saintly Indigenous characters salve white pain and wait for the white gift of their white-recorded history. In the play's 'conscious' text, the contemporary Indigenous character, Edie, is outspoken, honest, witty, passionate and compassionate. She resists white racism, fights for the Yirralong's rights, cares for her (offstage) son, who is in desperate straits, and provides help to the white woman Cathy when she is in crisis. Unlike Cathy's passion, however, Edie's desire is ordered by sweet reason, chastity and duty. In the new utopia Edie is fashioned into

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[23] Euripides, "Medea," lines 1415-19.

[24] See Chapter One.

[25] See analysis in Chapter One.

an image of an 'other' whose sexual desire is in the past, and who has no personal need in the present that may become unruly, or put herself, or others, at risk.

The curtailment of Indigenous desire is exacerbated in both *Wonderlands* and *Holy Day* by what remains *absent* from the text that I have been referring to as the 'conscious' one, as distinct from the unofficial, unremarked, or unconscious texts that parallel it. There are offstage Indigenous characters who, in *Holy Day*, suffer invasion, child removal and massacre, and, in *Wonderlands*, forced displacement, child removal and a contemporary legacy of racism in the form of drug addiction and suicidal tendencies. These characters, although kin to those who are onstage, remain *absent* – shadows who do not acquire substance. Their suffering, as reported passionately and movingly by onstage relatives (Obedience in *Holy Day* and Jim and Edie in *Wonderlands*), adds weight to each play's 'official' text with its searing exposure of the shocking effects of white colonisation and racism on Aboriginal people. The absence of the 'discussed' characters from the stage, however, contributes to the parallel irrupted text. Unnoticed by the main text, the shadow text notices that the rage and pain suffered by those never-to-be-seen people has an etiolated transient presence. The onstage Aboriginal characters convey the shadow of the offstage trauma, but the rage and pain, because it is only present *as a shadow* has no power to drive the main action, or instigate an alternative reality, or disrupt the white paradigm that controls fate. That control deflects the course of the drama away from crisis points where the white characters might otherwise be forced to recognise and bear witness to the truth of their actions, or might be brought to experience the remorse that Gaita, following Socrates, describes as "the proper recognition of the harm the evildoer has done himself."[26]

While white characters in both *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* acknowledge fear of a land perceived as dangerous and unforgiving, those characters are not brought to acknowledge that they are transposing that fear into a punishing hatred or bullying of scapegoated Aboriginal characters and a requirement, whether benign or malign in its intent, that Aboriginal characters provide them with succour. Nor are they brought to recognise the significance for their own behaviour of the metaphoric connection

[26] I am again drawing on Gaita's concepts. See the discussion in Chapter One, 80. See Gaita, *Good and Evil* 63.

they are making between the Aboriginal people and the landscape. In both plays there are white characters who represent the land as dangerous to whites, and white characters (sometimes the same ones, sometimes different ones) who represent Aboriginal people as dangerous. Those fears come together subtextually as acts of hatred.

Although Nora in *Holy Day* makes the point at the beginning of the play that it is not the blacks, but the land and their own ignorance of sheep farming that has driven off a string of white settlers,[27] she and her fellow whites remain largely unaccountable *to themselves* for their punishment of the blacks. While Nora gives momentary recognition to her culpability in the destruction of Obedience, she returns almost immediately to self-preservatory restoration of her role as the controller of Obedience's destiny. White characters articulate demonstrably false 'reasons' for their shocking cruelty to Indigenous characters, but none of the white invaders is brought to a crisis where they might recognise in their own actions their mutation of their fear and ignorance of the landscape into punishment of Aboriginal people.

In *Wonderlands* the white pastoralists attack the Indigenous rock art but they do so without Indigenous witness and without any white characters being brought to recognise the metaphoric connection they have made between the Aboriginal people and the landscape. Without that crisis of illumination the white characters cannot bear witness to themselves. Without witness to their own truths – their own desire – they cannot bear witness to the truths of others. The desire of Indigenous characters must be truncated too.

Texts ancillary to Bovell's *Holy Day* abound with references to the violent landscape. In the programme for The Sydney Theatre Company production (2003), there are many, mostly small, black and white production photographs of the cast, crew, writer and director at work in rehearsal, but there are three full colour, full page pictures of the Australian landscape's violence. A Frederick McCubbin painting shows a lost white child wearing a white pinafore among the alien gum trees.[28] A photo-collage created for *Holy Day*, shows a landscape with a rock the colour of fire, towering over

[27] Bovell, *Holy Day* 5.

[28] Frederick McCubbin, "Lost," 1886, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, *Holy Day*, Andrew Bovell, Sydney: Sydney Theatre Company. 2003.

a superimposed figure of a modern white child in a white gown.[29] Like her 19th century McCubbin counterpart, this child has a whiteness that stands alone in the landscape, feminised, vulnerable, passive and respectably dressed. Both girls stand still. The light strikes the girls' white garments, while their faces turn away from its intensity. Each gaze is introverted. An arm is raised to the head. Neither looks into the landscape. Their way of seeing is from somewhere else and they cannot read the land. If no-one comes to find them, they will die. As Wakefield makes clear, in *Holy Day* the sun itself represents death. Believing Elizabeth's story (later proven false) that her child has been taken by Aboriginal people and that her husband is out there somewhere in the landscape on his own looking for them, Wakefield makes sending out a search party a priority over Goundry's desire to gather a punitive party of men against the 'blacks':

> WAKEFIELD. Let's find the woman's child first. And the husband. Before tomorrow's sun kills him."[30]

The central image in The Sydney Theatre Company's *Holy Day* programme, on the page to which one turns to find cast and production information, is a colour photograph of a bushfire. It flames the undergrowth and threatens the dark scraggy trees.[31] There is no bushfire in the play. The offstage fire, which Elizabeth, the missionary's widow, confesses to lighting, burns only her dead husband's half-built church. Yet the Sydney Theatre Company's programme and the words from the playwright, Bovell, that are superimposed on the photograph of the smoke-filled sky above the burning bush, impute the violence to the landscape:

> For some plays landscape is vital. For other plays it is just there. In *Holy Day* I consciously thought about a particular violent kind of landscape, and the qualities of that landscape were deliberately brought to bear upon the story of those characters.[32]

Arguably bushfire is the most spectacular danger the land poses to white settlement in Australia. The programme would appear to aid the play's imbuing of the landscape

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[29] "*Holy Day* Image," 2001, *Holy Day*, Andrew Bovell, Sydney: Sydney Theatre Company. 2003. For its publication as cover image, see Bovell, *Holy Day*.

[30] Bovell, *Holy Day* 28.

[31] Peter Waanders, "Photo," *Holy Day*, Andrew Bovell, Sydney: Sydney Theatre Company. 2003.

[32] Andrew Bovell, "Untitled Programme Note," Programme for *Holy Day*, Sydney Theatre Company, 2003.

with death-giving qualities that threaten vulnerable whiteness. Bovell may or may not have chosen the bushfire image, but to write of the qualities of "a particular violent kind of landscape" is to invite into thought not only the landscape whose violence arouses hatred or fear, but a serene and ordered landscape that must exist somewhere else so that this one can be measured against it, and condemned. Almost all of the white characters in *Holy Day* have their own frightening obsession with imposing the order of that far away imperial landscape on the one they have entered, whose unruly trees and inhabitants they must therefore condemn.

In the hardships and cruelty they must inflict on themselves and others to possess this new environment, farmer Wakefield and Elizabeth, the missionary's widow, intend their hard work to forge a longed for financial independence and respectability that would have been out of their reach back under the English class system. When with Elizabeth's prompting, Wakefield reveals the size of his acreage and his plans to double it, she is impressed: "With a thousand acres you'd be a gentleman in England."[33]

The violence of the whites in *Holy Day* appears closely related to their attempt to transform the landscape after their own image in one generation, although they have come from an English landscape that, as Hoskins explains, has been hand-made over centuries. The clearance of that landscape by fire began in neolithic times and continued by axe and the grazing of farm animals.[34] "The work of colonisation went on generation after generation, century after century [. . .]."[35]

In *Holy Day* the violent attack the white characters make on the landscape and the people for whom the land is home, redounds to their own natures. They punish themselves. They use physical and emotional violence to impose their will on Aboriginal characters and to fabricate a history that will not hold them responsible.[36] They fabricate scenarios that rationalise their punishment of two vulnerable and isolated young black women characters, whose actions pose no discernible danger to the white characters, except in the white characters' imaginings.

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[33] Bovell, *Holy Day* 47.

[34] W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (Hammondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1986) 21.

[35] Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* 58.

[36] See Chapter One.

In the pessimistic *Holy Day* with its dystopian closure, the white characters are trapped by storm, darkness, the desert and the unknown. In *Holy Day*'s production at the Sydney Theatre Company (2003) darkness pervaded the set. Even though Nora expresses her pleasure at the coming of the morning light ("Is there any place where dawn is more beautiful than this?") each new day appears barely distinguishable from the darkness.[37]

In *Wonderlands* where goodness prevails to bring utopian closure, the white characters are trapped by the breadth of the light. Even though the stage represents a wide open land, the space the white characters occupy shrinks. After Lon's heart attack, he and his wife move into town away from the pastoral station. In the 1930s setting Alice gropes in radiant light and is reduced to immobility. Her vision of what is real is progressively lost to an inner sight where white and black characters together share in the goodness of the land. The HotHouse production at the Stables in Sydney (2003) shimmered with light and was faithful to Thomson's description of the set as "a packed red earth floor, with a gum-leaf encrusted curtain snaking across the space, used to define acting areas as required."[38] While the curtain was translucent and beautiful, evoking space, air and sun, it also refigured that space as contained and unreal – a surface for the play of beauty and light.

In *Wonderlands* the land is dangerous to the white characters. Cathy expresses white fear of the land: "We'll disappear in the topsoil. All of us in a willy willy [. . .]."[39] "Willy willy" has Indigenous derivation, from the Yinjibarndi people.[40] Cathy, however, does not make conscious her use of an Aboriginal term to represent the land as a source of danger. The land brings danger to Lon too. His lifetime of work on the land to which he describes himself as belonging ("My boots aren't on the soil, they're of the soil.")[41] has brought him a weak heart, that reduces him to immobility in a wheelchair. The land is literally killing him.

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[37] Bovell, *Holy Day* 15.

[38] Thomson, *Wonderlands* ix.

[39] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 63.

[40] W.S. Ramson, ed., *The Australian National Dictionary* (Melbourne: OUP, 1988) 738.

[41] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 48.

His attack on the cave with the rock art is an attack on both land and people. The cave and its cultural inscription figure as a metonymic presence in the landscape of the people whose existence Lon both fears and denies. In the 1930s time frame, Alice dies in the landscape, having been tossed from her horse. The actions of the performing bodies of the dying white woman and the supportive black stockman recall the colonial myth of the good black servant protecting the white boss from the danger in the landscape. The action does not, however, bring the white characters to a crisis where they must *confront* the connections between such subtextual threads as: the tenuousness of white belonging; the dangers the landscape represents to the whites; white fear of Aboriginal people and landscape; and, concomitant white reliance on compliant Aboriginal people to sanction their belonging.[42]

In the opera *Black River* whose libretto is by a white writer, Julianne Schultz, there are non-Indigenous characters who do express their fear of the land in a setting that connects that fear with the punishment and death inflicted on Aboriginal people. In a fierce storm in the ancestral land of the Yorta Yorta people, the gaol has become a refuge where the white characters – the policeman, Les, and the Judge and his assistant Anna who are investigating race relations in the town – encounter Miriam, an Aboriginal women who bears witness to the cruelties her people suffer:

> JUDGE. In a place like this you realise it is a harsh land.
>
> ANNA. I think I know how frightened the first whites must have been.
>
> JUDGE. It is an alien place.
>
> LES. It's not that bad.
>
> ANNA. Yes it is. It is hard and unforgiving. This is not just rain, it's the land telling us treat it better or be forced out. And this place [the gaol].
>
> [. . .].
>
> ANNA. Terrible things have been done in here. I can feel it.
>
> [. . .].

[42] For Hills' critique of "European fear of loss of identity in a new and alien world" in Morgan's *My Place*, see Hills, 105.

> MIRIAM. Much evil has been done in this place. You are right to fear it.[43]

Anna's personal terror at the fury of the storm, and her anguished response to the gaol and its cruelties that are usually "kept secret, under lock and key, out of public view"[44] is a non-Indigenous character's witness to her own fear and her own recognition of the pain inflicted on Aboriginal people. Anna's witness compels the Judge to join with her in recognising – consciously or not – their own complicity in the gaol's existence:

> JUDGE. But without these places, our lives would not be so secure. Even if you don't want to see the ugliness, it is all around you. It's just a matter of looking.
>
> ANNA. But the ugliness in here is more than physical…it's psychic, it touches the soul.
>
> ANNA/JUDGE. It must corrode all those in it.[45]

In performance it is very clear that Anna and the Judge are *in* the gaol. They too are corroded by its presence. As it does in *Conversations with the Dead*, and in the stories Anderson tells of her father in *I Don't Wanna Play House*, the gaol in *Black River* has symbolic force as an embodiment of what the land has become under white control. Its dynamic corrodes people and their relationships.

Wonderlands creates a meeting between white and black that bridges difference. It is when Cathy recognises her own anguish at the corrosion of her family life as a result of their habitual lies about the land, its people, its history and their own relationships, that she is able to hear and respond to Edie's witness to her pain. Yet *Wonderlands* moves very quickly through that crucial connection. As reviewer Colin Rose points out the "climactic scene is rushed."[46] I would add that with the plot manipulated so that a great deal of pain and aggression are offstage at the climax, Cathy's crucial moment of insight is truncated. Cathy and Edie are able to face a moment of truth

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[43] It is important to remind oneself that the dialogue is written to be sung. On the page it may appear stiff. In performance where many of the lines are repeated and juxtaposed with others, the words and the emotions resound. Schultz, *Black River*, 26.

[44] Schultz, *Black River*, 26.

[45] Schultz, *Black River*, 26.

[46] Rose, "Conflict at Full Velocity," 5.

and finish happy, not hurting because that moment has remained superficial. The plot has walked them both to a sanitised shared side of the bridge where a veneer of understanding has been reached and an ease of reconciliation is possible.

Felman draws on Camus' *The Fall* to posit:

> It is not only the others that the reluctant witness does not inform. Essentially – the narrative will let us know – he fails precisely to inform himself.[47]

Bovell's *Holy Day* and Thomson's *Wonderlands* each achieve closure by placing a white woman in a relationship with a black woman (Nora with Obedience in *Holy Day* and Cathy with Edie in *Wonderlands*). Although Nora is presented as withholding and Cathy as generous, in both their relationships with a black woman, it is the black woman who is dependent on the white woman for her destiny. In both plays it is the white woman who has the last word. Because in *Wonderlands* the white woman has shifted in her consciousness from racism to humanitarianism, she gives support to the Aboriginal woman for the Native Title claim. *Holy Day*'s white woman Nora has made no such shift and gives the raped and mutilated black Obedience her habitual order: "Light the lamps, girl… Keep the night away."[48] Just as earlier in the play Obedience does not access the belly's fury to challenge Nora's concoction of her unseen, unknown people as essentially and unchangeably murderous, Obedience has gained no power by the end of the play to challenge the narrative's construction of herself as the one who must be punished. In *Wonderlands*, the Indigenous woman Edie has no access to the belly's voice to express what she is feeling when Cathy puts in her hands the white-recorded history of the dispossession of her people. The play closes over Edie's silence and over the very real possibility that the Native Title claim may not go through the courts. That possibility is absented from the play.

The closure that silences the Indigenous characters at the end of *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* has been operating throughout both plays to constrain Indigenous desire. Closure, whether constructed as benign, or malign mimics an imperial world, committed to its own destiny and its own certainty, whether imagined as brutal, as in

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[47] Shoshana Felman, "Camus' *The Fall*, or the Betrayal of the Witness," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 167.

[48] Bovell, *Holy Day* 66.

Holy Day, or redemptive, as in *Wonderlands*. *Holy Day* cuts off Australia's vicious past and freezes that cruelty as the past. *Wonderlands* freezes goodness as past, present and future.

Although Thomson plays with time in *Wonderlands*, creating parallel 1930s and contemporary scenes that use the same stage space and create a continuity of belonging to the land for both the white and the (dispossessed) black characters, at the end of the play the past is no longer present as a dialectic. It has been solved. The goodness of the pioneer white pastoralist and his daughter Alice has been handed into the present in the form of the historic record.

At the end of *Black River*, Miriam, whose son has died in custody, is reluctant to go with the whites when a helicopter comes to lift them from the rising floodwaters that are engulfing the gaol. Unlike Edie in *Wonderlands*, whose son's destiny is crafted in such a way that even though she speaks passionately about him, his suicidal despair remains offstage and theoretical and abstracted because it is not brought to a crisis, Miriam in *Black River lives* the crisis of her son, in the gaol where he died:

> MIRIAM. My beautiful, beautiful boy. Why have you gone.[49] I cannot bear the pain. The pain is killing me too. I'm drowning in the pain.[50]

To the white people's urgings for her to go with them to a place that for them represents a safety that Miriam can never feel no matter where she goes, Miriam replies:

> MIRIAM. I know your ways. You will never know me.[51]

Neither *Wonderlands* nor *Holy Day* recognise the unknowability of the other. Where Bovell and Thomson give white characters the closing words, Schultz gives Miriam the last words which offer no closure, no certainty:

> ALL *(except Miriam)*. Come, come…
>
> MIRIAM. Oohh maybe. Aahh Rainbow Serpent. Maybe, maybe, maybe.[52]

[49] There is no question mark. It is not a question, because there can be no answer that will ever change the pain.

[50] Schultz, *Black River*, 27.

[51] Schultz, *Black River*, 26.

There is possibility in Miriam's closing evocation of the Rainbow Serpent, whose absence Miriam earlier laments. Here is the opening line of the opera's sung text:

> MIRIAM. No, no rain, no, rain-bow. . . no rainbow serpent.[53]

Like *Black River* the published version of *Conversations with the Dead* ends with a similar tension between the longing for possibility and the anguish and catastrophe of another death of a young man in custody. The possibility of letting go "the spirits and [n]ightmares of the past" is sung by the cast:

> LILY, JACK & CAST [*singing*].
>
> [. . .]
>
> Maybe one day
>
> I can tear down the
> Gaols in my dreams
>
> And burn the ropes in my dreams
>
> And in my dreaming I can let
>
> go
>
> of the spirits
>
> of the past[54]

A projected photo of an actual death in custody of a boy who has been sentenced under Mandatory Sentencing laws ends the play. The matter is not closed.[55] The Belvoir Street production of *Conversations with the Dead* ends with Jack wondering if the emotion to which he is bearing active witness is understood:

> JACK. [. . .] I wonder if anyone can see the tears on my face or will they think it's the rain. I wonder if the storm will ever end.[56]

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[52] Schultz, *Black River*, 26.

[53] Schultz, *Black River*, 24.

[54] There is no full-stop. Past, present and future have not ended. Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 286

[55] Frankland, *Conversations* (Currency/Playbox) 287.

[56] Frankland, *Conversations* (Belvoir Script) 52.

Anderson ends *I Don't Wanna Play House* with smiles and laughter and upbeat country and western music and song, "*It Wasn't God who Made Honky Tonk Angels.*"[57] That joy is cognisant of the critical struggle to break the silence that had closed over witness to trauma. In the penultimate moments Tammy reminds the audience of the abuser's imposition of "SECRETS, SECRETS, SECRETS," while performing her whirling motion that recalls both the horror and its overcoming.[58]

Although Anderson's play, unlike Frankland's ends with a present that has been rendered safe, both playwrights keep the past present as the play ends. The experienced dangers and the witness to their trauma are not whited-out of the present.

Phelan writes:

> [. . .] perhaps the best possibility for 'understanding' racial, sexual, and ethnic difference lies in the *active* acceptance of the inevitability of misunderstanding [. . .]. *It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rackety bridge between self and other – and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other – that we discover real hope.* That walk is our always suspended performance [. . .] [original emphasis].[59]

[57] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 69.

[58] Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, 69.

[59] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 174.

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