Flinders University

Classic-ing on the Australian mainstage

The place and phenomenon of classic in Australian mainstream theatre

1995 – 2016

By

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Signed: Susan McClements

Date: 23/03/2023

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Abbreviations

ANT	Australian Nouveau Theatre
AETT	Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust
Belvoir	Belvoir Street Theatre Company B
Malthouse	Malthouse Theatre Company
MTC	Melbourne Theatre Company
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Art
Nimrod	Nimrod Theatre Company
Playbox	Playbox Theatre Company
STC	Sydney Theatre Company
STCSA	State Theatre Company of South Australia

Notes on Sources

Analysis of live performance presents specific challenges. Most of the performances I discuss I saw live, as part of the audience where I took detailed notes. Some I saw more than once, particularly the most recent STC productions. For others I relied more heavily on documentary recordings. After initial research in 2012, I assembled different types of source material from a range of archives between 2015 and 2018. Documentary videos housed at the theatre companies helped me gain some insight into the classic corpus of the period. My initial concern was adaptation, particularly in light of critical discussion at that time. I spent five days in the Belvoir offices looking at nineteen productions from between 2000 and 2014, around forty-five hours of recordings. I also accessed programs and press clippings for some of these productions from the archive boxes housed at Belvoir. I spent a similar amount of time watching Bell Shakespeare, MTC, Malthouse and STCSA productions in their company offices. These first steps towards gathering a corpus of performances and refining my research interests was greatly assisted by the extensive information in the AusStage database. As I focused the studies onto particular plays and productions, I subsequently returned to the Belvoir and Malthouse offices, and visited the NIDA archives and the STC archives to watch chosen productions and access production materials. I replayed particular scenes repeatedly to gain detailed scenic and performance insight.

For some of the case studies, the detailed observation of live performance has been augmented by archival research. The Australian Theatre Review, the press archives at the State Library of Victoria and the Trove database of the National Library of Australia were important resources for critical reviews of previous productions. The Wolanski Press Clipping archive offered a rich source of press material related to Australian theatre up to the mid-1990s. The Playbox and Louis Nowra archives held at Arts Centre Melbourne's Performing Arts Collection, and the NIDA archives were central to my research on *The Golden Age*.

Interviews with artists are intrinsic to this work. The quotes contained here are only a small fraction of the extensive and fascinating perspectives these and other theatre artists have generously offered.

Interviewees

	Position	Date of interview
Benedict Andrews	Director	11 December 2018
Neil Armfield	Artistic Director, Belvoir 1994-2010	9 September 2018
Julie Forsyth	Actor	2 June 2019
Matthew Lutton	Current Artistic Director, Malthouse	25 May 2019
Tess Schofield	Costume Designer	2 August 2018
Kip Williams	Current Artistic Director, STC	9 February 2018
Ursula Yovich	Actor	14 February 2018

Media Sources

There is a paucity of theatre reviewing in Australia. Any one production will gain a maximum of nine reviews. There is one national and a few quality, state-based newspapers. Over the period of this study there have also been significant changes in the media landscape, including theatre reviewers publishing their own online blogs. Some of these are listed here. Local, student or niche print media have also provided valuable viewpoints for archival research and are referenced in full in the footnotes.

Abbreviations:

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABR	Australian Book Review
Age	The Age
Aus	The Australian
DR	The Daily Review
G	The Guardian
H	The Herald
HS	Herald Sun
JW	James Waites Blogspot
NT	The National Times
RN	Radio National
RT	Real Time
Sat Age	The Saturday Age
S	The Sun
SH	Sun Herald
SMH	The Sydney Morning Herald
SN	Stage Noise
Tn	Theatrenotes
MT	The Melbourne Times
WAus	The Weekend Australian

Abstract

An accepted understanding of a classic play involves its repetition and critical recognition over time. A classic prevails in its relevance, speaking to audiences in the past, in the present and in the future. Interpretation may change the emphasis of the play, and this may be amplified through historical comparison so that each production is seen as cumulatively reassessing the play's meaning. Consequently, the notion of classic occupies a category that is both settled and revisable.

In Australia, a young post-settlement nation with an ancient and contested history, theatre has not yet had time to develop a solid canonical spine. Recognising a play as 'classic', therefore, significantly bolsters the country's slender sense of cultural history. Nominating classic thus contributes to the formation of an Australian dramatic canon. Identifying classic is a function of theatre companies and artists that makes canonical lists for audiences and critics easier to generate and believe in.

This thesis covers the period from 1995 to 2016. Over this time, there has been frequent discussion about the role of classic in Australian theatre, and debate about the role of auteur theatre directors. Their choice of European and American classic plays emphasises the tributary status of Australian culture. For a tributary culture, the salient features of what a classic play should be are well-known. The *sensation* of classic can be felt and recognised even without necessarily experiencing the reality.

In Australia, staging a classic play involves constructing the sensation of production history and signalling an ambition for temporal depth and purpose. Though a play may be rarely performed, it can be claimed as a classic in part because the term itself actively fashions a sense of the past. But this claim is not straightforward. Modern Australia's 230-year history of deportation, colonisation and dispossession continues to profoundly influence contemporary Australian society. The country's relationship to the 'classic' category has specific postcolonial resonances.

This research is organised into four case studies that discuss six carefully chosen productions of 'classic' drama in Australia. The productions are diverse and include old and new dramatic texts, adapted historical fiction and barely or rarely performed plays, while the playwrights are both Australian and European. My research is a process of comparison via thick description, moving between performative, historical and social dimensions of the plays to elucidate the embedded practice of classic-ing in Australian mainstream theatre.

In Australia, ‘doing a classic’ expresses a wide set of desires that can be followed across the theatre production process. From the artists, through the performance, to the audience and the critics, ‘classic-ing’ is an axis for pursuing actions that have deep relevance to the diverse cultural meanings involved in making theatre in Australia today.

Introduction: The Concept of the Classic

What makes a 'classic' in Australian theatre?

'Canonical drama' and the 'classic' play: these terms signify important aspirations for theatre and drama and are keywords for cultural programs and theatre production. The concept of 'the canon' is more fixed and institutionally networked than that of the 'classic', which is represented by a broader assemblage of literary works.[1] Yet any canonical list must justify its categories, a process subjecting it to a range of opinions and assessments. Harold Bloom (1994), for example, treats the canonical selection of literary works as a quasi-religious task, while John Guillory (1995) concentrates on its exclusionary nature. Whatever version of the canon is adopted, its deployment requires considerable critical authority behind it. Historically, in the 'civilising' imperial conquests of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European nations treated Western culture and traditions as a moral project, so that for postcolonial scholars 'the canon' is coterminous with the imposition of colonisation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989; Gilbert and Tompkins 1996; Loomba and Orkin 2010).

The theatre form is different from that of written literature, however, and has a complex relationship with the concept of both the canon and the classic as a result. Drama moves between the page and the stage: it is both a textual piece of literature to be read and imagined, and a plan for doing, a thing to be performed (Worthen 1998; Marx 2012: 10). These two dimensions exist in tension with each other, so that a signature production of a play may also have repercussions for the status of a drama as a literary text and how it is later read.[2] In Australia, theatre companies, artists, critics and theatre scholars pursue a version of an 'Australian dramatic canon'. But rather than relying on the crystallisation of critical authority over a long period of years, the timespan for judging a play canonical is truncated. Australian

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'classic' in two different ways. Classic as both adjective and noun indicates, for example, an acknowledged standard. As a noun classic refers to the canon of ancient Greek or Latin literature. In the current Australian theatre context, a 'classic' theatre production or playtext is closer to the first meaning, it implies the work has "acknowledged quality and enduring significance or popularity. […] something which is memorable and an outstanding example of its kind." (OED). Nevertheless, the concept and practice of classic in Australia leans on and borrows authority from European inheritance.

In theatre studies, the second meaning of 'classic' is central to the historical context of genre. The formal classic dramaturgy of seventeenth century France, and the wider European neo-classical revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries each called upon an idealised version of Greek and Roman classic antiquity as an artistic source. For example, French classical dramaturgy specifically brings together a coherence of action, time and space and humanist ideology. This form has survived into the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries in the 'well-made play' and television soap operas. (Pavis 1998: 56).

[2] Worthen (2010) frames the agency of drama as the intersection of literature and performance. Dramatic writing has agency, so that both the act of performing dramatic writing and the reading of a playtext have force. The text's agency changes with the agent, purpose and scene in which it is performed (Worthen 2010: 33). In this way, a signature performance can impact the way the playtext makes meaning for a reader by influencing contingent imaginative and cultural contexts.

theatre history has a slender canonical spine to it, so is significantly bolstered by the weight of any plays counted as dramatic 'classics'. In Australia, identifying 'classics' is one functional job of theatre artists and companies, thus making canonical lists for audiences and critics easier to generate and to believe in.

Like the concept of canon, the notion of a classic play is usually seen as the result of repeated critical judgements over time. A play proves itself a classic through its prevailing relevance and applicability.[3] Ideally, it will receive a number of productions, the cumulative experience of this decisively shaping a play's reception and reputation. A classic play achieves its classic status by speaking to the audiences both past, present and in the future: then, now and yet to come. A sense of reprise underlies the experience of watching it even the first time. Repetition is fundamental to how audiences understand classic drama (Carlson 2001: 23-24).[4] Assumed familiarity with its narratives or characters allows room for any one production to focus on how these are interpreted, rather than what they literally convey. Interpretation may change the emphasis of the play or be amplified through a process of historical critical comparison – a play's production history – so that each production is seen as reassessing its meaning in cumulative fashion. Thus, the classic play occupies a category that is both settled and revisable.

However, the circumstances of theatre production in Australia, a young postcolonial nation with an ancient and contested history, clearly differ from this assumed model. In the Australian cultural domain, both awareness of production history and the occasions for present performance are limited. In comparison to the performance traditions of the First Nations peoples who represent the oldest continuous living culture in the world, the theatre established after colonisation in 1788 is evidently short-lived. As a modern nation, Australia has not existed long enough to significantly contribute to the classic category in a historical sense. Yet drama in Australia shows the category can be constructed in other ways.

Theatre production always takes place within an institutional context.[5] In Australia, a small number of mainstream theatre companies dominate the sector, taking up a large proportion of

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[3] Notions of acknowledgement and enduring significance are important here.

[4] Carlson shows that much dramatic literature is based on pre-existing narratives, and that this recycling is particularly relevant in certain periods. The tradition of realism and new plays, however, largely avoids reworking known material. For a new work, comparison with previous treatments became less important in the reception process. (Carlson 2001: 28).

[5] Professional theatre production in Australia is considered an interdependent 'ecology' of commercial, small to medium and mainstage companies, and independent artists (Milne 2004; Meyrick 2005).

public assistance to the arts.[6] Typically, these companies produce mixed seasons of overseas and Australian drama. Some of the plays programmed will be presented, discussed and seen as 'classics'. Individual productions rarely remain in a company repertoire from year to year. The opportunities for remounting or revising specific plays are relatively infrequent, although productions can be toured or shared through legal agreements between companies.[7] A complex production infrastructure faces unique geographical and financial constraints. It is one that appreciably changed over the period of years, between 1995 and 2016, considered by this thesis (Milne 2004: 25).[8]

Since 2000, there has been frequent discussion about the role of the 'classic' in Australian theatre (Milne 2004; McCallum 2009: 378; Varney et. al.: 2013, 143-157; Bovell 2014). This has been framed by consideration of the different types of plays identifiable in mainstream theatre repertoires. By crunching repertoire numbers of major companies in Sydney and Melbourne, the number of Australian plays staged against classic plays can be contrasted, showing the lack of production opportunities, for example, for local drama (Meyrick 2012, 2014). While dramatically the boundaries between categories like 'classic', 'overseas' and

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[6] Public assistance is a complex system that operates across federal, state and local levels of government. At the federal level, funding is devolved at arm's length through the Australia Council, which was established with *The Australia Council Act* in 1975. Performing arts companies – orchestras, opera, ballet and nineteen theatre companies – gain a comparatively secure funding arrangement through the Major Performing Arts Framework (MPA) of the Australia Council. This was set up in the 1990s as a result of the Nugent Inquiry into the major performing arts. A consultation and review of the MPA was undertaken in 2019, resulting in a revised National Performing Arts Partnership Framework. The 1990s also saw the release of *Creative Nation*, the first federal government cultural policy document, which began assessing the arts as an industry, in economic terms. A move that has seen subsequent subsidy initiatives aligning cultural with economic policy (Hawkings 2014; Trembath and Fielding 2020). Being part of the MPA offers a relatively secure funding arrangement with the federal and state governments, and provides core financial support through a range of criteria that include demonstration of "the highest artistic standards", attracting a "sizable" audience base and gaining average minimum income of $1.6 million. (Australia Council Annual Report 2016). The selection of major organisations is not subject to peer assessment, a key aspect of the arm's length process of the Australia Council, or to competitive selection. The MPA locks in a significant proportion of Australia Council funding and creates a two-tier funding system (Croggon 2016). For example, in 2016-17, the Australia Council had a budget of $177 million, $109 million of which went to the MPA companies (Caust 2019). This same year, grants to individual artists and projects fell by 70% compared to the previous two years (Pledger 2019). The MPA structure has ensured that cuts over two successive federal budgets have solely affected smaller arts organisations (Meyrick 2016).

[7] Presentation possibilities and expanded audiences can be met by the Australian Performing Arts Centres Network (APACA). The arts centres are both presenters and co-producers with the major organisations, as well as producers in their own right. APACA changed name and membership focus in 2017 and is now called Performing Arts Connections. During the 1980s, a series of large theatres of 300 to 1500 seats were built across the country in both the major cities and in regional centres. This infrastructure shaped the type of production that toured across the country during the period in focus. Production cooperation between theatre companies is also common, making extended seasons possible while reducing production costs, for example, between Malthouse and Belvoir for Beckett's *Happy Days* in 2009, one of the key productions for the second case study.

[8] This period is marked by inconsistent political support of the performing arts, a steady reduction in government subsidy and significant shifts in cultural policy. The Australia Council's budget has never been indexed against inflation, which means that it has fallen in real terms since the 1990s (Croggon 2019). In the decade between 2007-08 and 2017-18, federal government spending per capita on the cultural sector fell by around 19%, compared to the total reduction of public funding per capita of 4.9% (Eltham and Pennington 2021: 21). In 2015, the federal arts minister cut the discretionary budget of the Australia Council by one third ($105 million) and established the National Program for Excellence in the Art*s* to be managed directly from his ministry.

'Australian' are permeable, the provenance of a play is usually tied to the nationality of the playwright. The work of a production's creative team is undervalued in this emphasis, especially in the cumulative production history process.

In recent years, accompanying discussion about 'classic' plays has been debate about the role of auteur theatre directors, whose work for some critics has signalled a generational change in artistic leadership in Australian theatre.[9] Attracting both acclaim and criticism, these young (mostly male) directors are accused of being motivated by ambition rather than creative concerns. The choice by these directors of European and American classic plays emphasises, for some, the tributary status of Australian culture. Though the history of postcolonial Australian theatre is short, longstanding and frequent exchanges with the English-speaking cultures of Britain and America mean the salient features of what a classic play should be are well-known by both Australian artists and audiences. As with the side branch of the river, there is enough shared awareness to sense the flow of the main course. The *sensation* of classic can be felt and recognised even without direct experience of a classic play's historical thread.

Thus, in Australia, staging a classic play involves constructing the sensation of production history, and signalling an ambition for temporal depth and purpose. Though a play may be rarely performed, it can be claimed as a classic in part because using the term itself actively fashions a sense of the past. But this claim is not straightforward. Modern Australia's 230-year history of deportation, colonisation and dispossession continues to profoundly influence contemporary Australian society. The country's relationship to the 'classic' category has specific postcolonial resonances. So, a classic play can be used to question the premise of a postcolonial cultural consciousness and/or recast the binary of white privilege. Recently, mainstream programming shows a noticeable decline in the production of European classics, and a consequent shift towards works by Australian and Indigenous artists.

Some of these, however, are presented as 'classic'. The game of labelling continues, therefore, with the status of a drama in the hands of various influential individuals involved in the chain of theatre production. Who has the right to call a particular play a classic in Australia? Without the passage of time as the chief determinant, but with an inherited cultural

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[9] Louis Nowra: The director's cut, SMH 3/2/2012; Makeover for play produces a drama, Aus 12/7/2012; Hooked on classics, Aus 12/9/2012; Simon Stone: True classics are ripe for interpretation at any time, SMH 18/10/2012; Tim Douglas: The local voices being swept off the stage, Aus 28/5/2013; Ralph Meyers: Theatre debate is a generational battle for the ages, Aus 30/5/2013; Ben Eltham: The trouble with adaptations, Arts Hub 2013; Alison Croggon: Are Australian playwrights really a threatened species?, ABC Arts Online 2013.

compulsion urging such nominations, the term ‘classic’ is a designation that influences resource distribution. The recent origin of Australian theatre cannot contribute lengthy production histories, so it solves the problem by unselfconsciously calling a brand new play an ‘instant classic’.

Advertising productions of European classics as ‘Australian works’[10], while calling new plays ‘classics’[11], are indications of how attractive and flexible Australian artists and critics find ‘classic’ as a term. Perhaps the demand for classics reflects more a visceral need than a reasoned choice. Critical encouragement, artistic attachment, and audience expectations reflect a deep social need for ‘doing classics’. Identifying ‘classics’ demonstrates involvement in significant work, while the idea of a classic play conjures the ambition, if not quite the reality, of cultural memory. Or perhaps producing a classic epitomises the tension between the chronological reality of historical time and a yearning for temporal depth. In Australia, ‘doing a classic’ expresses a wide set of different desires that can be followed across the theatre production process. From the artists, through the performance, to the audience and the critics, ‘classic-ing’ is an axis for pursuing actions that have deep relevance to the diverse cultural meanings involved in making theatre in Australia today.

An example of an Australian classic

In Sydney Theatre Company’s (STC’s) 2016 season, Australian playwright, Louis Nowra’s 1985 play *The Golden Age* was designated an “Australian classic”. No Australian mainstream theatre company had produced the play for more than thirty years since its premiere as a ‘new Australian play’. What generated this fundamental shift in the status of the play, from a ‘new’ play to a ‘classic’ play? What makes this particular play a ‘classic’? The production history of *The Golden Age* does not prefigure the category change. Like other Australian plays written in the 1980s, after its initial production and overwhelmingly negative critical

[10]The following productions from Belvoir seasons 2011–2017 promoted European classics as works by Australian artists by using the descriptors “after”, “a version by”, or “adapted”. In many cases, these were by the director of the production: *The Wild Duck* by Simon Stone with Chris Ryan after Henrik Ibsen. Dir. Simon Stone. Feb/Mar 2011; *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, in a version by Benedict Andrews. Dir. Benedict Andrews. Jun/Jul 2011; *Thystes* co-written by Thomas Henning, Chris Ryan, Simon Stone & Mark Winter after Seneca. Dir. Simon Stone. Jan/Feb 2012; *Medea* by Kate Mulvany & Anne-Louise Sarks after Euripides. Original Concept & Dir. Anne-Louise Sarks. Oct/Nov 2012; *Miss Julie* by Simon Stone after August Strindberg. Dir. Leticia Càceres. Aug-Oct 2013; *Hedda Gabler* adapted by Adena Jacobs from the play by Henrik Ibsen. Dir. Adena Jacobs. Jun-Aug 2014; *Nora* by Kit Brookman and Anne-Louise Sarks after *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen. Dir. Anne-Louise Sarks. Aug/Sep 2014; *Elektra/Orestes* by Jada Alberts & Anne-Louise Sarks. Dir. Anne-Louise Sarks. Mar/Apr 2015; *Ivanov* by Anton Chekhov. Adaptor and Director Eamon Flack. Sep-Nov 2015; *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen. Adapted and Directed by Eamon Flack. Sept/Oct 2017.

[11] For example: STC *The Secret River* 2013/2016; Belvoir *The Drovers Wife* 2017, Review – plot twist leaves Australian classic spinning on its axis, G 23/09/2016.

reception, it was laid to rest and forgotten (Nowra 2004: 80-81). However, the sparse repertoire revival pattern only reinforced the STC's cultural repositioning of the play.[12] In a purposeful programmatic step, the company deliberately made *The Golden Age* its representative Australian classic for the year (Williams interview, 9/2/2020).

Without the influence of repetition and continual critical assessment over time, Nowra's play does not match the accepted definition of classic. Rather, it occupies a reconstructed category around the notion of a 'classic' itself. What are the features that constitute this modification? How is a play to be measured against it? The reconstructed category operates at a number of levels, from company, through artists, to audiences and critics. *The Golden Age* recommends itself to all of them. Principally set on the Australian island state of Tasmania, the play narratively and symbolically enacts a scene of 'first contact', perhaps between white imperialists and Indigenous Australians, and makes ironic colonial-type reflections that frame language as an authentic marker of identity. The narrative portrays the character opposition of upper versus working class, civilised versus wild, and uses these distinctions to question the values attached to different political positions, to reveal the savagery of civilisation and the protective care of the so-called primitive. Thematically and structurally the play has, in the past, been regarded as characteristic (that is 'typical') postcolonial drama (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996; Kelly 1998). How do these postcolonial and colonial resonances feed into its (new) status as an 'Australian classic'?

The central stylistic feature of *The Golden Age* is the language spoken by the forest people who are discovered in the wilderness of isolated Tasmania. This is a colony of settlers and escapees who have developed their customs far away from imperial influence. Their unique way of speaking provides a powerful example of the group's liminal position, an attempt to create a new language that represents a new world (Turcotte 1989). Borrowing rhymes, verse and slang from 1850s Irish, Scottish and Cockney dialects, Nowra's invented argot combines unusual syntax and grammar with words and expressions to make up a 'word salad' that is both foreign and recognisable to an English speaker's ear. The matriarch of the forest people, Ayre, speaks for her tribe. In the STC 2016 production, a 'name actor' playing this role was billed as the star attraction of the production, in a casting strategy that emphasises female maturity in the constellation of characters and judiciously shifts the allegorical nature of the

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[12] The play was marketed by the STC as an 'unearthed classic'. Upton referred to the play as being "largely buried by time", and that it "deserves to be unearthed" (Press release, December 2015; "A message from Andrew Upton", *The Golden Age* program: 4).

play in comparison with its original critical framing. The mis en scène for Ayre's speeches heightens their powerful effect, and her monologues are delivered with full gravitas and figurative meaning.

> AYRE: [*with an all-encompassing motion of her hands*] Our goldy sow, the furst t`bloodburst int` this silent sea. Past riverrun `n` turn o` kelp int` muddy moss, seay green `n` here. `Ere! Spirit eyes o` gold. In ghost time, behind us; osier `n` leather `n` `ello, ducky. `Oary boyos, sun-stricken girlie days. Blackysmith `n` Trunk's Tavern. I hear the goldey lifey, the glommen lifey. Do nowt ferget dreamytime. (Act 1 Scene 6).

One radio interview with the director and some of the actors soon after the 2016 opening night discusses Nowra's invented language. Analysed twenty years previously as postcolonially disruptive (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 188), the STC production uses it to signal 'classic'. The director highlighted its "magnetic, metaphysical quality" and suggested it is "a form of Shakespeare", a position also reiterated by one actor, for whom the language of the play is "almost Shakespearean in a way".[13]

Within the Anglophone world view, Shakespeare's plays define the category of classic itself. On the Australian stage, Shakespeare predominates as 'the classic's' most obvious representative. Repetition ensures familiarity with the plays (or some of them), and in any single production this throws the focus on the significance of their interpretation. His plays are thus the first and best examples of ones presented as both established and revisable. This has an auricular dimension to it. On the Australian stage, the classic status of Shakespearean drama is predicated on its language, which sounds both foreign and antique. Thus, when Shakespeare's language is compared with the language component of Nowra's invention, the status of classic is claimed through association. The STC production of *The Golden Age* then becomes what might be called an 'affinity classic'.

Critical reaction to the STC production emphasised the language as a key aspect of its success. "Praise has to go to voice and text coach Charmian Gradwell for helping Pierce and Hick find those almost otherworldly voices," commented The Daily Review,[14] "the thought and imagination put into their dialect and way of life by the playwright is immensely satisfying," remarked Stage Noise.[15] The production developed the language as a rich and

[13] Arts Show Interview, RN 10/2/2016.

[14] The Golden Age, DR 20/1/2016.

[15] The Golden Age, SN 20/2/2016.

expressive aspect of the play, one that "takes a certain craft to bring it off the page," observed The Sydney Morning Herald.[16] Performing *The Golden Age* as a classic profoundly changed the context of its reception, where classic status affiliated the sound of its language to the auricular pattern of how a classic is expected to sound. The programming of an 'Australian classic' is an active mindset that looks for indications of the category existing in advance of concrete production.

By contrast, at its premiere in 1985 Nowra's language was considered as one of the main problems of the 'new play'. Critical responses included negative references to "something like James Joyce stream of consciousness",[17] and a "Finnegan's Wake stew of fragments".[18] Reviewers were baffled by the "weighty tracts of gibberish being spoken onstage",[19] such that "much of the dialogue is spoken in an incomprehensible gobbledegook which can only be followed with a written script".[20] They were unable to detect any political intention in the drama. The initial reception shows an inability to recognise the play's originality and ambition, or the capacity of its language to convey postcolonial resonances. But when the play was presented as classic, these announced themselves. Rather than befuddling people, the language transformed into a signal and expressive feature of the production: "It is a testament to the skills of both Nowra and the cast that what at first sounds like gibberish by the end of the performance makes sense so that the final lines of the play come across with shattering power," commented the Australian Book Review.[21] Performing the forest group's language is vehicle and proof of the play's status as 'a classic', while its new status framed the language as central to what the audience should understand by the category. The postcolonial resonances of *The Golden Age*'s dialogue were appropriated as part of its classic status. The question remains whether the edge of the postcolonial critique stays intact in the classic-ing practice.

What this research does

This research is organised into four case studies that discuss six productions of 'classic' drama in the Australian theatre. The productions have been carefully chosen from an

[16] Lost tribe of Louis Nowra's Golden Age make timely return, SMH 15/1/2016.

[17] An experience in discovery, H 11/2/1985.

[18] The Golden Age, SMH 7/8/1987.

[19] The Golden Age Review, SH 9/8/1987.

[20] Nowra…not so simple, Aus 11/2/1985.

[21] The Golden Age, ABR 25/1/2016.

extensive corpus of Australian mainstream ‘classic’ plays performed between 1995 and 2016 to provide distinct examples of the category. A complete survey of the period is beyond the scope of this thesis and may only result in an unhelpful list. My research explores the concept of classic by analysing these productions in depth, using a synchronic set of examples to explore some of the dynamics of ‘classic-ing’ in Australian mainstream theatre. The productions are diverse and include old and new dramatic texts, adapted historical fiction and barely or rarely performed plays, while the playwrights are both Australian and European. My research is a process of comparison via thick description (Geertz 1973: 3-30), moving between performative, historical and social dimensions of the plays to elucidate the embedded practice of classic-ing in Australian mainstream theatre.

Another underlying assumption of ‘classic’ in Australia is that it is tied to European theatre. The Australian notion of a classic play draws on the Western drama canon and has a blind spot in relation to traditional forms in the neighbouring Asian region. Longstanding classic performance traditions such as Chinese Opera or Indonesian Wayang, for example, have negligible impact on the vision of mainstream companies and artists.[22] This point can be observed in the touring schedules of major theatre companies which are predominantly focused on Europe and the US, and the capital cities of London and New York, rather than in the Asia-Pacific (Varney et. al. 2013: 143). Furthermore, there is a connection between Western theatre and international artistic practice that coheres within the category of classic drama in Australia. Denise Varney argues that the artistic practice of European canon adaptation by Australian artists engages in a self-confident modernist discourse while simultaneously disregarding non-Western traditions, expressing an ‘internationalist’ position that actually means ‘European’ (Varney et. al. 2013: 147-149). Despite modern Australia’s geographic and economic proximity to the Asia-Pacific region, it is the Western canon and the values attached to it that are central to classic-ing as a practice. The circumvention of non-Western drama needs to be noted as a constraining factor in Australian theatre programming.[23]

[22] Exceptions include artistic and cultural exchanges between Japan and Australia, such as Playbox’s presentation of Makato Sato’s production of John Romeril’s *The Floating World* in 1995, exchanges between Australian and Asian cultural institutions initiated by Asialink, or the Asia Triennial of Performing Arts (Asia TOPA) which began in 2017.

[23] Veronica Kelly highlights the 1997 production *Water Stories*, a collaboration between a youth theatre and youth wind ensemble from Canberra and the Song Ngoc Water Puppetry Troupe from Vietnam, as an example of an emerging alternative to a European-influenced mainstage. This points to the assumed role of these stages as a principal space for questions of Australian identity (Kelly 1998: 12).

Case study analysis of classic-ing in Australian mainstream theatre commences by comparing two Shakespeare productions. Both Belvoir Street Theatre Company productions, they are viewed here within a wider context of postcolonial Shakespeare production expectations. My performance analyses of the 1995 production of *The Tempest* and of the 2004 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* highlight directorial interpretation, and reflect the fact that the director is a key artist when classics are produced. Belvoir's productions in different ways use 'intact' Shakespeare to renegotiate a white settler identity in relation to Indigenous Australian authenticity. Shakespeare becomes an eloquent vehicle to reassess the ambivalent status of the settler, even while tied to settler society's cultural needs. Shakespeare's position as classic is central to this end.

The second case study approaches the category of 'modern classic' by examining the Malthouse Theatre's 2009 production of *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett and Australian Patrick White's *Night on Bald Mountain* staged by the same company in 2014. A review of their production histories demonstrates these plays' infrequent revival patterns. However, for particular reasons, these productions generated a sensation of temporal depth and purpose. This case study considers 'classic-ing' through the lens of the leading actor in both shows, Julie Forsyth. In a socially over-determined process, her performance *endows* these works as classic. This is a complex and multidimensional activity. Cultural memory is evoked by Forsyth on stage, as her presence symbolically consolidates a sense of theatre legacy. This sense is heightened at specific scenic moments when Forsyth is haunted (Carlson 2001) by her previous performances in previous roles. Character types and their characterisations have postcolonial resonance (see Chapter 1) in these performances, interacting with and recasting cultural tropes of settler identity. Claiming a 'classic' has effects for both a director's reputation and a company, yet the proof of 'classic' status remains contingent on the work of the actor.

The third and fourth case studies look at self-nominated Australian drama classics. The first of these is Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* (1985), both a 'new' play and a 'classic'. Historical perspectives of the play's production – its life as a new play, its scholarly framing as a postcolonial drama, and the production chain of this classic version – illuminate this category of 'Australian' classic. The STC 2016 'classic' production demonstrates a mindset that flows through its marketing, predicating its classic status on existing understandings of the category. But the mindset reaches further, developing into an intricate interplay between classic and postcolonial consciousness. As mentioned, and as will be explored later, certain

scenic moments have postcolonial resonance and signal ‘classic’. So that, when Nowra’s appropriated canonical scenes in the play are depicted in the STC production as culturally representative, or when the allegorically grotesque characters are portrayed as gracefully able, the *sensation* of classic arises. Post-colonial strategies are co-opted as indications of classic status, with the consequence that the production reworks assumptions of postcolonial drama. However, the question remains: can these resonances be appended to the category of classic?

The Secret River, adapted for the stage by Andrew Bovell from the novel by Kate Grenville, is the final case study in this thesis. This was a brand new play that was received as an ‘instant classic’. What defines this understanding of the classic category? The play shows postcolonial political intent in its critical retelling of an early settlement story. The literary success of the historical fiction novel from which it was adapted influenced its subsequent stage life. However, the critical success of the stage version relied on physical Indigenous representation, which was absent in the novel. This reset the postcolonial ambitions of the narrative. Discussion in this case study begins with the adaptation process, then turns to dramaturgical structure, key scenes and scenic elements that brought a specific kind of theatricality and meaning to the production. Discussion of the use of Indigenous language on stage highlights the complex critical response. This understanding of classic explores the tension between the aspirations of the company and the expectations of its intended audience. Who is classic *for*? What can classic *do*? This case study exposes the prescriptive charge of the term ‘Australian classic’.

These case studies examine the practice of classic-ing in Australian mainstream theatre. The definition of mainstream here is a matter of noting the context of stage production. ‘Flagship’ state-based theatre companies exist across the continent. However, this project confines its examples of mainstream theatre to the high population centres of Sydney and Melbourne. The size of the company, venue capacity and audience reach are all factors that vary and do not necessarily follow on from each other.[24] This thesis does not analyse the industrial conditions of theatre production or assess the impact of related public policies. However, public subsidy underpins mainstream theatre production and contributes to the definition of mainstream theatre. The companies examined here were supported through the Major Performing Arts

[24] Audience reach may not reflect the size of the company where, for example, the comparatively small ANT company gained significant renown through international and regional touring of Raymond Cousse’s *Kids Stuff* for more than ten years (see Chapter 3).

Framework of the Australia Council (see footnote 6) and illustrate some of the regular features of mainstream theatre. The STC is Australia's largest theatre company in terms of subsidy, size of staff and the number of annual productions. Over the period covered by this study, the other two companies, Belvoir in Sydney and Malthouse in Melbourne, have shifted cultural position in the cultural sector, first deemed as alternative, or second rung, later as major organisations. This revaluation of role may indicate the blurring of the distinction between mainstream and alternative practice in Australia (Kelly 1998: 8). Yet it could also reflect the expansion of the mainstream and the entrenchment of its outlook and values. The case studies in this thesis also include the now defunct 'alternative' companies Australian Nouveau Theatre (ANT) and Playbox Theatre in Melbourne, which persist in cultural memory.

Research into 'classic' drama as a category and an embedded practice must necessarily be methodologically eclectic. This investigation uses three related research methods. Performance analysis is at the core of the approach. This involved attending the live performance of each production at least once, and taking detailed notes during and immediately after the performance. Later it involved accessing documentary recordings of the productions, and repeated close viewing of production aspects and particular scenes. Access to valuable production documents such as prompt copies, design sketches and lighting designs was also possible for some, but not all, of the productions. Evidence of critical responses at the time of performance was examined, located in archives and online sources. These formed a valuable comparative source for my own perceptions. Ordinarily, performance analysis is guided by aesthetic questions and perspectives (Balme 2008: 122), but for the purposes of this research the method was augmented by more practical concerns. 'To classic' is a 'real-life' action that works across the theatre production chain, from initial programming discussions through to final reception, a gradational process that involves the theatre company, artists, audiences and critics. Therefore, I interviewed leading artists involved in these productions to gather information on their perspectives from inside production and company processes and undertook archival research to gain related historical and quantitative material. The AusStage database was a valuable source for both reconstructing production histories and gathering aggregate data. A conceptual framework brought to all these methods was that of postcolonial analysis. This critical literature provided a means of assessing the postcolonial resonances claimed by the productions. This allowed close examination of how postcolonialism and classic coexist. Can these dramas be both

postcolonial and classic? How do these aspects interact? In addition, this assessment revisited fundamental precepts of postcolonial drama and engaged with these in a critical way. This brought scholarly and creative perspectives into dialogue and contributes to the ongoing process of postcolonial thinking (Mbembe 2006: 118). Each of these three methods afforded distinct perspectives on the practice of classic-ing in Australian mainstream theatre.

Why case study analysis?

This thesis considers 'classic' through a series of four case studies. Case study is a useful method to analyse the complex phenomenon of classic-ing. The method is flexible, so that each time the design of a case study varies. Rather than being shaped by a central research question, the case study begins with observable material. Thus, the structure for each study is not repeated, as the peripatetic approach allows the design of a case to respond to the chosen object of interest. The approach then responds to 'real-life' practice, exploring chosen elements to elucidate the practice within.

When integrating performance into conceptual analysis, it is useful to think about a performance as a case (Meyrick 2014a). To consider the embedded practice of classic-ing, these performances are used as carefully chosen examples of the type. However, the target of analysis is not necessarily the meanings generated within the performance itself, but how the production of the performance is more broadly construed. The case therefore can be viewed as both a unique example and as more generally representative of classic-ing.

As chosen examples of an embedded practice, these performances are placed at the centre of the analysis. A case study allows performance elements to take primary position. Active description is a compelling dimension of the case study and conveys specific, in-depth perspectives as well as broader approaches to the concept. In contrast, a literary inquiry of drama would use the text as the principal material and may use performance to strengthen a literary perspective. In these case studies, a number of dimensions amplify the postcolonial resonance of performance. The case study approach, therefore, can reframe postcolonial drama from a more complex point of view. Rather than approaching the dramas from the perspective of the dramatic text, this method involves a range of emphases and perspectives.

Each case study moves across different aspects of theatre production, taking up the director, the dramatic text, scenic elements, the actor and so on, in different ways. Historical awareness, particularly an awareness of production history, is also an important aspect of the analysis. Furthermore, this diverse series of case studies can also be considered together, as

one single case. Taken collectively, they begin to form a more inclusive view of the classic, they work together to form a broader picture. Seen in this way, the case studies elucidate the complex and multifaceted nature of classic-ing in Australia and reveal key aspects of what the productions are. The performances are not only interpretations. They are, in some way, encounters with the potential meaning of the plays, brought out by a combination of the circumstances of production and what is latent in the writing. Therefore, it is this encounter, rather than the text that is the objective of the analysis.

1. The Classic, Postcolonial Resonance and Australia

This chapter explores the dispositions of Australian postcolonial resonance. What are the connotations of postcolonialism in Australia? What aspects of these resonate in dramatic classics? Postcolonial and resonance together form a complex interaction. ‘Resonance’ suggests a rich quality of response that arises from “vibrations”, from interactions, between two separate objects (OED 2020). In drama, resonance arises from the interaction between the audience and the performance. These are variable and interactive elements. Audiences bring expectations to the theatre; their reactions are conditioned by their own experiences and the cultural context that surrounds them. On the stage, the performance generates an elaborate, contingent and dynamic system that produces meaning (Worthen 1998; Knowles 2014). Diverse aspects interact in dramatic performance and within the practice of classic-ing. Gauging where an audience’s understanding ends and a play’s message begins is an analytical challenge. However, the resonances of postcolonialism in the productions are an integral component of their classic effect. This view of the critical literature therefore attends to aspects of postcolonialism that resonate strongly in Australia.

The aim of this investigation is to discern the rich response of Australian postcolonial resonance. Postcolonialism is a wide-ranging term that threads through the cultural, social and political consciousness of modern Australia. It can characterise a theatrical or literary style, imply a level of cultural maturity or even proclaim colonial history as a thing of the past. Postcolonialism is not a consistent term and can be slippery in meaning. The consequences of colonisation are explored by wide range of academic scholarship. Some of these develop aesthetic and political strategies to redress colonial effects. This assessment begins with an outline of foundational conceptual strands of the scholarly field. The focus then turns to critical perspectives pertinent to Australian circumstances. Founded on colonial settlement, the history of modern Australia continues to influence contemporary society. The discussion therefore charts critical perspectives of the conditions of settlement and the settler. These are then correlated with Indigenous epistemologies and discourses of Australian cultural identity. The next step draws out key concepts from representative studies in postcolonial drama. Finally, postcolonial resonances in classic productions are illustrated by comparing how Shakespeare is addressed in Canada, India and in Australia.

Postcolonial cultural studies

In postcolonial cultural studies, an interdisciplinary relationship of psychological, discourse analytical, political, feminist and aesthetic theories is used to investigate the ramifications of colonial encounter. Within this heterogeneous constellation, two authoritative precursors are influential in the field. These are the writings of Frantz Fanon, for example, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), his interrogation of the psychological dimension of black and white relations, and *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said's examination of the structural dominance established by discourse. Fanon and Said reconsidered the binary distinction of colonised and coloniser as a structurally complex phenomenon. Fanon examined the psychological dimension of Empire using Lacan's account of the formative experience of subjectivity.[25] He saw that the black elite class did little to shift colonial patterns; rather, they became implicated in the socio-political structure. Fanon's scholarly project advocated revolutionary action and underpins much of the intellectual work of black consciousness. His involvement in the Algerian Liberation movement demonstrated his personal ideals (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 99-101). The lived struggle for independence and the vexed question of decolonisation embed radical action in postcolonial scholarship. This is a political purpose that continues today.[26]

Edward Said evaluated systemic aspects of imperialist domination in society's institutions. The academic institution was Said's exemplar. He used Foucault's notion of discourse to demonstrate how Orientalism is advanced in Western scholarship. The West uses Orientalism to construct the Orient and to have control over it: "It is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is manifestly a different world." (Said 1978: 12). The authority of academic institutions builds a hierarchy of knowledge where the 'other' can be known and controlled, "the discourse of Orientalism constructs and dominates Orientals in the process of knowing them" (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 2009: 53). The use of stereotype allows the West to construct the other 'them',

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[25] Lacan considers the division of the conscious ego and unconscious desire by using the moment a child looks into the mirror to explore the realms of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. Lacan proposes that a child recognises themselves as the image in the mirror, while they also see the lack of control they have over their body. Lacan hypothesises that the child resolves this conflicted recognition by forming the Ego to primarily identify with the image. This is an ultimate suppression of their recognised difference within the realm of the imaginary. The adult that holds the child becomes the symbolic Other, who is asked to confirm the Ego of the child. This stage of self-recognition is attached to the mother or father holding the child in front of the mirror and sees the child symbolically confirming their identity through the recognition of the other (Gallop 2018: 74-92).

[26] For postcolonial analysis of the position of asylum in Australia and its theatrical response see Cox 2018.

so that 'we' can dominate. This fabricates the colonised position which therefore can never really be understood.

Robert J. C. Young sees postcolonial as the "preoccupation with the oppressed, with the subaltern classes, with minorities in any society, with the concerns of those who live or come from elsewhere" (Young 2009: 14). This attention traces back to cultural analysis in South Asian studies during the early 1980s, where subaltern representation became a leading concern. Gayatri Spivak's *Can the subaltern speak?* (1993) looks at the position of women in India to interrogate the construction of a subaltern identity, "for both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" (Spivak 2006: 28). Ideological concepts articulated by intellectuals, according to Spivak, will never enable a collective voice for the subaltern and can only function to reinscribe colonial dominance. Representation of the disempowered remains a vexed issue in postcolonial scholarship. A critical structural approach seems unable to locate any agency with the colonised subject.

Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) introduced concepts that bring some agency to the colonised. Hybridity and mimicry are influential concepts in critical literature. To outline the concept of mimicry, Bhabha portrays imperial policy in India as a moral distortion, and those who produced this policy as "figures of farce" (Bhabha 1994: 85). Colonial discourse persuades the colonised to be like those in power; for example, to be 'more English than the English', adopt British dress, values and cultural manners. The effect, however, is to become Anglicised not English. The process of mimicry reproduces the coloniser as "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994: 89). This 'reformed other' can mock the British by copying them and so strategically destabilise colonial power; their resemblance contains the 'other' within. Bhabha described this as "almost the same but not white" (Bhabha 1994: 89). Mimicry is thus a destabilising force intrinsic to the colonial relationship. However, Bhabha's concept responds to a specific type of colonial interaction. Yet colonisation occurs under varying circumstances. Mimicry does not gain the same effect across all postcolonial positions.

Hybridity is also a term coined by Bhabha frequently used in scholarship. Bhabha's concept of hybridity considers culture and identity as dynamic processes. Culture is not an essence to be returned through decolonisation, and identity is never reached and is always in motion. Hybridity poses culture as liminal and ambivalent, always in a process of interaction, a third space that "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without

an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994: 4). The colonised subject contains many influences and is thus culturally hybrid. As a synonym for cross-cultural exchange, however, there is a danger of overlooking imbalances of power. Bhabha's hybridity has been criticised for its lack of clear psychological theory, the flattening out of cultural difference and as overlooking the material realities of postcolonial cultures (Knowles 2004: 16; Mishra and Hodge 2005: 383). Ric Knowles argues the mechanisms of hybrid culture are "contested, unsettling, and often unequal spaces", preferring the term 'intercultural' which "evokes the possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings, avoiding binary codings" (Knowles 2010: 4). In theatre studies, intercultural scholarship has increasingly overshadowed postcolonial perspectives. A broad scholarly shift in the 1990s and 2000s moved concerns towards the mechanisms of cultural exchange (Bharucha 1993, 2000; Balme 1999), such as interculturalism (Fischer-Lichte 1996; Holledge and Tompkins 2000; Knowles 2010) and cosmopolitanism (Gilbert and Lo 2007). Postcolonialism was more broadly questioned as an unfinished and impossible project, (Mishra and Hodge 2005; Young 2012; Ashcroft 2013).[27] At the same time, the field expanded across disciplines and became increasingly diverse (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2006).

Hybridity and mimicry are characteristic postcolonial concepts that bring some agency to the colonised subject. However, these have been formulated in response to the specific system of colonial occupation. Imperialism is far-reaching, but colonial systems of occupation or settlement have distinct and differing local ongoing effects. These differences need to be considered. The next section differentiates between the modes of colonisation to focus in detail on perspectives and dimensions of settlement culture.

Settlement colonialisation

Colonisation is not a homogenous phenomenon and the circumstances of the colonising event bear profoundly on its consequences. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British Empire established colonies by either occupation or settlement.[28] These modes of colonisation generate distinct colonial and postcolonial conditions. Postcolonial critique has focused on the struggles of occupied colonies. The settler colony may then be relegated as a

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[27] Ashcroft (2013) responded to this position with an analytical postcolonial approach to globalisation. Hodge (2005) refocused postcolonial concerns related to modernity.

[28] This is a broad distinction which may also be considered as a continuum. There are colonies such as the Caribbean that can be seen as both occupied and settled. The distinction is made here to emphasise the differing conditions of occupation, such as those of India, and those of settled Canada and Australia (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989).

colonial structure: “White settlers were historically the agents of colonial rule, and their own subsequent development – cultural as well as economic – does not simply align them with other colonised peoples.” (Loomba 1998: 9). Can the settler then be credibly postcolonial? Is there a danger of eliding colonial and settlement experience by excluding the settler, and to therefore consider colonialism as a consistent phenomenon (Mishra and Hodge 2011: 286)? Postcolonialism may then fail to engage with whiteness as a construct, for example. Australia was established as a settler colony, and this act delineates the assessment here. The condition of settlement is a key aspect of Australian postcolonial resonance.

Settlement involves the often-distant imperial force, the often culturally and socially privileged settler, and the Indigenous peoples of the land. In settlement countries such as Australia, consequent waves of migration also exert influence, developing a complex cultural consciousness. According to Lawson, settler colonies take a “second world” position, and are classified as an awkward fit compared to the opposing first and third worlds (Lawson 1994 cited in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 6). However, placing the settler outside a first/third world historical paradigm appears to be an outmoded rationale. The reality is that today Australia is an economically developed, capitalist, first world country. The Australian settler certainly resides in a first world that affords social and economic privilege and opportunities.

The settler is the descendant and the inheritor of colonisation, receives the privileges of the colonised land and is implicated in the inequities of the imperial project. The settler is positioned between two opposites, in a predicament of simultaneously being both colonised and being the coloniser. The term ‘settler-invader’ reflects the historical impact of settlement on Indigenous peoples and acknowledges this dichotomy. The ambivalent consciousness of the settler is a complex of desire and mimicry, according to Johnson and Lawson (2002). Unable to legitimise their position, the settler is caught between Indigenous authenticity and imperial authority. Indigenisation has no substance and is “marked by counterfeitings of both emergence and origination” (Johnson and Lawson 2000: 369). Settler mimicry does not gain postcolonial agency, as the settler appears inescapably complicit in colonisation.

Lorenzo Veracini argues that the defining element of settlement is the denial of Indigenous presence:

> The successful settler colonies ‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity. By the end of this trajectory, they claim to be

> no longer settler colonial (they are putatively 'settled' and 'postcolonial' – except that unsettling anxieties remain, and references to a postcolonial condition appear hollow as soon as indigenous disadvantage is taken into account). Settler colonialism thus covers its tracks and operates towards its self-supersession. (Veracini 2013: 3).

This radical perspective embeds the settler in the imperial project. Postcolonial strategies are therefore Indigenous persistence and survival, argues Veracini. For him, the principal postcolonial struggle is the struggle of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous disadvantage persists in Australian society where there is significant social and economic disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Only a small percentage of Australians are of Indigenous descent,[29] yet Aboriginal people are the most socioeconomically impoverished group in Australia. Aileen Moreton-Robinson defines Australia as "a postcolonizing society [to] signify the active, current and continuing nature of the colonising relationship that positions [Indigenous Australians] as belonging but not belonging" (Moreton-Robinson 2015: 196). Australia can be considered postcolonial with respect to former colonisers, yet very much colonial in the treatment of its own Indigenous peoples. The process of postcolonising is, therefore, consistent with Indigenous Australian belonging.

Indigenous epistemologies and settler postcolonialism

The general terms Indigenous and Aboriginal imply a homogeneity of culture; however, Australia, like other settler countries, holds a number of heterogeneous Indigenous nations. Yet there are broad commonalities shared among Indigenous peoples. These are worldview and relation to the earth, the experience of colonial violence and its ongoing legacies, and the ongoing struggle for decolonisation and self-determination. A relation to homelands, known as connection to Country by Indigenous Australians, intrinsically shapes the diversity of Indigenous nations. Indigenous Australia is collectively more than 250 separate nations or groupings who live across the continent, with significant variations between cultures and a multitude of distinct languages. Indigenous language, spiritual and social practices, totems or skin and cultures reflect the different geographical homelands and histories, responding to the continent's variety of topologies and to the lived experience of the devastating impacts of colonialism.

[29] The national census shows an increase in the Indigenous population from 3% in 2011 to 3.3% in 2016, attributed in part to the number of people now identifying as Indigenous (Biddle and Markham 2017).

The connection to Country reflects the integral place the landscape has within Indigenous Australian culture, embedded by the belief in The Dreaming, a time when the continent was formed by mythical ancestors. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes this connection to Country as sovereign: "Indigenous sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (knowing), and is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans and land." (Moreton-Robinson cited in Casey 2012: 16).

Epistemological frameworks differ essentially between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Is it possible to reconsider this difference? Historically, Indigenous ways of knowing have been devalued as inferior, a perception reinforced by dichotomies such as 'primitive' and 'modern' inherent in the colonial project. There is also a risk of essentialising indigeneity, overlooking the plurality, dynamism and adaptivity of Indigenous cultures. Established ideas of tradition suggest an authentic and ancient set of beliefs and customs, the opposite to ideals of modernity. Essentialist tropes consider Indigenous people as tribal and traditional, so that urban ways of life call indigeneity into question, even though around sixty per cent of Indigenous Australians live in urban areas (Casey 2012: 9). Indigenous knowledge is not a reified construct without context: it is complex and interactive. Thus, understanding tradition as relational emphasises social practices of learning and sharing knowledge that are unique to each Indigenous culture.

The last two decades have seen increased visibility of Indigenous self-representation in the embodied arts. A move paralleled by growing public interest in an Indigenous mode of belonging and way of viewing the world (Kelly 1998: 1; Gilbert et. al. 2017: 4). This movement empowers the social and political potential of indigeneity in the process of postcolonising. This, for many settler artists, has precipitated a deep assessment of their own work. In Australia, where there is growing recognition of Indigenous sovereignty as a way to move forward, there is also realisation that the settler is indefensibly advantaged. The settler condition is a shifting condition, in a process of reassessment. Indigenous sovereignty troubles the settler: there is a need to more profoundly engage with Indigenous ways of knowing.

Recent scholarship has focused on Indigenous agency in performance and its real-world postcolonial effects (Gilbert et.al. 2017; Werry 2017). Yet, could opposing positions of white settler and Indigenous Australian be newly perceived as a boundary to traverse? Would it be possible to consider indigeneity as dynamically co-constitutive? Is an interrelation of settler

and Indigenous elements critically possible? (Davis 2006: 153).[30] The cultural shift of recent decades may potentially open more equitable engagement, where resurgence of Indigenous cultures enables resilience and visibility that in turn demands the settler to engage in more complex processes of cultural negotiation.

These demands highlight the interactive and reactive condition of the non-Indigenous Australian settler. These case study classic productions grapple with this condition. The settler seems compelled to investigate their implications in the histories of colonialism, to ponder their responsibilities in the treatment of Indigenous people and to consider their position in relation to Indigenous sovereignty. In these case studies, theatre functions as a reflective dimension for a shifting settler condition. The productions may be seen as practices of a settler culture renegotiating itself. However, the classic framework could reinforce this practice as momentous, as acclamatory rather than contemplative. In a culture where not only the condition of settlement, but also the classic is in active process, an elision of identity discourse and critical authority requires close examination. Does the resonance of settler postcolonialism urge self-reflection, or does it assuage a need for radical change? Is classic-ing compelled by a settler need for legitimacy?

Discourses of identity and Australian culture

This section takes a brief historical look at Australian culture and the associated identity discourses, to identify key tropes of Australian identity. As the new colony of Australia began to establish, 'respectable' colonists were eager to shed their convict past and therefore called their new generation children, the 'currency lads and lasses'. This was a generation of 'native-born'. The 'currency lad' subsequently transmuted into the man of the bush, an Australian legend who personified democratic and collectivist values. The later experiences of World War I saw the Australian 'digger' soldier elevated as a national type, drawing on derivative bushman characteristics that were combined with the larrikin, his urban counterpart.

Another rendition of Australian identity was the pioneer tradition, which is set in adversarial relation with his or her environment (Rickard 1988: 65). This was an Australian character

[30] The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an historic consensus of Indigenous Australians that calls for constitutional reform and recognition of Australia's First Nations peoples. Issued in May 2017, it is an invitation from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to "walk with us in a movement for the Australian people for a better future" (The Uluru Statement n.d.). Steps toward reforms such as a voice to parliament and a truth-telling process have been continually rejected by the current Liberal Coalition federal government.

forged by the challenges of settlement in the Australian landscape, 'the bush'. Similarly, idealised figures such as the shearer or the bushman correspond to the tough landscape in which they are situated. The bush is a dominant cultural landscape in Australia, and is a general notion of a natural environment, which may be dense forest, desert, outback or frontier, among others. The bush is a harsh environment but not necessarily a specific one. Depictions of the bush are explored across art forms and genres, often as a landscape that defies settlement, and was germane inspiration in painting and literature. The early Australian 'bush' poet Henry Lawson developed the bush as a popular image, celebrating the people while depicting the landscape as 'bleak and unrelenting' (Rickard 1988: 71). The experience of the land pervades identity discourses, even while this landscape is not clearly defined. "The difficulty in pinning down a specific definition for this cultural landscape is part of its appeal: it is both place (located in geography) and landscape (connected to the national identity)." (Tompkins 2006: 32). Experiences of the landscape are an integral aspect of these early national identity figures.

Paul Carter's pioneering study of the founding of Australia, *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987) puts forward a cultural history that emerges from the *felt* experience of the new continent. He is concerned with "the spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence" (Carter 1987: xxii). In the act of naming and mapping the land, the early colonists and explorers turned a strange and unfamiliar space into a place they perceived as known. In this way they produced 'Australia'. John Rickard contends that in the late twentieth century, an increasingly urban population associated the bush with the past. Rites, codes and customs, such as the emergence of beach culture, constructed rather than projected culture (Rickard 1988: 192). The landscape of the coast is also a powerful spatial environment in the Australian cultural imagination.

The cultural history of settled-invaded Australia is vividly bound to representations of space. Equally, theatre's manipulation of space constitutes a prime facility of the art form. The interconnection of what occurs in the internal space of the theatre stage and the surrounding external public space is a critical dimension of theatre's cultural capacity. Joanne Tompkins argues that, for Australian theatre, "the bush has historically been more popular as a site of actual and symbolic location than the coast, but the vast extent of both landscapes sometimes overwhelms the action and the characters, such that landscape not only governs the events that take place, but even stands in for the individual and history" (Tompkins 2006: 21). The landscape is seen as a palpable force in representations of 'Australia'.

The case study classic productions all reveal specific spatial references to Australian cultural landscapes, and their cultural significance is projected through these settings. The island of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* offers a familiar wild coastal environment. Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* juxtaposes the forest wilderness with colonial Tasmania, its STC production set on a mound of rich brown earth. Bovell's *The Secret River* transpires between a river and the bush at the colonial frontier. The interior isolation of the house in Patrick White's play *Night on Bald Mountain* is overwhelmed by the immense presence of a mountain. Each of these productions situates cultural meaning in the natural Australian landscape. In contrast, the other two productions, Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* at Malthouse and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Belvoir, convert their natural settings into urban environments. These productions respond to the built landscape of the large Australian population centres. By turning away from a natural environment as the dominant cultural space, these productions also leverage their radical theatrical edge.

The period of this thesis begins between the 1988 commemorations of the bicentenary of white settlement and the 2001 centenary of Australian Federation. This time saw issues of Indigenous rights and the country's uncertainty surrounding an Australian republic coalesce as signs of national direction (Kelly 1998: 1). Even so, the 1988 Bicentenary bolstered identity markers as a national preoccupation. "Australians share with many nations an urgent need to think about the sources of belonging, a need which strongly fuels the obsession with identity." (Dixson 1999: 17). 'The identity debate' of the 1980s saw 1970s multicultural policies come under fire. The long period of recession over these decades exposed the fragility of tolerant pluralism (Rickard 1988: 248-249). Miriam Dixson sought a path to social cohesiveness by affirming an "Anglo-Celtic core culture" and its potential to act as a "holding centre" in a transitional, newly diverse Australia. A way to integrate the tension between social diversity and cohesion. [31] (Dixson 1999: 162). Anglo-Celtic cultural identity is often analogous with (white) Australia. However, the intricate relation of colonial settlement, layers of migration and a deep-time indigeneity continually confront the idea of a fixed national identity. The trope of white Australia as Australian identity can be (and has been) used as a polemic tool for toxic provocation. The notion of diversity becomes the promise and signal of a more complex understanding of national identity.

[31] Diversity here acts as a synonym for ethnicity.

The New Wave theatre moment of the 1970s projected a felt experience of 'being Australian'. With its demise, the potential for theatre to notionally represent national identity appeared to fragment. Narratives of cohesive national identity also fractured; diversity became the overarching motif. Veronica Kelly acknowledges this fragmentation, observing a consequent division in the theatre landscape between a text-based mainstream and an innovative physical theatre. Where "middle-class old-Australian or 'Anglo-Celtic' voices are easily matched by queer, indigenous or new migrant visions" (Kelly 1998: 8). Geoffrey Milne terms this period "the third wave", with its increasing diversity of theatre structures and perspectives (Milne 2004: 260-298). Subsequent decades have seen Indigenous cultural authority progressively moving into mainstream cultural institutions. Film and television have successfully incorporated and promoted Indigenous artists and voices with many significant national and international achievements in film and television over this time. So, too, leading Indigenous visual artists have gained and maintained significant careers. In comparison, mainstream theatre appears to lag in its recognition and depiction of the cultural authority of indigeneity. At the same time, the theatre form can take a different role to other art forms within discourses of identity. Theatre has the potential to ameliorate the experience of cultural landscape and to illuminate a sense of future orientation, creating a space where questions and consequences can be exercised, imagined and felt. The interactive and reactive condition of the settler can be explored through the functions of theatre. The classic in mainstream theatre can act as a dynamic intervention and interaction with history. How does the practice of classic-ing leverage the tropes and tensions of cultural identity? Is the classic in Australian mainstream a category solely occupied by the settler?

Key concepts in postcolonial drama

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins' *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (1996) was the first full-length study of the postcolonial potential of dramatic texts.[32] Postcolonial drama follows the lead of the influential literary study, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), where postcolonial margins 'write back' to the privileged centre. Postcolonial drama functions as "an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 2). Postcolonial drama

[32] The hyphenated form, post-colonial, is used to indicate the time commencing with colonialism and the cultural process founded by the experience of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 2; Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 2). My work uses the form post-colonial to specifically refer to dramatic strategies that have been identified as key precepts of postcolonial drama.

reveals the pervading cultural effects of colonialism and develops cultural expression outside an imperialist construct. Drama is applied as an aspirational decolonising device.

Post-colonial Drama extensively surveys both settler and Indigenous plays from a range of countries including Australia Canada and India and is a significant source for my research. Perhaps due to the background and experience of the authors, the study provides salient examples of Australian plays and playwrights relevant to the case studies. Even though *Post-colonial Drama* is twenty-five years old, and the impulses of the field have changed, it continues to be a consequential and singular reference. Specifically, the constitutional principles Gilbert and Tompkins identify as 'post-colonial dramatic strategies' provide useful comparative counterpoints here. The postcolonial claims made by the classic productions are an opportunity to assess current practice of postcolonial drama and the precepts that underpin their strategic effect. *Post-colonial Drama* also offers insight into the historical and social contexts of postcolonial drama at the beginning of the time period under consideration.

There are, however, limitations to Gilbert and Tompkins' approach. Dramatic performance and the literary potential of drama appear to be interchangeable in *Post-colonial Drama*, and the terms performance, theatre, drama and acts are used synonymously. The approach assesses the post-colonial strategies using literary reading disguised as performance analysis. The possibilities of the plays are interpreted to limited effect. This is principally done on a structural level, which presents methodological problems. Stage performance is evoked by textual close reading and risks misrepresenting a production's 'real-life' effects. The approach is not enquiry into what a performance may reveal in multiple ways but is concerned with reading the text as a primary source of political intention.

By way of example, the analysis of a scene from *The Golden Age* by Louis Nowra uses Bakhtin's carnivalesque to demonstrate the disruptive representation in the drama. This scene depicts the moment when a group of people are 'discovered' in the Tasmanian wilderness:

> The audience is then rapidly transported to the bizarre and excessively corporeal world of the forest people who, although mostly mute and/or genetically deformed, none the less convey a tremendous vitality which carnivalises classical form with grotesque formlessness. […] Through such misfits, the play presents the unfinished protean and anarchic body/language extolled by Bakhtin, decentring imperial tropes to foreground corporeal performativity that promotes unruliness. (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 224).

The audience here is none other than the writers and readers. This is one possibility of performance but is presented as an inherent meaning of the play. To construe *The Golden Age*, in this instance, as a tool for anti-imperialism by counteracting 'imperial tropes', limits the resources of performance. Even so, this description may be equally understood as performance itself. From this perspective, the analysis provides a useful comparative point for the recent STC production. It makes plain a form of postcolonial resonance in this scenic moment that helps with the assessment of the claim of classic. This comparative approach to postcolonial resonance will be taken up in the third case study.

Postcolonial analysis has also looked specifically at emerging theatrical elements of dramatic practice. The perspective of hybridity in both corporeal and oral forms is addressed by Balme (1999) and Carlson (2006) in their analyses of aesthetic and dramaturgical strategies. In *Decolonizing the Stage* (1999), Christopher Balme defines 'syncretism' as a type of hybrid form that subverts hierarchy. It is a dramaturgical strategy that integrates Indigenous performance traditions into Western dramatic forms in a non-hierarchical way. Australian Aboriginal theatre and Native American cultures have extensive theatrical performance traditions, yet only selectively employ these traditions in theatre practice. Key elements of this hybrid post-colonial strategy are Indigenous dance, orality and body language. Highlighting Aboriginal realism, a formal dramatic practice that expands on European realism (Narogin 1989), Balme discusses the work of acclaimed Australian Aboriginal dramatist Jack Davis as an example of work that shows flexible integration of such elements. The "polysemic nature" of Davis' plays deconstructs a perceived opposition between the everyday and the spiritual which, from an Aboriginal viewpoint, "are not phenomenologically separate but, on the contrary, part of a continuum permitting continual interchange" (Balme 1999: 61-62). Davis' *No Sugar* (1985) uses sign language as a gestural system to signal specific Aboriginal communication and reflect on the white justice system (Balme 1999: 224-226). The examples drawn by Balme highlight the aesthetic capacities of syncretism to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into Western forms.

Marvin Carlson takes up aesthetic strategies of postcolonial plays in *Speaking in Tongues* (2006). Carlson focuses on the role of language and identifies a hybridised language that negotiates colonial and Indigenous language as "postcolonial heteroglossia". His study tracks dramatic languages in the trans-Pacific axis from the 1970s to 1990s, where bilingualism in theatre changed. Carlson draws on examples of Māori performance, illustrating that initially bilingual performance accommodated audience linguistic differences, but more recently

directly confronts an audience's lack of linguistic knowledge. Incomprehension is used as a tool to speak back to colonial power, particularly in the complex transactions of Indigenous and colonial languages (Carlson 2006: 141). Postcolonial heteroglossia examines increasingly complex negotiations across language accelerated by the emergence of Indigenous and immigrant languages. Both Carlson and Balme focus on works by Indigenous artists to offer aesthetic frameworks for the integration of postcolonial elements.

Performance and Cosmopolitics, Cross-cultural Transactions in Australasia by Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo (2007) considers cosmopolitanism and globalisation in Australasian cultural practice. They argue that cross-cultural exchange is rarely free of politics and question the assumption that cosmopolitanism does away with inequity. The study pinpoints the influence of Aboriginal and Asian culture on mainstream Australian cultural practice, specifically, the practice of Indigenous cross-casting in local productions of European canonical theatre. Gilbert and Lo reveal the dilemma faced by Indigenous actors who assert their cultural specificity even while aspiring for careers that recognise them as equal to their peers. This is further complicated by the stage reception which often reads their appearance as markers of relevant meaning (Gilbert and Lo 2007: 133). The critical analysis emphasises the exchange across cultures in Australia as a materialist consideration (Gilbert and Lo 2007: 4-11). In a similar vein, Ric Knowles defines a materialist understanding of intercultural theatre as defined by one question: "Who benefits?" (Knowles 2010: 43). While these representative studies reflect the scholarly interest of the period, investigations have shifted from the aesthetic implications of postcolonial drama to the wider ramifications of Indigenous cultures within the settler nation.

This book views the classic as an embedded practice and form of Australian settler imagination, and regards the settler condition as in a process of change. To consider the effects of postcolonial resonance in the productions at hand, each case study looks at their use of post-colonial dramatic strategies. These classic productions variously take up mimicry, historical revision, corporeal representation, foreign language use and interaction with an imperial canon. The first case study looks at interpretations of Shakespeare and local postcolonial expectations. The second appraises negotiations between tropes of European and Anglo-Celtic identity. The two final case studies explore the resonances of agency and authenticity surrounding the new Australian classics. These examples demonstrate that settler culture has shifted from concerns of British imperial legacy to considering its impact on

Indigenous peoples and culture. However, the difficult question of whether these performances as classic can reconcile the young country's history remains open.

The final part of this chapter explores postcolonial resonance by comparison, taking in historical factors and theatrical practice of Australia and Canada. Even though both countries share the experience of British colonisation and have a strong interest in performing Shakespeare, the common factors mostly stop there. The following section explores differences in cultural response to Shakespeare in India and Canada and considers Australian postcolonial relations to classic.

Colonial occupation and Shakespeare in India

Colonial occupation of the subcontinent has a long and complex history. British involvement in India began well before the English Crown occupied and directly ruled the country. As early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, British, Dutch, French and other trading posts were established on the Indian subcontinent. The British transacted as the East India Company and built trade upon the sophisticated Indian economy. They also had aggressive ambitions, and with the disintegration of the Mogul Empire, and incursion and war in Eastern and Southern India, a new British Empire was established in Bengal in the 1760s under East India Company authority. Subsequent wars lasted into the nineteenth century as British hegemony was imposed across the continent. These were fought by armies of Indian sepoys established by the British. By the 1820s, more than 200,000 Indian soldiers and 40,000 British troops were there, all paid by Indian taxpayers (Marshall 1996: 26). The transferral of governance to Britain occurred after the brutal 1857 rebellion, which left behind a legacy of racial hatred (Raychaudhuri 2001: 359). The British Raj maintained colonial rule from 1858 to 1947 and proclaimed Queen Victoria as the Empress of India.

The occupying British Raj was relatively small in number compared to the population of several hundred million Indians. The people of the Indian subcontinent have a diverse number of languages and religions and are a mostly rural population. The colonisers gained the cooperation and acquiescence of the locals in part by devolving certain powers and opening access to some resources. This created interest groups willing to collaborate with the British, and so-called 'divide and rule' powers. With the introduction of English as a key to new bureaucratic careers, for example, colonial rule created an elite even though these middle-ranking Indian bureaucrats held little administrative power. British occupation was particularly marked by communal violence notably with independence and the Partition of

British India into Pakistan and India. This decision triggered riots and an enormous wave of migration, sparking violence that killed between 200,000 and two million people (Ansari 2017). When the British left the country in 1947, nearly half of the population was below the poverty line, the average life expectancy was twenty-nine years and eighty-eight percent of the population was illiterate (Raychaudhuri 2001: 362). The legacy of British occupation had little to do with social justice. Following independence, English has remained the language of administration and intellectual discourse in India, even though the vast majority of the country does not speak or understand the language.

Shakespeare in India may be seen as a symbol of imperial authority. Colonial English education featured Shakespeare's plays and language and this emphasis created "a single ideological climate" according to Ashcroft et al. (1989: 3).[33] Colonialism violently imposed an external 'other' Western culture onto India. But before this, a homogenous 'we' did not exist: "The idea that a diverse population of the continent constituted a nation was a product of British rule." (Raychaudhuri 2001: 366). Furthermore, notions of indigeneity have become increasingly complex since independence. When Shakespeare is performed in India, a more complex and intrinsic relationship develops. The diverse cultures of India influence Shakespeare's works and the works correspond with Indian cultural practice. Indian Shakespeare cannot simply be understood as imperial imposition: his presence has wider implications. For example, as an opportunity to reconfigure Shakespeare for traditional use. Shakespeare has become culturally constituent in India. Nevertheless, Shakespeare does interact with British colonial history.

The question of language as a pervading colonial cultural construct cannot be disregarded, even though many people in India are illiterate or have no education in English. India has a strong connection to Shakespeare, in a span of influence where, "outside the Western world, India has the longest and most intense engagement with Shakespeare of any country anywhere" (Chaudhuri cited in Panja and Saraf 2016: 4). The significance of Shakespeare in India is shaped by theatre's dominant position and its cinematic affiliation. The wider Indian population eagerly engages in cultural activity across multiple and complex theatre traditions.

[33] Intellectual colonisation happened with the imposition of English, with Shakespeare as pivotal to literary knowledge. While in England, university education centred on Greek and Latin classics, in India Shakespeare was at the centre of instruction. Shakespeare was part of English literature courses taught in India before they were taught in England (Panja and Saraf 2016: 4) A systematic study of English literature and the *Education Act* of 1835 led to a division of an 'academic' Shakespeare and popular adapted Shakespeare. (Trivedi 2005: 15).

There is a vast number of cinema and theatre audiences in the country. A bond with Shakespeare spans cultural differences, and diverse adaptations and translations nurture traditions of theatre spectacle. Shakespeare's plays have agency in Indian classic and folk traditions, as much as local traditions exert their own agential appropriation of Shakespeare (Panja and Saraf 2016: 5–10). Theatre traditions have long done things *with* Shakespeare, which demonstrates a cultural flexibility and implies that Shakespeare is not imposed. Panja and Saraf see regional artistic relationships with Shakespeare as a "creative interface" that remains productive and contemporary (Panja and Saraf 2016: 3). Shakespeare's works take a collaborative role in India and thus resist the notion of the Bard as a universal cultural value.

Poonam Trivedi suggests: "Though colonialism brought him to the subcontinent, Shakespeare has been utterly absorbed into the Indian imagination." (cited in Buckley 2016: 89). Contemporary examples of Shakespeare's theatrical imaginary in India include The Company Theatre's *Hamlet the Clown Prince* in 2009 and 2016. This is the first of four Shakespeare adaptations by director Rajat Kapoor that feature a troupe of clowns as the central characters. Even the sense of absurdity that is taken to this iconic tragedy does not dilute the deeper emotions of the story.[34] Kapoor does not adapt Shakespeare's language to colloquial English; rather, the clown characters use a stylised gibberish as the adapted form of Shakespearean.[35] A profound translation of the language that ridicules the notion of translation itself. This linguistic exploitation effectively parodies the idea of Shakespearean English as the gold standard of the language.

The Company Theatre's highly successful *Piya Behrupiya*, a Hindi translation/adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, was at the Globe to Globe Festival in 2012. The play was set in an Indian context using folk song and dance, and employed diverse Hindi regional dialects to distinguish characters and acknowledge the particularity of Shakespeare's use of English. The director Atul Kumar's infidelity to the source challenged assumed hierarchies of the text as well as the stipulations of the festival (Buckley 2016: 74). The production "risked creating an exoticized and artificialized representation", yet also conveyed an Indian intercultural richness (Buckley 2016: 82). Elizabeth Schafer identified direct strikes on British interpretations of the text, such as the recasting of Orsino as a comic figure, which was, "one of many refreshing and robust demolition jobs that the production carried out on current

[34] "Hamlet the Clown Prince", The Hindu 21/7/2009.

[35] "Hamlet the Clown Prince: Imbuing sombre Shakespearean characters with joviality and colour", Scroll.in 14/12/2016.

British pieties in relation to the staging of *Twelfth Night*" (Schafer 2013: 68). The observation that the production ironized a British approach indicates the scope of the appropriation. This was not talking back to the centre but is an interaction that assumes such a centre does not exist; a confidence that infers the British have something to learn about themselves from this production. Postcolonial assumptions of countering imperial authority appear to be blown aside in the "cheeky, thumb-your-nose-at-a-classic production" (Panja and Saraf 2016: 10), where reflexive performative moments in *Piya Behrupiya* demonstrate Shakespeare is considered as a right in India rather than an inheritance.

Colonial settlement and Shakespeare in Canada and Australia

Both Australia and Canada are British settlement colonies, so the Canadian reception of Shakespeare may offer strong consonance with Australia. However, historical and social factors indicate the significant cultural differences between the two countries, differences that are reflected in the reception of Shakespeare.

The histories of settlement in Canada and Australia diverge markedly. As Terra Australis Incognita or Nouvelle Hollande remained a largely imagined southern landmass during the seventeenth century, the French and English established colonies in territories of now Canada and the United States. In the mid-1700s, France and England battled for control over North America. Eventually, France ceded Canada to the British, but only twelve years later British colonies declared their independence and formed the United States. Around this time, the English explorer Captain James Cook briefly landed on the east coast of Australia at a place he called Botany Bay. Noting its suitability for settlement, he 'took possession' for the British Crown. When the United States gained independence, Britain lost part of North America as well as its destination for transported criminals. In 1788, an alternative was found as a fleet of eleven British ships carrying 750 convicts as well as soldiers and officials landed on the east coast of Australia to establish a new British penal settlement. By this time, Canada was establishing its democratic institutions, with the 1791 constitutional act officially naming the country Canada.

Both Canada and Australia have strong traditions of migration that began in their early history. In the first decades of the 1800s in Australia, there was fierce debate about increasing the numbers of transported convicts to meet a wide labour shortage, as notions of white Australia were strongly defended (Clark 1963: 108-112). Through the period to the last convict transportation in 1868, Australia took more than 160,000 convicts and 200,000 free

settlers and assisted migrants. The gold rushes of the mid-1800s transformed the country, quadrupling the country's population from 430,000 to 1.7 million including thousands of Chinese people. In Canada, a distinct French-Canadian identity was maintained alongside British inheritance. The economic boom in the last decade of the 1800s saw millions of British and Americans and thousands of Ukrainians, Poles, Germans and other Europeans immigrate to Canada and settle in the West. Settlement was opened up by the Mounties who were sent to pacify uprisings and negotiate with the Indigenous peoples. The Canadian Mountie persists as a heroic national figure representing the idea of benevolent conquest. However, there were many settler-Indigenous conflicts during the appropriation of these lands (Regan 2010: 102). Nevertheless, treaties were struck with Indigenous peoples, which differs from the British proclamation of sovereignty when claiming Australia as terra nullius, an uninhabited land. The self-governing dominion of Canada was declared in 1867, while Australia became a Federation of six states and two territories in 1901. Both countries maintain the British sovereign as the head of state today. In 1999, a constitutional referendum for Australia to become a republic was rejected.

Canada and Australia fought in the two world wars alongside Britain. The experience of the First World War has been described as the 'birth of the nation' for both countries. An alliance between the US and Australia saw Australian men drafted to fight in Vietnam, while Canada did not directly take part in the Vietnam War. The geographic adjacency of the US impacts on Canada. Americans were provided haven when evading the Vietnam draft, a migration comparable to the escape of enslaved African Americans to Canada in the 1850s. There is history of conflict between the neighbouring countries.[36] The US constitutes a strong cultural counterpoint for Canada. In Australia, the geographical region has a different cultural influence. Australia is the smallest continent in the world and the largest country in the Southern Hemisphere. Although situated in the Asia-Pacific, many Australians have European heritage. External geographical pressures on Canadian and Australian cultural inheritance differ greatly.

These differences are also reflected in the reception of Shakespeare. In Canada, Shakespeare is considered central to Canadian national culture, and adapted Shakespeare is seen in opposition to mainstream Shakespeare. Ric Knowles considers Canada's postcolonial

[36] In 1812, the US invaded Canada and burnt their Government House and Parliament buildings. Canada retaliated and burnt down the White House. The British invested heavily in Canadian defense and this attempt to take possession of Canada failed. (Gov. Canada).

positioning as existing in “a peculiar hothouse of complex colonial relations”, where colonial displacement and defeat, and waves of immigrant cultural layers, interact with each other and with Shakespeare and Canada (Knowles 2004: 15). The colonial inheritance drives cultural symbolic meaning and develops complex relational enactments of Shakespeare (Knowles 2009). In contrast to Canadian adaptations, Australia is predominantly concerned with producing ‘intact’ versions of Shakespeare’s works. Over the period at hand, Australia has limited engagement with forms of Shakespeare other than the direct text. This contradicts the common appropriations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and offers insight into the critical debate in recent decades on classic adaptation.

There is widespread practice of Shakespeare adaptation across Canada’s diverse cultures. This confidence may in part be steered by linguistic circumstance, where two official languages, a diversity of spoken language and the role of Indigenous cultures work to frame the production of Shakespeare. The Canadian colonial inheritance of French as well as English embeds linguistic diversity alongside the cultural importance of First Nation languages and the migrant languages which are spoken by twenty percent of the population.[37] This may provoke a consequent urge to translate Shakespeare. The variety of language appears to strengthen translation and adaptation as a cultural force.

Conversely, the Australian relation to Shakespeare may be partly conditioned by the prime position of the English language. Although there is not an officially recognised first language in Australia, English has been the de facto Lingua Franca since settlement-invasion, the time when the Indigenous inhabitants spoke more than 250 languages. Currently, just under eighty percent of the Australian population speak English only, and twenty percent speak a language other than English at home. Like Canada, diverse immigrant cultures affect the country’s cultural layers. However, twenty-five percent of Australians were born overseas, a larger proportion than any other settlement society (Macintyre 2009: 306). Even so, cultural diversity is not necessarily a defining aspect of Shakespeare enactment, just as the close geographical relationship to Asia has limited effect on Australian Shakespeare.[38] A minimal adaptive response may indicate a sense of reverence to Shakespeare’s language, which could be considered as heightened consciousness of a symbolic and imperial Shakespeare. Yet, the

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[37] There is a broad linguistic diversity of around twenty percent of the population who speak a language other than English or French, reflecting the country’s diverse migrant background and the extensive and diverse number of Indigenous languages that are mother tongue for around 0.6% of the population.

[38] An exception here is the Suzuki-Playbox project in 1992, *The Chronicle of Macbeth* (see Carruthers 1996).

contained adaptive mentality also indicates a form of postcolonial engagement more complex than direct counteraction. It may be unproductive to simply view Shakespeare's significance in Australia through opposing characteristics of postcolonial reaction and crypto-colonial enaction.

In Canada, there is significant academic and critical discussion on Shakespeare performance, in contrast to the relatively sparse response in Australia. The Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project (CASP) contains over fifty playscripts and more than 450 dramatic adaptations in its database and holds associated visual materials from the nineteenth century to present day. This is a resource that registers "the significant investment Canadian cultural communities have made in re-inventing, appropriating, bastardizing, hijacking, and adapting Shakespeare to their own purposes" (Fischlin 2004). The range of interactions produces nuanced versions across various modes and within a range of cultural contexts that move beyond borrowing from Shakespeare's cultural capital. Yet, in all the various adaptations of Shakespeare, Canadian Shakespeare is particularly concerned with reflecting on what it means to be Canadian (Fischlin 2007; 2014: 355).

Contemporary adaptation of Shakespeare in Australia is limited. Only a handful of Australian playwrights have engaged with a Shakespearean source. Variations on structure and direct reference to Shakespeare nonetheless dramaturgically shape widely regarded Australian plays, an influence that may court their popularity. The leading proponent is Michael Gow's *Away* (1986), a play that is structured using *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear* to develop a nostalgic and emotional comedy of a Shakespearean kind (Parsons 1995: 77). Regularly making its way onto high school reading lists, this play has enduring, popular success, is studied and produced in schools and has received important mainstream productions (McCallum 2009: 257). David Malouf's *Blood Relations* (1987) is an adaptation of *The Tempest* that focuses on social rather than political critique (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 33) and David Williamson's *Dead White Males* (1995) uses the appearance of Shakespeare as a recurring motif (McCallum 2009: 180; Houlahan 2014: 364). There have been a number of parodic versions of *Hamlet*, including the Nimrod Theatre Company's comic review *Hamlet on Ice* (1971), and The Listies' version at the STC, *The Tragedy of Hamlet: Prince of Skidmark* (2016, 2018). The 1987 adaptation, *The Popular Mechanicals* by Keith Robinson and William Shakespeare has received fifteen revival productions.[39] In

[39] This production information was drawn from the AusStage database.

2013, Michael Kantor and Tom E. Lewis adapted *King Lear* in a tale of two Indigenous families, *The Shadow King*. Performed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cast, the adaptation included Aboriginal and creole languages. The 2013 Malthouse production went on to tour to the Barbican in London in 2016. These examples of mainstream Australian Shakespeare adaptation, however, are few in number compared to Canadian versions.

It is clear there is little shared affinity between Australia and Canada for Shakespearean adaptation. However, there are interesting theatre historical correlations between the two countries, common perceptions of a maturing settler culture, and comparable efforts to establish national theatre institutions. The development of a national theatre and the role of Shakespeare has provocative parallels. In Canada, the impact of a symbolic mainstream and colonial Shakespeare is prefigured in the 1953 founding of the Stratford Summer Festival in rural Ontario. Tyrone Guthrie, one of the leading English producers of Shakespeare at the time, was involved in the conception of a theatre built to Elizabethan audience arrangements, which was realised by Canadian enthusiasm and finance. Guthrie saw the opportunity to put his ideas of finding a more satisfactory 'authentic' method of staging Shakespeare into reality, an opportunity that had been frustrated in England (Carson 2010: 60). Stratford, Ontario was well positioned to access an international news network and the project quickly gained international attention. The festival was firstly named the Canadian National Theatre, was led by an Englishman and had a repertoire dedicated to the English canon that was performed by English actors. Although now significantly diversified, the Stratford Festival continues to dedicate much of its repertoire to Shakespeare. This festival's resources and cultural cachet stake a decisive contraposition for wider production of Canadian Shakespeare, acting as counterweight for the extensive variety of Shakespeare adaptation.

Guthrie's influence on the theatrical and cultural direction at the time was also felt in Australia, although his engagement took a different path. In 1949, input from the English producer and director was also sought for the development of a professional and national theatre. This had been under discussion at a federal government level for decades, influenced by the development of English national culture by the Arts Council of Great Britain (Rees 1973: 248; Leahy 2009: 135). Guthrie's four-page report on the development of an Australian national theatre was the result of a two-week visit as a guest of the British Council (Parsons 1995: 255). This report was "cold-shouldered" by those working in the theatre and the wider public (Rees 1973: 249). With a change of federal government, the report was subsequently shelved. There was neither enthusiasm nor finance for Guthrie's recommendations. While

this model of cultural development eventually prescribed the model of English import taken up by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), the combination of political circumstance and divided cultural interests at the time ensured that no equivalent national theatre was established.

Unlike for Canada, postcolonial Shakespeare in Australia does not clearly take a counter position. The dominant J. C. Williamson's lavish English-type stage productions central to the theatrical offering in Australia for close to 100 years, the work of the AETT which moved in similar patterns, the countless lauded visits from aging and current stage stars, this history of imposed models of production and presentation in Australia still fails to transmit the distinctive signal of Canadian Shakespeare at Stratford Ontario. Shakespeare's role in Australia is simultaneously inextricable and diffused, integral to the repertoire of the professional mainstream, at the same time evidence of an alternative Australianised and localised classic dramatic tradition (Milne 2004: 121). In Australia, cultural individuals and institutions divided, embroiled and ultimately avoided a representative national theatre. In Canada, the Canadian National Theatre imposed a crypto-colonial Stratford ersatz to dominate the dramatic imagination of the country. This inevitably instituted mainstream Shakespeare as clear target for postcolonial response.

Within Canadian settler-invader culture, Shakespeare can be used to culturally traverse the authority of British culture as well as explore an authority of Indigenous culture.[40] For example, the reappropriation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in *Julius Caesar, Death of a Chief* by Native Earth Performing Arts in 2008, used a process of training and performance to maintain but rearrange and recontextualise Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare was a familiar frame in which to explore specific challenges for the Canadian Indigenous community (Knowles 2009: 381-383; 2010: 65-67; Mackenzie 2017: 116-121). Ric Knowles, a white settler critic analysing the production, observed that his "anticipated postcolonial critique in *Death of a Chief* was replaced by a project that generally accepted the cultural authority and 'universality' of Shakespeare but laid claim to that authority and that

[40] Canadian Native performing arts development is discussed by Helen Peters who details the supporting institutional structures that have been established since the 1970s. These companies and associations seek to "preserve Native traditions and develop them into contemporary art forms that inform and enrich Canadian heritage through programmes that promote, tour, train and counsel Native artists and administer projects initiated by Native artists themselves." (Peters 2010: 6). The reach and number of Canadian Aboriginal theatre schools and companies attests to the significant intercultural work done in this area. Self-determination is central to the empowerment of the artists and the work of these many companies.

universality" (Knowles 2010: 63). Knowles contemplates his scholarly assumptions brought to viewing the project, to recognise:

> My own tendency to focus, post-new-historically and post-colonially, on 'Shakespeare" as agent of the colonial project – and my consequent interest in adaptations as deconstructions, disarticulations, and revisionings – had blinded me to the potential practical use of Shakespeare for First Nations communities-in-the-(re)making. (Knowles 2007: 62).

By claiming the authority of Shakespeare for its own purpose, this Indigenous production challenged the precept of resistance to the colonial agency of Shakespeare. The reverse was evident: intact Shakespeare was sufficient and expressive material to reflect and form local cultures. This challenged expectations of postcolonial counter-canon. The ideology of Shakespeare and the counter position of adaptation are significantly called into question. Moreover, it may be that by laying claim to Shakespeare for its own purpose, this production also shifts ground in the complex settler position.

This historical snapshot suggests a changing postcolonial resonance in Canadian Shakespeare. This is also reflected in scholarly approaches to Shakespeare. In the 1990s, there was a turn in the discourse around Shakespeare, where the Bard's geographical origin became less crucial and the contingency of cultural production increasingly important. Meaning made from Shakespeare in places other than Britain was more closely examined (Flaherty 2011: 16). Shakespeare has significant presence on the Australian stage and is the most produced playwright over the time since settlement;[41] even so, global surveys of Shakespeare have made obvious omissions of Australian production.[42] In light of his popularity, theatre scholarship on Shakespeare in Australia seems limited compared to Canadian or British attention. Critical literature on postcolonial Australian versions of Shakespeare tends to emphasise accent or location as performative and interpretive indicators.

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[41] Figures drawn from the AusStage database indicate there were 1,945 professional productions since settlement. A figure that is threefold greater than the next produced playwright, Australian David Williamson (Meyrick 2012).

[42] From the position of twentieth century theatre history, Goldner and Madelaine highlight Lily Brayton's role as Cleopatra in Oscar Asche's 1912 spectacular Melbourne production which contradicts David Bevington's survey in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* where Brayton is observed as an actor that "stayed away" from Cleopatra. (Goldner and Madelaine 2001: 2). Closer to the concerns of this research, the Arden Shakespeare and Shakespeare in Production (1999) versions of *The Tempest* make almost no reference to any Australian production or perspective. This is also in part a result of a restricted view of postcolonial countries where the settler is subsumed into occupied colonies.

In the single major historical study of Shakespeare on the Australian stage, *O Brave New World: Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the Australian Stage*, John Goldner declares that:

> catering for specifically Australian tastes and attitudes scarcely became possible until Australian society claimed post-colonial status: one index of this is the way in which the composition of locally-based Shakespeare touring companies (a phenomenon in themselves) became more Australian. (Goldner and Madelaine 2001: 10).

Accordingly, postcolonialism frees Shakespeare for local use. But what does this 'local' represent, who is the 'Australian' assigned? According to Goldner, the prime proponent of this phenomenon is the mainstream touring company, Bell Shakespeare Company, who by virtue of touring into most major cities, stakes claim as the national theatre of Australia. This company was established by actor and director John Bell, and positions Shakespeare as a national playwright by using the determiner "Bell" before "Shakespeare" to signal a specific Australian identity. Bell's Shakespeare interpretations, like those of the New Wave company Nimrod, can be seen as reaction to a conservative and traditional mainstream. These works find their postcolonial expression in the development of an "energetic and physical" Australian acting style (Kiernander 2001: 242). It is interesting to note that *John Bell and a Post-colonial Australian Shakespeare 1963-2000* (Kiernander 2001) assesses Bell's work on 'postcolonial' qualities, while the most recent full-length study of the company, *John Bell, Shakespeare and the Quest for a New Australian theatre* (Kiernander 2015) barely makes reference to postcolonial force. This significant shift in analytical focus may reflect a change in academic interests as much as the more comprehensive assessment of Bell's work.

Bell Shakespeare generates expectations of postcolonial Shakespeare reflected in a distinctive 'Australian' style. A 'larrikin' acting approach is analogous with much of Bell's work, and is a trope readily associated with Australian settler identity. Accent, localisation, or the carnivalesque determine the national characteristics of the Bell Shakespeare stage, anticipating an Australian settler identity in tension with other possible cultural representations. Casting choices reflect the "current social mix and social attitudes" (Goldner and Madelaine 2001: 11) to encompass the cultural backgrounds of the actors. Kiernander focuses on the performative characteristics that work to "refashion Shakespeare for self-consciously antipodean consumption" (Kiernander 2015: 158). Australian settler culture is assumed to be postcolonial because it eschews British accent and engages actors with diverse backgrounds. Bell Shakespeare is thus posited as proof of Australian postcolonial achievement.

Kate Flaherty (2011) questions postcolonial assumptions that revolve around Shakespeare. She suggests that the political function of textual appropriation and rewriting against hegemonic Shakespeare is countered by the performative cultural contexts at hand. Justifiably arguing that, "habits of thought […] co-opt Shakespeare to performatively 'mean' them" (Flaherty 2011: 19). This observation challenges the assumption that Shakespeare can never be fully appropriated by postcolonial process (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 23). This is an assumption that interaction with Shakespeare is a necessary yet unattainable postcolonial goal (Flaherty 2011: 23). Flaherty focuses on Shakespeare's metatheatricality and the multivalence of performance as the place for the culturally specific meaning of Australian Shakespeare. Flaherty pays attention to cultural mores such as masculinity, the conception of space and the exertion of authority, themes reflected in the three Shakespeare plays under her consideration. Mark Houlahan also notes Australian productions of *Hamlet* that have "resisted easy nationalising sentiment in production styles" (Houlahan 2014: 360). Flaherty's comparative and detailed view across a range of mainstream productions highlights the instability of Shakespeare as an imperial symbol, to suggest that Shakespeare is owned by Australia "as we play it". Her assessment therefore rejects appropriation as a necessary factor to create an Australian Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's role in Australian mainstream theatre is ambivalent. Shakespeare simultaneously secures a sense of intrinsic cultural value, reveals a conspicuous need to measure up, and calibrates an Australian cultural consciousness where Shakespeare matters. Is his predominance a sign of potential of the plays and their inherent agency? Or does his popularity reflect continuing colonial relations? Scholarship proposes a postcolonial relationship to Shakespeare has been achieved in Australia, yet this perspective may be constrained by expectations of tradition. Ambitions of postcolonial expression through Shakespeare can be realised by a set of stylistic expectations or may be completely bypassed. Despite a history of irreverent adaptation, an apprehensive Australian relationship with Shakespeare lingers when attached to the idea of national representation. On the Australian stage, Shakespeare predominates as the most obvious representative of classic, yet his role as postcolonial Australian classic remains an equivocal field of inquiry.

2. Australian Postcolonial Classic: Shakespeare's Role

This first case study of classic in Australia focuses on postcolonial Shakespeare in performance on a specific stage. Belvoir Theatre Company B's 1995 production of *The Tempest*, a play widely considered to be a fable of colonisation, is the initial production under investigation. The analysis then takes another Belvoir Shakespeare produced in the following decade, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2004. Each play carries heightened production expectations. Do the directors meet, confront, shape or confound these? How do the productions mediate settler identity in relation to Indigenous authenticity? This case study investigates aesthetic and social-political aspects of Shakespeare productions and considers the ways they are used as creative sites for local cultural questioning.

To begin, this case study compares Canadian and Australian expectations of Shakespeare's paradigmatic postcolonial *The Tempest*. This wider context offers a comparative structure for the analysis of the Belvoir production. Since Aimè Cesare's 1969 adaptation confronted colonisation by casting a white Prospero, a mulatto Ariel and Caliban as a black slave, it has been difficult to avoid a postcolonial reading of the play. This is "the text most widely chosen for counter-discursive interrogations of the Shakespeare canon" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 25). Postcolonial interpretation can be literal, where Prospero embodies the coloniser and the slaves, Caliban and Ariel, form the postcolonial response. Such a dichotomy between Prospero and his slaves may overlook the third position of the settler, possibly represented by the figure of Miranda. Diana Brydon's ground-breaking essays on Canadian literary appropriation of Shakespeare calls Miranda, Canada, "attempting to create neo-Europe in an invaded land, torn between Old World fathers and suitors while unable to ignore the just grievances of those her culture is displacing" (Brydon cited in Vaughan and Vaughan1991: 109). Rewriting from the view of the settler is important to a literary reading of the play. However, Canadian theatre productions have principally focused on issues of colonisation and the depiction and agency of the First Nations subject.

The Tempest: postcolonial settler interpretations

A 1989 acclaimed postcolonial interpretation of *The Tempest* by Canadian Skylight Theatre did not adapt the original text and placed the action in the time of first British settlement and James Cook's eighteenth-century voyages, casting First Nations actors as Ariel and Caliban. Critical response to this renowned production has changed over time. Knowles suggests this production "coat-tailed" on the cultural authority of Shakespeare, presenting both an original

"authentic" version and an "authentic" postcolonial perspective (Knowles 2004: 23). Other assessments see an inherent racism in both the production and the playtext. Caliban bears limited agency, unable to convey the real power of the North American Indian (Peters 1993: 7). The rape of Miranda by Caliban, fuelled by alcohol and met with laughter from the audience, reinforced stereotypes of the dark rapist and the pure white settler woman (Mackenzie 2017: 115). However, the performance of Ariel gains more latitude. Based on the Indigenous trickster figure of Nanabush, this role has greater range and dynamic potential. The masque, depicted as a traditional potlatch, portrays Ariel's multiple personalities and spiritual power (Peters 2010: 8). This is a postcolonial example of "performative counter-discourse shaped to fit the contingencies of local history." (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 26).

In Britain, the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2006 production of *The Tempest* drew on Indigenous imagery and seemed to confirm the racist potential of Shakespeare's play. Set in an artic wasteland, the production used native images and dance in the casting of Ariel, the setting, the masque and the magic elements. Ric Knowles acknowledged the production's aesthetic beauty but attacked it as "appalling misappropriation, decontextualization, commodification, and eroticization of Native legends and images, many of them sacred" (Knowles 2007: 53). Another perspective of Canadian postcolonial cultural ownership through Shakespeare is the work of Quebecois director Robert Lepage, best known for his work in the international festival circuit. In 2011, Robert Lepage and his company, Ex Machina worked in collaboration with the Huron-Wendat Nation on an outdoor version of *The Tempest*. The production used casting, setting, the masque and banquet scenes to envisage the power balance of early-contact moments.[43] Caliban's role was significantly reconfigured in the final scene to give him agency over Prospero where "Caliban pondered First Nations retribution or reconciliation with axe in hand" (Poll 2018: 140-41). The anxiety produced in such moments handed agency to the First Nations characters. This was reflected in the production process through contained aspects of artistic transaction and the efforts by Ex Machina to facilitate intercultural exchange (Poll 2018: 135). This indicates a potential for Caliban to gain contemporary postcolonial agency. Yet more recent Lepage productions point

[43] The collaborative production echoed the 1826 meeting between Edmund Kean and the Huron chiefs which took place after Kean had successfully performed *Richard III* in Quebec City and Montreal following an unsuccessful tour of the US. The meeting between the First Nations group and Kean is portrayed in Joseph Légaré's painting "Edmund Kean Reciting Before the Hurons" c.1826 (Fischlin 2014: 9). The costume design for the Ex Machina *Tempest* was inspired by the idealised seventeenth century New France as depicted by the nineteenth century painter. The masque, in contrast, was staged by the Sandokwa Dance Troupe, who in subtle tones counterpointed the high gloss aesthetic of the other characters and served to highlight the fantasy that was Légaré's romanticised view of New France (Poll 2018: 139).

in a different direction. *Kanata* in 2018, portrayed a white settler relationship with an Indigenous woman, and *Slav*, also in 2018, had a predominantly white cast dressed up as cotton pickers who sang slave songs. These were blatant cultural appropriations that took an increasingly iconoclastic view of cultural ownership. Media coverage at the time pitted artistic freedom against the right to tell the stories of minority groups (Scott 2018). Forms of Indigenous representation, both within the artistic process as collaborators or consultants and the representations in the performance, were key issues for some Canadian Indigenous artists, who used the example of high-profile artists such as Lepage as counterpoint to their own lack of artistic opportunities.[44] These projects recall earlier debate around the work of Peter Brook or Ariane Mnouchkine, or Lepage himself, yet their tenor indicates an increasingly audacious attitude towards the responsibilities of Indigenous representation. These projects serve as contemporary indication of authenticity as cultural control, a diametric that appears to escalate over the period in consideration.

In Australia, Indigenous representation in Shakespeare underpinned a social process of reconciliation. Elizabeth Schafer (2003) coins the term “Reconciliation Shakespeare” to frame her cogent view of Shakespeare’s role in the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians during the 1990s. Her analyses include Simon Phillips’ 2001 production of *The Tempest* with the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) performed as part of the centenary celebrations of Australian Federation. Over this decade there was considerable mainstream attention on the play, with Bell Shakespeare producing *The Tempest* in 1998 and 2001. In 1990, the year of Neil Armfield’s first production of *The Tempest*, there were two other mainstream state company productions. None of these made any attempt to highlight Aboriginal issues (Schafer 2003: 75). However, colonial Australia was explicit in Phillips’ 2001 MTC production, with white-wigged First Fleet officers and convict labourer servants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander actors playing Ariel and Caliban, and the spirit world of the island and the masque presented by an Aboriginal dance company. This production was “the first to localise the play so completely” (Tweg 2004: 46). Caliban was a slave who could no longer access his spiritual world. At the end of the play, he was reconciled with Prospero and left in charge of the island. The final scene was rewritten for Ariel who “performed a ritual of cleansing and purification” to divest herself of

[44] Review: In Robert Lepage’s ‘Kanata’, the Director, too, plays the victim, The New York Times 17/12/2018; Robert Lepage’s controversial ‘Kanata’ opens in Paris as a rehearsal, Montreal Gazette 20/12/2018; Controversial Lepage show ‘Kanata’ cancelled after co-producers withdraw financial support, National Post 26/7/2018.

colonisation (Schafer 2003: 72). This localisation offers conscious postcolonial critique and likens approaches taken in Canadian productions. Although, the addition of a cleaning ritual for Ariel as the final image of the play is a unique interpretation.

Critical reception of the MTC production was concerned by the presence of an Aboriginal spirit world within the Western traditional canon:

> An aboriginal takeover of the spirit world of *The Tempest* not only risks marginalisation in terms of today's dominant cultures, which take the material so much more seriously than the spiritual, but also leaves the aboriginal performers to deal with what most modern audiences traditionally find the play's most tedious section, the masque. (Schafer 2003: 73)

Helen Gilbert differentiates between non-traditional casting practice that bills Aboriginal actors equally with their white counterparts as "aboriginalised", and casting "racially marked roles" such as Caliban (Gilbert 1998: 79). This implies a racial marking in *Tempest*s that offers limited postcolonial efficacy. Race is integral to the reading of the MTC production with its literal casting approach and explicit historical point in time. The cross-over of Indigenous ritual with the classic Western dramatic form is the central attempt to overhaul Shakespeare as postcolonial inscription.[45]

Belvoir's *The Tempest* sits apart from these postcolonial interpretations. With a muted postcolonial approach, the Belvoir production anticipates the significant force of Indigenous representation in Australian Shakespeare in the following decades. Armfield's production uses the Aboriginal Caliban figure to establish dominance and control as backdrop to a deeper exploration of mercy and reconciliation. Even though this Caliban shares his reference point with that of the MTC production, an Aboriginal man from early contact, the political efficacy of the reference varies significantly. Colonial assumptions within the playtext may limit the representation of Caliban, even so, the Belvoir production leverages this role to enable wider contemplation of the humanist concerns of the play.

By staging Caliban as an Aboriginal original inhabitant, the production also broadly considers the responsibilities and consequences of settlement. This interpretation contemplates the relational complex of the settler-invader but is not principally concerned

[45] For a detailed analysis of this production see Sue Tweg (2004), and on the 1999 production, Emma Cox (2004).

with recasting along postcolonial lines. In an interview, director Neil Armfield discussed casting Kevin Smith as Caliban:

> *The Tempest* was originally conceived in 1990 with Max Cullen as Caliban. After that I started to work with Uncle Kevin Smith in a number of roles. He was the lead actor in Nick Parsons' *Dead Heart*. We formed this little company in 1994 which was Geoffrey Rush and the cast of *Hamlet*, and I tried to create a number of works, revival of *The Tempest* and a revival of *Blind Giant is Dancing* and particularly later a revival of *The Seagull* that we did, some actors were in all. Cate Blanchett, Gillian Jones, Keith Robinson, and Kevin Smith. For the revival of *The Tempest,* Max Cullen ended up withdrawing.
>
> We'd drawn a company of performers together. But knowing what a beautiful clown Kevin was as the grave digger in *Hamlet* and then realising how interesting it would be for him to play Caliban and what the insights that casting allowed was a bonus. I guess it was the reason to revive that production, as a way to explore how Shakespeare seemed to be particularly interested in British colonialism. It only goes so far in *The Tempest.* Prospero ends up maintaining his mastery of the stage in the story. But it certainly opens the play up and connects it out to the streets. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Armfield recognises the limits of the play, but also seizes an opportunity presented by the group of actors he found himself with and his interest in classic revival.

Armfield's *The Tempest* explores the nature of authority within settlement culture. The setting of the play and the casting invoke a historical Australian moment of settlement-invasion. This imperial past provides a cultural context with which to plumb figurative and metaphorical constructions of equality, and to challenge the balance of power through questions of reparation, mercy and relinquishment. In this production, an anxious and ambivalent settler gives rise to a neurotic evocation of power. Ariel's supernatural power is far-reaching, synchronic of nature and destruction, while Prospero's power is theatrically contingent, reliant on the actions of Ariel to achieve his ends, just as he relies on the audience to read signs of his literal and figural enslavement of other figures. The rope tied around Caliban's waist is actually a flimsy constraint reliant on the actor and spectator's accord. The magical staff is simply made of wood. Prospero and Miranda symbolise ambivalent white settlement, eminently more local than those washed ashore by the storm, caught between the

desire to exercise control and the sense of becoming more at home there than in the courts of Milan. Miranda, as a forthright and earthy character full of simple wonder for her “brave new world”, configures the settler as struggling and finding awkward place in new surroundings. In reaching its conclusion the production offers a humanist and uplifting resolution in Prospero’s return to the ‘real’ world of responsibility and, to contemporary audiences, offers metaphoric and material signs of healing.

Settlement classic: *The Tempest*, Belvoir Company B 1995

At Belvoir, the audience look down onto a stage covered in sand. [46] Along the left side wall to the upstage corner is a pile of flotsam and jetsam – whale bones, old planks of wood, branches worn by the action of waves – piled as if washed against the wall by a rising tide. At front stage right, at the feet of the right bank of audience, is an old metal tub filled with water, like an old tin bath from pioneer days. The stage is open. There is an old ladder balanced on the pile of debris. This is a space for Ariel to sit to the side and above the stage action. A pale scrim curtain runs straight across the back of the space. Opening, closing, and simple techniques such as back lighting to reveal hidden ‘wonders’ and front lighting to make these disappear, means the operation of the scrim is used to pace the play. There are three entrances and exits: the right side of the stage, upstage left in the corner created by the back wall, and a vomitorium that runs between the seating banks so that characters enter from under and amongst the audience space. Ariel and Caliban bare-footed and bare-legged, are able to swiftly negotiate the physical challenge of walking in deep sand. Miranda and Prospero also have bare feet and are dressed in sun-bleached ragged clothing. Those thrown onto the island by the storm are formally dinner-suited, in full military regalia, hats and footwear, they struggle with the surface of the stage. This creates clear contrast between the rigid self-importance of the visitors and the gentle decay of the island dwellers. The setting, an Aboriginal local inhabitant and sun-bleached Prospero and Miranda figuratively place the play on the shores of Australia.

The familiar setting integrates the audience into the world of the play. The first scene is established by simple theatrical means and invites the audience to work with the imagination of the actors. The performance opens with a light on the forestage tub of water. Prospero enters and places a small model of a boat onto the surface of the water. He begins to create

[46] The performance analysis of the production is based on notes taken in a performance on Wednesday 14 June 1995, and subsequent multiple viewing of the one-camera documentation video in the Belvoir offices in 2012, and again in 2015 and 2016.

the storm by stirring the water with a long wooden rod. Music of a violin overlaid with the sound of wind and thunder builds to a wild rhythm, and behind Prospero the ship in the tempest storm is created by figures lurching onto the stage clutching ropes and calling out to each other above the noise. The chaos of the first scene is underscored by rhythmic music, lightning flashes and the uncontrolled movements of those onstage, tossed around while clinging tightly to the rope as their lifeline. Prospero stirs the storm and throws this self-important group of characters onto the stage and the island and into his game.

Neil Armfield directed two productions of *The Tempest* at Belvoir. The first, in 1990, featured John Bell just before he became director of the Bell Shakespeare Company, as a "complex and commanding" (Kiernander 2001: 246), "intellectual and magisterial",[47] Prospero, "with a great mane of wild hair" (John 2011: 162), "an unforgettably classical interpretation".[48] The later 1995 production was produced as Belvoir Company B first formed. This time, Barry Otto played Prospero: frail, neurotic, "weary and angry",[49] at times vulnerable, compassionate and gentle, a "wildly emotional performance",[50] that "could not be more different from John Bell's intellectual and magisterial performance".[51] Otto's Prospero recognises the transience of achievement and experiences an emotional journey of release. It is difficult to see him as a commanding colonial figure. Prospero's command is contingent on theatricalised magic. He appears, like the other residents of the island, ragged and decaying, subject to the wear of the tide and sun-bleached surroundings. Historically, Prospero has been represented as a figure of patriarchal authority. A portrayal that "necessitates a demure Miranda, a beast-like Caliban and an Ariel whose willing servility is seen as natural and inevitable: in other words, a gossamer female fairy" (Dymkowski 2000: 37). The following detailed performance analysis of the Belvoir production focuses on the postcolonial resonance of the three characters in relation to this settler Prospero.

[47] The Tempest, Aus 2/6/1995.

[48] Armfield's new troupe storms in with Tempest, SMH 2/6/1995.

[49] Simplicity shines in a flashy world, The Bulletin 2/6/1995.

[50] The Tempest, Aus 2/6/1995.

[51] Restless spirits – arresting images, SH 4/6/1995.

Fig. 3.1 Cate Blanchett in Belvoir's *The Tempest*, 1995. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

Miranda as idealised settler

Miranda is played by a newcomer and recent graduate of the national acting training institution, "rising star",[52] Cate Blanchett (see Fig. 1.1). Her performance was critically received as "luminous",[53] and as "ethereal beauty".[54] Miranda is a beach child, bleached, tattered, innocent but confident, intent on gaining knowledge. There is a sweeping engagement with the place she lives, she is the product of growing up on the shoreline. In this sense, Miranda is readily associated with a national psyche that sees the beach as expression of egalitarian freedom. She could be read as an uncorrupted idealised form of Australian settler existence, claiming connection between the character and the landscape. From a retrospective viewpoint, the actor's biography, her subsequent global fame and then her position as artistic director of the Sydney Theatre Company in the following decade, lend remarkable resonance to this casting and to the role. The following analysis, however, takes a close-up view of character portrayal, to ask how scenic moments portray Miranda in relation

[52] A formidable combination, The Westworth Courier 14/6/1995.

[53] Armfield triumphs with timely Tempest, Telegraph Mirror 2/6/1995.

[54] Armfield triumphs with timely Tempest, Telegraph Mirror 2/6/1995.

to the authority of her father. What are the settler postcolonial resonances generated by their interaction?

In Act 1, Prospero tells Miranda the story of their arrival on the island, their delicate interaction intimately portrays the consequences of their banishment.

PROSPERO:

> 'Tis time
> I should inform thee further. Lend thy hand
> And pluck my magic garment from me. (Act 1 Scene 2 22-24).

Miranda looks up surprised at Prospero as he stands in front of her, and then she too slowly stands and moves behind him to take off his cloak. It appears heavy on his shoulders and then is heavy in Miranda's arms. Prospero is visibly lighter when he raises his arms freely without the weight of the cloak. Prospero takes it back and, as Miranda looks away as though confused and exhausted, he places the cloak on her shoulders. She bows down under its weight. Prospero takes Miranda's head in his hands and hugs her; rubbing her on the back, as though to comfort her. The cloak appears to be a burden that Miranda has experienced before. Is this the duty of authority? Is this a burden that comes with the magic?

With this exchange, and at the beginning of the longest expositional speech in the play, the cloak is a visual symbol of the transfer of knowledge and the weight of responsibility. However, the dialogue is light and affectionate, as Miranda sits centre stage and Prospero alternates between sitting close to her and walking around her. At the end of his story Prospero says:

> Here cease more questions.
> Thou art inclined to sleep; 'tis a good dullness,
> And give it way. I know thou canst not choose. (Act 1 Scene 2 184-186).

Prospero turns upstage to Miranda, raises his hands, palms outstretched and walks towards her. He places his hands on her head and, as he talks of sleep, she moves her head backwards uttering a small moan of disagreement. With this, Prospero rubs both hands in her hair and over her head and she gradually lies down under the cloak to fall asleep. Commanding and paternal gestures indicate the magic of his touch and ease Miranda towards sleep despite her dissent. Miranda reluctantly complies. These interactions of resistance and responsibility do not show Miranda as demure; she knows own mind and is eager to know more. Her beauty lies in her earthy innocence, her poise and determination. Prospero's swings between command, passion and paternal care, his authority is inflected by responsibility and love.

These fluctuations are amplified in his interactions with Ariel, who is not a traditional version of a willingly servile servant.

Fig. 3.2 Gillian Jones in Belvoir's *The Tempest*, 1995. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

A female Ariel

Ariel, as a delicate sprite with defined feminine characteristics, is part of the Victorian tradition. However, "just when Caliban became recognisably human onstage, Ariel became firmly established as a male role" (Dymkowski 2000: 41). These two characters are in counterbalance. By showing Caliban as human, Prospero's power was questioned so that

Ariel’s gender became a critical factor for contemporary interpretation of the figure’s servility:

> to suggest that the oppression of both Caliban and Ariel is in some way unjust, the one had to become human and the other male … the service of a female Ariel was too culturally normative to be disturbing … an unwilling enslaved female spirit must have appeared a contradiction in terms. (Dymkowski 2000: 44).

Few productions have sought to question the place of dominant gender assumptions. “Although in staging *The Tempest* the English theatre has often used Ariel’s gender as an instrument of ideological struggle, it has rarely used Ariel to contest the dominant cultural view of gender itself.” (Dymkowski 2000: 48). In the Belvoir production, Gillian Jones portrays the unearthly sprite by blurring earthly gender rules, unquestionably revealing Ariel as female, at the same time disrupting associated gender assumptions.

The production links Ariel and Caliban visually through costume. They both wear a simple cloth wrapped around their bare legs, like a loincloth, signalling they are indigenes of the island. Ariel’s femaleness is apparent (see Fig. 3.2). She wears a transparent top buttoned to the neck, her breasts can be seen, yet femininity is contradicted by her deep vocal quality, slightly accentuated with the use of a simple small microphone hidden in her hair. Ariel is not androgynous. Gender is shown as female, but her portrayal is without ‘feminine’ characteristics. This Ariel is only subservient under threat, and she often stands face to face, eye to eye with Prospero.

On Ariel’s first entrance, Prospero is in the middle of the stage facing the audience and softly beseeches: “Approach, my Ariel. Come.” As Ariel’s voice is heard “All hail, great master; grave sir, hail!” (Act 1 Scene 2 188-189), Prospero bows his head and leans forward, then raises his head to look for her. Ariel appears behind him and he turns. With Prospero’s back to the audience the focus shifts to Ariel, who describes the attack on the ship, moving around the edges of the stage and across the front of the audience seating banks. A long sheer scarf accentuates her gestures, her bare and muscular legs accentuate her motion. Ariel speaks fast, clipped, with a restrained and rasping tone. Prospero is transfixed, follows her with his gaze, leans forward as though hypnotised. In Ariel’s presence Prospero is held in thrall.

Ariel is not restricted by the deep sand surface of the stage, and she moves swiftly between stage and audience space, perches at the side of the audience, over the top of the vomitorium,

inhabits onstage and the audience space. This figure is able to move where no others can, and thus Ariel extends the space of the stage and controls the magical capacities of the island.

Ariel's observations estrange the human and emotional texture of the production. When perched on the debris washed ashore at the side of the stage, Ariel describes Ferdinand:

> The King's son have I landed by himself,
> Whom I left cooling of the air with sighs,
> In an odd angle of the isle, and sitting,
> His arms in this sad knot. (Act 1 Scene 2 221-224).

As she speaks, she contorts her legs and arms to sculpt the odd angle of the island and the sad knot of the boy: she is bewildered by his predicament, tries to comprehend his plight through her strange physical posture. Ariel is a detached yet curious observer. Her gestural language reflects and extends the text. The poetic analogy of the shape of the island and the boy is taken to tangible expression as Ariel's body grasps for meaning.

Ariel's state of freedom is precarious, but her servitude ambiguous. As Ariel states her expectation of release, she stands face to face with Prospero. When Prospero suddenly swings into fury and takes a stick from the debris onstage to point it at Ariel, she falls into exaggerated gestures of submission, avoids him with small cries of fear, lies facedown, arms outstretched, fluttering her hands in an expression of obedience. Prospero is an unstable, unpredictable tyrant, and so with this is Ariel's independence tenuous. In this moment, however, Ariel maintains some power, her reaction suggests she knows how to appease Prospero. Ariel has the power of action, she controls the forward action of the play, is executor of Prospero's plans and transforms them into reality. As efficacious servant, Ariel takes delight in the effects of her magic. The terms of her enslavement are apparent, yet her preternatural capacities engender her agency, these are a force beyond the interests of Prospero.

Ariel's magic is theatrically articulate compared to the simple gestures of Prospero's sorcery. The magic staff, Prospero's key method of control, only occasionally gains power beyond its everyday appearance. Prospero's struggle for control culminates in Act 5 Scene 1 as he and Ariel face each other. Prospero holds his staff with his two hands in front of him and close to Ariel's face:

> Say, my spirit,
>
> How fares the King and's followers?

Ariel stands facing him, not cowering:

Confined together

In the same fashion as you gave in charge,

Just as you left them all; all prisoners, sir. (Act 5 Scene 1 6-9).

Ariel pushes the wooden rod away as she gestures and moves forward to direct his gaze offstage to the men, and then moves to stand beside him and they both look across audience to detail their sorrow:

Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo.

His tears running down his beard like winter drops

From eaves of reeds.

On this line Ariel moves forward, as if drawn to Gonzalo. Standing at the front of the stage, she then turns towards Prospero to suggest:

If you now beheld them, your affections

Would become tender.

There is a pause before Prospero asks:

Does thou think so spirit?

With Ariel's reply:

Mine would, sir, were I human.

Prospero, with an intake of breath, a backward tilt of the head as though struck by the thought, lowers his staff and lets it drop on:

And mine shall. (Act 5 Scene 1 15-20).

He relinquishes control with Gonzalo's tears; the turning point of Prospero's drama is his recognition of mercy. Neil Armfield calls this, "the play's defining moment of humanity".[55] Ariel's other-worldly perspective, her ability to look at human action from the outside, brings Prospero to self-realisation and with this, to a steady unravelling of his dominance. When he reclaims his authority as Duke in the human world, he must release his control over the spirit of this island.

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[55] Neil Armfield Director's Notes, Production Program, Company B *The Tempest* 1995.

As Prospero faces Ariel, defenceless without his staff, and wonders at her moment of compassion for the humans, he reaches out his hand towards her and traces her shape in the air. The timbre of Prospero's voice switches to the register of his spirit, querulous and questioning, tone faltering on his wonder of this spirit's world. Prospero's desire for Ariel suggests a desire to be immortal, but in the recognition of his human failings he can only release her and expose his own failures. Prospero uses the staff as an old man's walking stick to help him stand.

Following this, Ariel's song, "where the bee sucks" runs an expectant highpoint as Ariel attires Prospero and the music builds to a triumphant chord. Ariel sings as she brings in the duke's vest and red sash, the garb of nobility that transforms Prospero from sun-bleached, ragged magician into a slightly moth-eaten nobleman. On the song's finale, Ariel enters carrying a large cloak with epaulets and wearing the duke's three-cornered plumed hat. There is a sense of childlike dressing-up that undercuts the regal quality of the apparel. She places and secures the cloak facing Prospero, and then kneels at his feet to remove and offer him the hat. This gesture of subservience is also one of equality, and evidence of their great and playful love for each other. The power exchange between the two characters is often read as ambiguously 'loving'. This scene emphasises Ariel's compassion for Prospero: she is not absolutely controlled by him. In fact, it is Prospero that is vulnerable, he who has the greater need.

The consequences of Caliban

Caliban can be viewed as "an important 'expressive symbol', a cultural signifier that changes through space and time, geography and chronology" (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991: xvii). Caliban is a litmus test for intellectual and ideological changes imagined in society. On the Belvoir stage, Caliban resonates in the complex of postcolonial settlement. Reciprocity between slave and master has a different tenor between Prospero and Caliban. Caliban is not the most important character in *The Tempest*, but he is essential to the dynamic of the play, to the plot and structure. In 1995, the casting of Aboriginal actor Kevin Smith as Caliban appears to be the first time an Aboriginal actor played this role on an Australian stage.

Caliban's disrespect for Prospero's authority is clear from his first entrance. Before Caliban first enters the stage, Miranda puts on Prospero's cloak as though for protection. As Prospero commands Caliban to come, he pulls at a rope and shouts, pointing his staff. Caliban runs out onto the stage from the vomitorium entrance, roaring through the audience, and Prospero and Miranda retreat in fright to the side. Caliban wears a faded English redcoat jacket and the

rope is tied around his waist. He falls about laughing at their fright. Prospero and Miranda stand behind the outstretched staff, attempting to keep him at bay. The scene shifts mood and tone between Caliban's disregard, "I must eat my dinner" (Act I Scene 2 332), and his rage, "This island's mine" (Act I Scene 2 333). Caliban is indifferent to his captor's anger, as he teases Prospero by splashing him with water and chases Miranda, playfully leaping and rolling on the sand laughing: "I had peopled else this isle with Calibans" (Act I Scene 2 351-352). He sits casually and is unperturbed when Miranda rails at him and throws sand into his face. Later they argue and like children in frustration throw sand at each other.

Prospero's annoyance and Caliban's disrespect conveys unstable control. Caliban lies on his back with his legs open and scratches his crotch. As Prospero commands him to work, he flicks sand carelessly. Yet when Prospero prods Caliban with the staff, he suddenly rises onto his knees, shifting backwards as though drawn towards the staff against his will, making sharp moans of surprise and anxiety all the while looking out at the audience. Caliban winds the rope into his hands and after his last speech in the scene spoken directly to the audience, exits the stage. The theatricality of unspecific magic that masters Caliban gives his position as slave a satirical edge. His obvious disdain for authority and capacity to laugh at oppression underscores his representation and draws connection to present-day Australia.

Colonial Australia is thrown into focus by the tattered English redcoat jacket he wears – a ragged symbol of past exchange and a pointed reference to a specific Aboriginal figure in early settlement history (see Fig. 3.3). In November 1789, Woollarawarre Bennelong, a senior man of the Eora people of the Port Jackson area, was captured on the orders of Arthur Phillip, the first governor of the convict colony of New South Wales. Bennelong became a valued informant and interlocutor for the British. He formed an unlikely friendship with Phillip, who in 1792 took him to England. The jacket is a visual signal of this journey when Bennelong was clothed fit to be presented to British society (Smith 2009). Symbolising the tragedy of early encounters in Australia, Bennelong is an ambivalent and often overlooked figure of early settlement history. His role as go-between implicates him in the act of colonisation. The highly regarded Aboriginal theatre director, Wesley Enoch, suggested that many Aboriginal people do not want to claim Bennelong as he is viewed as a sell-out, as someone who did not stand up enough to the colonisers.[56] The 2001 MTC production of *The Tempest* also connected Bennelong with Caliban. This was critically observed as constraining

[56] 2012 Sydney Festival: Black at the Centre, Real Time 106 12/08/2012.

the potential of Caliban by foregrounding the life story of the real figure that tragically ended in alcoholism (Tweg 2004: 51). The comic energy of Caliban in the Belvoir production complicates this potential interpretation.

Fig. 3.3 Keith Robinson and Kevin Smith in Belvoir's *The Tempest*, 1995. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

As a racially marked figure, Kevin Smith's Caliban carries a responsibility greater than just his character. During this decade, some Aboriginal actors discussed a lack of distinction between the character role and that of the actor, stating that their representation onstage becomes a representation for the whole of the Aboriginal people: "It's not just me on stage, but it's the rest of my people too".[57] At this time, the Indigenous actor became a surrogate for Aboriginal representation at large, where Caliban simultaneously carried colonial history,

[57] It's not just me on stage, but it's the rest of my people too, Deb Mailman, Aus 21/5/1999; "It's still a political act when an Aboriginal person walks on stage […] You can't help but see their skin, and all the resonances that come with that at this point in time" (Wesley Enoch cited in Schafer 2003: 64).

Aboriginal heritage and a present-day perspective. Marvin Carlson's (2001) notion of 'haunting' in the theatre can be considered here, with the weight of colonisation and ghosts of the past brought onstage through the Aboriginal actor. Yet, here Aboriginal presence is ghosted, not by previous stage presence, but by its historical absence.

The effects of colonisation are most clearly depicted in the scenes between Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, characters that represent the values of the world to which Prospero will return. Prospero's hold over his slave appears contingent and at times inconsequential, whereas the imperial clowns Trinculo and Stephano gain effective control over Caliban by plying him with alcohol. This is a chilling scene depicting 'real-life' colonial consequence. These traditionally lower-class characters wear upper-class formal dinner suits and are completely and seriously drunk. Their physical and verbal comedy reinforces the alcoholic interaction as a dark, uncomfortable allusion to the ingrained problem of alcoholism for contemporary Australian Indigenous communities. The scene, however, suddenly shifts in power:

> STEPHANO: Come on, Trinculo, let us sing.

[lines 121 and 122 are cut]

> Thought is free.

Stephano and Trinculo stand centre stage clutching each other and their bamboo beaker of alcohol while Caliban slowly dances around them, circling their ankles with the rope that is tied to his waist to physically restrain them. Ariel sits high to the side of the stage. Caliban threatens from behind:

> CALIBAN: That's not the tune.

[the following line is added]

> Thought is free, thought is free. (Act 3 Scene 2 120-124).

Caliban gradually begins his own chant. Circling them with a different kind of dance, distinctly Aboriginal. As his dance builds, Ariel raises her arm. There is music and a sudden lighting change, which darkens the stage and lights the faces from the front. Stephano and Trinculo fall either side of the stage in fright, while Caliban barely reacts. Caliban comes slowly behind Stephano who is lying, crying on the sand and asks:

> Art thou afeard?

On Stephano's denial, he lays a hand on his head, and Stephano cringes from Caliban's touch. Stephano raises his head as if in a trance as Caliban explains the sounds of the island:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,

Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not. (Act 3 Scene 2 135-136)

Caliban lays Stephano's head in his lap and strokes his face, recalling earlier gestures between Prospero and Miranda. On the line:

That when I waked

I cried to dream again. (Act 3 Scene 2 142-143).

Caliban lays his cheek on Stephano's cheek and there is silence, except for the sound of the island music – a distant wailing violin and for some moments their faces are lit in intimate closeness. Black and white skin lie together. The moment is broken by Stephano, who shakes himself from his reverie to resume the drunken pursuit of his "brave kingdom".

Caliban is subject to Prospero, but this *Tempest* establishes complexity in a construed dichotomy of colonial and colonised. Oppositional colonisation, slavery and ownership are contingent. The production poses questions. What maintains the dynamic of subjection? Is freedom granted or taken? How can relations to the land be imagined? By recasting colonial Prospero as an ambivalent unstable settler, the production sets dominance as a backdrop to the exploration of mercy and the shared responsibilities of reconciliation.

The text of *The Tempest* leaves many gaps for many characters, none more so than for Caliban. Caliban's final scene with drunk Stephano and Trinculo is marked by his central stillness, as he kneels centre stage with the rope that is tied around him, wound up and held in his outstretched hands. The circle of rope is like a noose and becomes a sign of systemic disadvantage in present-day Australian society.[58] Caliban's abject position is at the centre of the scene. Prospero then comes behind him, unties the rope to free him and throws the rope forcefully off the stage, and all the cast move downstage in fright. Caliban stands tall:

I'll be wise thereafter

And seek for grace. (Act 5 Scene 1 294–296).

Then, looking at the drunken clowns, he shakes his head and exits. No more is said of Caliban in the playtext.

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[58] The report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was released in 1991. The commission found that Aboriginals were far more likely to be in prison than non-Aboriginal people and that child removal was a significant precursor to the high rate of imprisonment. Many of the commissions 339 recommendations are yet to be implemented and 500 Aboriginal people have died in custody since the report was handed down (Wright, Swain and Sköld 2020).

In Prospero's final speech, Prospero takes a more direct tone and steps towards the audience, moving forward for this final allegorical speech on the nature of forgiveness. With the last two lines:

> As you from crimes would pardoned be

Prospero turns upstage where Caliban holding his master's staff is revealed behind the scrim.

> Let your indulgence set me free. (Act 5 Scene 1 19-20).

Caliban deliberately and effortlessly snaps the staff in half across his knees.

The potency of the speech and the interpolated image suggest that forgiveness lies with Caliban's indulgence; it is Caliban that breaks the staff, Caliban that effectively sets Prospero free. The joint presence of Caliban and Prospero sets up a shared responsibility of power. Critics noted this coda in critical reviews as an overlooked strand of relevance to the play. *The Australian* remarked: "This production gives the play to Caliban and gives him a key role in the final healing which is, with hindsight, eye-openingly obvious and necessary."[59] The final moment of the production is a statement on the nature of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia, where holding and breaking the symbol of authority requires the action of both.

For Belvoir, as for many other companies during the 1990s, aboriginalised classics became a site for intervention into a historical process of erasure. Elizabeth Schafer documents and discusses a decade of Aboriginal presence in Australian Shakespeare production, arguing these, "invited reflection on Reconciliation politics" (Schafer 2003: 63) and suggesting that,

> Reconciliation Shakespeare offers a theatre practice that not only invigorates the texts with overt and confrontational politics, which indubitably plays Australia even as it plays Shakespeare, but also offers a unique contribution to the debates of Shakespeare and race. (Schafer 2003: 75).

The 1988 bicentenary celebration of settlement/invasion was a key political precursor to a time that was termed "the official period of reconciliation between Indigenous and settler peoples" (McDonnell 2008: 131). The decade framed by debates around the 1992 High

[59] The Tempest Review, Aus 2/6/1995.

Court's Mabo Decision and the centenary of Australian Federation in 2001,[60] made this a time when many Australians began examining the colonial legacy of the nation.[61]

Belvoir's *The Tempest* came as this significant social action gained early momentum, and was performed in dialogue with growing social concern for reconciliation. The fact that Australia was established on the lie of terra nullius, the lie that the continent was unoccupied when the British settled, had concerned many theatre practitioners since the 1960s. Neil Armfield reflected: "There was a consciousness of the lie that surrounded us, and politics caught up with that. From the late sixties when the Redfern black theatre was created, and with Nimrod in the seventies in the now Belvoir space, there was an interest in involving black voices." (Armfield interview 9/9/2018). This *Tempest* did not overtly portray postcolonial expectations, as were seen in later productions. Similarly, the Belvoir production did not echo the postcolonial interpretations of the Canadian productions. Elizabeth Schafer identifies key Shakespeare productions concerned with reconciliation, but her Australia-wide survey only pays passing attention to this production of *The Tempest*.[62] Schafer's observation that this decade saw Shakespeare as an important way to dream of reconciliation, places Belvoir's *Tempest* as a forerunner to this forceful movement. Belvoir's production contemplates qualities of mercy and joint responsibility, crucial to the aspiration of reconciliation. The postcolonial resonances of the play resound within the dependant complex of the settler-invader. Prospero and Miranda are ambivalent settlers, while Ariel hovers as the landscape, as metaphorical witness, as a figure that bears the consequences of Prospero's encampment but who shows compassion. Caliban stands as visual referent for an actual figure in history and as representative of ideological changes imagined in society. This production adapts Shakespeare to the contemporary cultural needs of the settler society.

The second part of this case study considers another Shakespeare production at Belvoir, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced almost ten years later. The performance analysis again

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[60] Legal recognition of Indigenous original occupation first came with the High Court's Mabo decision in 1992, considered to be a major turning point in a national consciousness and one that profoundly disturbed the settler narrative. In Australia, recognition of native title has impacted the law and politics as well as the concerns of film, literature and theatre. The profound effects of Indigenous dispossession has been a cultural project over many years for many theatre artists, alternative groups and, now increasingly, mainstream companies.

[61] Seen in the 1988 counter-protest to the government celebration of British sovereignty and the groundswell of support for a national apology to the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal children who were taken from their homes as government policy. This culminated in the year 2000 when 250,000 people marched across Sydney Harbour Bridge to support the demand for an apology.

[62] Schafer discusses: *Twelfth Night*, dir. Ross, 1991, *Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Rider, 1994, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Tovey, 1997, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Enoch 1999, dir. Rider, 1999, *As You Like It*, dir. Armfield, 1999, *The Tempest*, dir. Phillips, 1999 (Schafer 2003: 63-78).

pays attention to the setting of the play and the interpretation of characters, particularly the portrayal of the fairy world. These are central interpretive realms in this classic, both in relation to previous productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and compared to choices made in *The Tempest*. Harley Granville-Barker who, with his 1914 production at the Savoy Theatre, London, was credited with major innovations of the play, stated that the central challenge for any director of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the fairies, "the fairies are the producer's test" (Granville-Barker cited in Griffiths 1996: 41). The theatrical conventions that produce the fairy world encompass contemporary intellectual and social beliefs in magic, and these elements in the plays can visualise social meaning, are perceptions of the social mores of the times. This analysis considers such expectations of the play, but those more closely related to local anticipation of this Shakespeare classic.

Localising *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Australia prompts expectations such as: "[…] in post-colonial Australia, the performance of Shakespeare in outdoor spaces has developed into a gesture of local appropriation that expresses both a sense of Australian cultural identity and a deepening attachment to place." (Gaby 2005: 136).

The director of this Belvoir production, Benedict Andrews, draws attention to a wider cultural agency of the play in Australia that ignores the tradition of outdoor performance:

> Jim [Sharman][63] sees *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, just as he sees *Season at Sarsaparilla*,[64] as part of an Australian canon and a kind of proving piece, a test of an Australian director. One of those pieces that shows your chops as a director because of its metatheatricality and its imaginative demands. […] The play is fundamentally about the theatre and the imagination, and it asks a director to meet both its earthy and its visionary aspects. (Benedict Andrews interview 11/12/2018).

Andrews suggests the practice of this play in Australia is to assess a director's skill. The unearthly characters contain great interpretive leeway, yet the capacity of the director to transform the playtext is its proof of classic, suggests Andrews. Furthermore, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is only one example of a director's proving piece in Australian theatre. This play can be considered as a vehicle for self-conscious local classic-ing. By approaching the

[63] Jim Sharman was one of Australia's leading directors. Graduating from NIDA in 1965, he directed *Hair, Jesus Christ Superstar* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in Australia and London during the 1970s. He was closely associated with the revival of Patrick White and White's return to playwrighting (Parsons 1996: 525-526).

[64] *Season at Sarsaparilla* by Patrick White was first revived by Jim Sharman. See Appendix: "Patrick White Revival".

play in this way, the Belvoir production redirects productions expectations of place towards a globalised sense of space.

Internationalised classic: *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Belvoir Company B 2004

The performance begins behind a curtain that runs the entire length of the stage. [65] The curtain would touch the knees of the front row, except that a low wall separates the audience from the stage. The set theatrically emphasises the intimate stage/audience relationship of Belvoir, while alluding to the separation of a proscenium arch theatre. To begin, the curtain opens very gradually as the cast sing the cult pop song "Pale Blue Eyes" a cappella.[66] It is sung slowly, with emphasis on a pure high sound of a single voice, backed by the low harmony of others. The stage picture belies the sound, seven figures lie on the stage in a state of deep sleep, limbs flung out, eyes closed, they sprawl flat on their back, on their side or on their stomach. While singing in harmony, the onstage figures also sleep deeply. The mood is somnolent, languid, almost comatose, they are motionless in sleep. The song comes to an end as the curtain gradually and fully opens.

The entire stage space is a vivid ultramarine blue. The back walls of the stage are blue curtained into the corner, the floor is covered by thick blue deep pile carpet and the ceiling is fitted with blue tiles. The entire space is boxed by one colour. Monotone colour, slow harmonic song and the complete repose of the figures onstage achieve an intense effect in this opening scenic moment. The simple force of image and sound heightens the play's visual sense, to emphasise performative over textual detail. The colour of the stage space punctuates its man-made qualities. The audience can smell the acrylic of the carpet, there is nothing natural in this space. Single, stackable orange plastic chairs are the main set pieces, a visual counterpoint for the strong blue monochrome. The aesthetic is sharply retro, reiterated in the costumes. Recognisable '70s fashion, such as a zip-up jacket with a photograph print of a couple in a sunset, is part of its aesthetic humour. Similarly, the silver-strand curtain that backs the mechanicals' performance, or Titania's silver sequined dress, builds a retro cult pop aesthetic. Critical comments suggest the play is set in a specific location such as "a grotty

[65] The performance analysis of this production is based on notes taken in a performance on 21 July 2004 and the subsequent multiple viewing of the one-camera documentation video in the Belvoir offices in February 2012 and February 2015.

[66] Written by Lou Reed in 1969 and produced at that time by the Velvet Underground.

hotel for hire”,[67] “a sterile conference centre”,[68] or “a function centre of the Athens Hilton”.[69] However, the monochromatic blue visually draws the play away from spatial specificity shifting the local referent to cite a globalised metropolitan space.

‘Brechtian’ lovers

Andrews casts *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Belvoir by doubling the mortal and fairy rulers, the mechanicals with the fairies, and Puck and Philostrate. The exchange of roles is played onstage; fairy rulers become mortal by putting on full-length fur coats and again become spirits by removing them. Similar relational lines of physicality are emphasised by the disparate, grotesque shapes of the fairies that emerge from the emphasised individuality of the mechanicals. Onstage transformation of the characters accentuates this cross-over of roles.

The first scenic moments of the play suggest an indeterminate state of consciousness that corresponds with the blurred spirit and human worlds. The lovers lie asleep onstage and are thrust into the opening scene from their deep slumber. The lovers are dressed reminiscent of school children – the girls in long socks and petticoats, the boys in white shirts and ties. In the first scene as the court interrogates the lovers, there is no barrier between their deep sleep and compliant behaviour, which is shown physically as their arms are held stiffly by their sides and their lines are flatly delivered.

The cast of lovers do not double in other roles, and so are consistent against an otherwise fluid interaction between the human and spirit world. However, the lover’s acting style is as changeable as their narrative arc. Helena loves Demetrius who loves Hermia who loves Lysander, and with the confusions wrought by the fairy world, their contradictory and sudden shifts are reflected in their physical impetus and verbal delivery. The acting is determinedly jarring and abrupt and takes hold of an energy at odds with the poetry of their dialogue. Against the flow of their rhyming couplet speeches, the lovers purposefully exaggerate gestures and body movements and physically depict the overbearing potency of the throes of love. Their amorous demonstrations are extreme and fully and physically felt, yet these physical expressions appear to create a distance for the audience.

[67] A hot night away with the fairies, Aus 23/07/2004.

[68] Bit players the stars in a post-punk garden of dreams, SMH 23/07/2004.

[69] Timeless sense of the silly, SH 23/07/2004.

The shifting performance style seems to cause uncertainty in the audience, signalled by uncomfortable shifting in seats and a drop in focused attention. How should the audience feel about these characters? Are these lovers humorous or disturbed? The extreme physical actions that comment on the emotional state of the lovers can be read as a Verfremdungseffekt. This acting becomes a significant interpretive statement, one commented on by many critics. Criticised as jarring or voyeuristic, the approach was also read as 'Brechtian' and considered as the director's preference or intention.[70] Dennis Kennedy observes that the term 'Brechtian' is a stylistic description in the West, disconnected with the political commentary of Brecht's time (Kennedy 1993: 12). This apolitical Brechtian style frames the realm of the lovers. The stylistic distance created by their performance emphasises their flexible physical abilities and vocal prowess. Their youthful energy thus plays in particular contrast to the 'old ham actors' that make up the mechanicals.

Eastern European mechanicals

Australian mechanicals frequently lean towards the characterisation of a working-class clown. Flaherty and Gay suggest these characters:

> provide a matrix of associations with Australian culture, yielding a gratifying and unproblematic combination of worker and creative identities. It is therefore not surprising that it is the mechanicals with whom Australian audiences quickly identify and who contribute enormously to the sense of ownership of the play by the audience. (Flaherty and Gay 2010: 232).

These associations create strong expectations for the group of mechanicals. The Belvoir production works against these by casting Polish-born actor Jacek Koman in the role of Bottom. He does not naturalise the role with an 'Australian' accent, and the characterisation also avoids working-class associations. Koman's Bottom wears an aspiring Eastern version of Western style with assurance but plain lack of sophistication. Rather than overly reinforcing class order, his comedy principally rises from the character's physical bearing and gestural confidence that contradict the reality of his situation. Koman's work with Belvoir authenticates what has been termed as an 'eastern-European aesthetic' of the company. As part of the 'loose ensemble' of Belvoir actors, he appeared in many of the productions under

[70] For example: "[…] the dual informing ideological frames of Brechtian Epic theatre and voyeurism clash in their philosophical objectives" (Flaherty 2011: 209).

Armfield's direction, and his presence has helped lend intellectual and international rigour over many years to the company's work. He also brings an acute and powerful quality to his theatre roles, both comic and tragic, stemming from his training at Poland's leading acting school and his family's theatre heritage.

The mechanicals convey an intense self-belief but reveal significant lack of insight and misguided judgement. The comedy of this relies on parody. The audience at Belvoir is in on the joke, as it relies on their sense of ownership of the company. The mechanicals play a gentle parody of the longstanding Belvoir ensemble with Quince as an exaggerated version of director Neil Armfield. Their performance marks a change in Belvoir's artistic direction. The mechanicals lay out the business of theatre and flit between dramatic illusion and reality to problematise the company in generational transition. This metatheatrical level is not only a reflection on theatre per se, but also a reflection on the mechanisms of Belvoir Company B. Most of the actors playing the mechanicals are mainstays of previous Belvoir productions, including Ralph Cotterill as Starveling who first came to Australia in 1973 when he played Moth in the Peter Brook production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Recalling previous productions and acting approaches, the mechanicals parody and comment on their fading roles at Belvoir. The world of the stage is also the world of the company, the mechanicals ascribe the ensemble to the past with a gentle comic style that accentuates the younger actors in their first roles with Belvoir.

Apolitical Puck

The production does not represent the fairy world as natural and thus authentic; it alludes to nature with ironic and casual reference. Oberon's tattoo traces a twisting vine over his chest and back, Puck wears a daisy chain (see Fig. 3.4), Bottom wears a knitted ass head and the fairy masks are as though home-made. These visual references to nature are a snide aside. This is not a synesthetic world of outdoor production and does not play magic as real. The woods and the fairy's realm are synthetic or mock gestures, which confounds production expectations of Shakespeare as a sensory experience of outdoor space. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was Australia's most popular play between 1988 and 1998, given no fewer than twenty-six separate professional productions played in an enduring tradition of outdoor performance (Milne 1998: 65). Furthermore, in 2000 and 2004, Bell Shakespeare Company produced two separate productions of the play. In one of these, the fairy world drew on Australian bush animals: "They belonged to Australian native bush lore rather than to European tradition, and they recalled the cunning, tricksy creatures from Indigenous

Dreamtime stories […] In this way the fairies tapped the idiom of fairytale but re-located it within a recognisably Australian tradition." (Flaherty 2011: 182).

In a very different tone, the fairies in the Belvoir production are as if from a bedraggled childhood world, and look like discarded, misused dolls. Flesh coloured or flesh exposed, they wear mangled tutus with old long john underwear, balaclava masks of stockings or animal prints with ear and mouth coverings. Their presence teeters on the bestial and provocative, is both playful and comic, both sexual and childlike. Ambivalent innocence and desire form their animalistic and hedonistic sexual realm. The fairies hint at children's games of sexual discovery, self-interested and with careless consequence they convey a detached fantasy of sexualised childhood. The Belvoir production fashions the fairy world as no more enchanting than the reality of the court, making the humans strange and the fairies equally so.

Fig. 3.4. Luke Carroll in Belvoir's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2004. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

Puck's magical gestures are done with purposeful lack of effort, they are casual, careless magical moments. Over the course of the play, Puck balances a chair on his hand, blows white dust from his palm, strikes a gong and cymbals, and elicits a ringing tone from the rim of a glass with no trace of self-irony. In the same year, the Bell Shakespeare's *Dream*, locates

Puck's magic in his physical prowess: "His back-flipping and tumbling not only contributed an awe-inspiring spectacle to the performance but also facilitated great fluency and energy in scene transitions. Puck's supernatural abilities were given a palpable life in Gyoerffy's unnatural dexterity." (Flaherty 2011: 181).

Australian productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* connect Puck with the bush, with physical ability, with nature. The nonchalant efforts of Luke Carroll's Belvoir Puck diametrically oppose these assumptions. Furthermore, this casting reworks his Aboriginal presence with an apolitical slant. The setting of a man-made globalised space disassociates essentialised notions of Aboriginal as spiritual and natural. Thus, this Indigenous Puck could be considered as colour-blind casting. However, by confounding production expectations, the performance shifts certain cultural assumptions. Indigenous representation is different to that in *The Tempest*. This Puck does not reflect wider socio-political debates. The characterisation does not claim social responsibility. Andrews' production refuses to play along expected lines, and in doing so proposes a shift in cultural perceptions of indigeneity.

However, this rejection of production expectations provoked debate about the production's cultural legitimacy. Critics charged this production as borrowing an 'international aesthetic', specifically a "German aesthetic". Critical discussion of Andrews' work assumed there were appropriate Australian aesthetic and political approaches which were not adopted by this work, rather it was drawing on European influences.[71] The diametric of Australian versus European is perhaps typified in the following comment:

> The disjunction between Andrews' articulated emphasis upon the language of the play and his production's obscuring of its poetic force highlights a detectable tension within contemporary Australian theatrical practice. On the one hand, we observe a well-grounded confidence and excitement about the potential for Shakespeare's play to speak to the immediate context. On the other hand, we observe an anxious drive to exculpate the play – and perhaps Australian theatrical activity – from the charge of easy pleasure, by importing models from Europe. This might be read as a new incarnation of Australian cultural cringe, one that simply looks further east on the European continent

[71] Senior theatre critics for leading newspapers led this discussion: Alison Croggon Theatrenotes, James Waites Blogspot and Cameron Woodhead Behind the Critical Curtain. Reviewer Peter Craven inflamed debate with his comment, "Half the trouble with Australian theatre is caused by talented directors who feel they are above realism and well-made plays." NT 30/09/2009.

for the stamp of respectable rigorous and contemporary ideological approaches to theatre? (Flaherty and Gay 2010: 243).

This observation of cultural tension sets a legitimate "immediate context" against antagonistic "imported models", contrasting cultural inferiority/cringe with its inverse, Australian-ness. This diametric has often arisen in critical analysis of Australian theatre. However, the reaction appears to emphasise the tributary status of the culture, where cultural exchange is crucial and serves to develop the classic sensation. In this case, the Belvoir production has been set against expected local *A Midsummer Night's Dream* production. The critical reaction targets the director, who is uninterested in upholding these expectations. His stylistic resource is European, his influence is 'international'. The setting of a globalised space challenges the idea that local ownership means cultural attachment to place and this serves to leverage the play's radical edge. The critical irritation with the production thus uncovers cultural values that have become attached to this Shakespeare play. The Belvoir production effectively reshapes expected interpretive parameters and resets the postcolonial resonances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Where Belvoir's *Tempest* takes the island setting as both a literal and figurative place to connect with audiences, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* deliberately steps away from assumptions of authentic production. Connectedness is rejected by a sense of detachment. *The Tempest* contemplates settler relations to Indigenous Australians animated by the desire for social change. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* almost ten years later shifts the interpretation of a key onstage marker, indigeneity. Caliban stands for Aboriginal relations in Australian settler society, whereas the indigeneity of Puck played a decade on by Aboriginal actor Luke Carroll passes relatively unremarked. This production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* recasts the identity tropes of place and race that generate postcolonial resonance. In its pursuit of cultural change, the production tests cultural assumptions and shapes alternative representations. Even with this defiance, the recalibrated cultural influence maintains a fine thread of theatrical inheritance. The mechanicals enact a call and response to that which has gone before. Generational change in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is envisioned as both consolidation and revision. In reception, however, cultural authority remains at large, as does the pressure of 'Australian-ness'. At the same time, the work frames an 'international' outlook that is firmly European. This shift in influence may also be a signal of constrained dramatic imaginary. Yet, the following decade plays out this cultural realignment, with the aesthetic and theatrical approach of directors such as Benedict Andrews taking the lead in a

new generation of Australian artists working internationally, bringing this influence to bear on local imaginative consciousness.

Performing Shakespeare is unmistakably classic production. What is done with the plays in performance demonstrate the ways classic generates cultural meaning in Australia. Postcolonial theory assesses this interaction explicitly: Shakespeare represents imperial imposition and is thus the site for postcolonial revision. This diametric viewpoint means canonical adaptation can reject imperial influence and open up postcolonial identity formation, while repeat attachment to intact Shakespeare secures its crypto-colonial institution. For a settler society, performing Shakespeare is more complex, it is doubly provocative. For the ambivalent settler, postcolonial outcomes sought through opposition inevitably evolve into a complex interplay. Nevertheless, critical expectations of postcolonial classic are framed by these diametric positions. This case study of two Belvoir Shakespeares elucidates a more nuanced relation to Shakespeare for Australian settler culture.

These Belvoir productions use Shakespeare as a site to explore the settler-invader complex. Rather than mediate British imperialism, they negotiate the settler in relation to Indigenous authenticity. *The Tempest* considers the denial of Indigenous authority, even though the playtext has limitations to this end. Careful theatrical means and the interpolation of a short visual scene devolves the task of forgiveness to Caliban. The pivotal figure of Prospero is an ambivalent and dislocated settler who comes to recognise his own dependency and responsibility. Essential to his realisation is the Indigenous figure Caliban. In this production, resolving settler legitimacy is coherent with recognition of Indigenous sovereignty.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the Indigenous actor playing Puck passes relatively racially unmarked, in an interpretation that confounds Australianised production expectations. This production discards interpretive legacies and challenges notions of cultural legitimacy. This occurs on an aesthetic level, where a natural place becomes a synthetic urban space, and on a socio-political level that bypasses racial markers of belonging. The production ignores postcolonial expectations of the play and subsumes these into a globalised ideal of cultural production. Tropes of Australian identity traditionally connected with the mechanicals are translated to metatheatrical generational transition, a reflection on company production; a concern with internal company artistic change that assumes 'inside' audience knowledge. The directorial approach develops contrasting styles of acting, the lovers engage in a 'Brechtian style' whereas the mechanicals characterise as 'eastern European'. This is a wider negotiation of European legacies and influences that mediates the imperial inheritance of Shakespeare as

well as its local postcolonial counterpart. The Bard here is co-opted using defiance and ironic reversal. This classic production reformulates cultural values, both as reflection of contemporary concerns and as challenge to artistic expectations.

This case study has explored the role of classic and Shakespeare as sites of revision, reflection and negotiation for the postcolonial settler. The productions rework postcolonial canonical relations and processes of local identity formation through Shakespeare. Here, the framework of postcolonial classic negotiates in a matrix of influences. *The Tempest* signals ramifications of settlement-invasion. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* calls outside imperial heritage and precipitates ironic reflection. The representation of indigeneity is central to the socio-political effect of Shakespeare in Australia over the period. This indicates a realignment of the cultural sensibilities of the settler towards notions of Indigenous authenticity. These productions exemplify the use of 'intact' Shakespeare as effective material to negotiate the cultural values of the postcolonial Australian settler.

3. An Actor as Classic-er

> For me at least, listening to Winnie chirruping as she reminisces and daydreams and conjures her illusory happy days became a real phenomenon in the theatre as images and memories of Forsyth as the small boy in Raymond Cousse's *Kids' Stuff* hung in the air – in echoes of voice, motive, artless innocence and ultimate tragedy. The DNA of that character from at least two decades ago is in Winnie in 2009. The overwhelming authority and magic of Julie Forsyth and Samuel Beckett.[72]

(See Fig. 4.1) This critic observes the Malthouse production of *Happy Days* as a theatrical phenomenon of cultural memory that brings past and present performance together to accord the influence of the actor with that of the playwright.

This case-study considers the socially derived notion of classic through the lens of an actor, Julie Forsyth, and her function as classic-er in Australian theatre. The analysis of three productions of two different plays explores the dynamic. The plays are recognised modern classics and generate a classic aura in Australian mainstream theatre despite their infrequent revival. The aura of these plays is not only a result of the tributary nature of the culture. Nor does their status simply flow from programming choice. Underpinning these classics is the social process surrounding the actor, an endowment of classic in performance. This classic-ing is generated by the distinctive characteristics of Julie Forsyth as an actor and her place in theatre history. The plays and their programming are the conditions that allow this sensation of classic to emerge. Changes in company artistic direction frame the productions. This case study moves from repertoire analyses to individual biography, then to company contexts, and finally to performance analysis of specific scenic moments to elucidate the various dimensions of this action of classic-ing.

Despite a scarce revival pattern in Australia, these plays have 'classic aura'. Revival frequency will be discussed in relation to conditions of a tributary culture, elaborating the place these works occupy in mainstream theatre. At the level of the theatre company, significant industrial and artistic changes also occur around the time of the productions. These offer perspective on affiliations between artistic leadership and the 'classic', and scrutinise the assumption that a classic play emphasises the work of a director. From the point

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[72] Happy Days, SN 7/11/2009.

of view of the actor's performance history, identifying the repetition and 'haunting' effect of her stage work brings closer consideration of reception, of audience expectations. The female protagonists of these plays are illustrative roles with certain characteristics that allow a sensation of classic to arise in performance.

Fig. 4.1 Julie Forsyth in Malthouse's *Happy Days*, 2009. Photo: Jeff Busby ©

The production of classic is influenced by the level of the company. ANT (now defunct) and Malthouse produced these works during times of artistic adjustment. These ‘classics’ have been chosen for analysis as they coincide with institutional reorganisation, performed as each company pursued changes in artistic focus. The first in 1989 as ANT lost both state and federal government funding based on accumulated concerns about their artistic direction (Meyrick 2018: 147-156). The same play, Samuel Beckett’s *Happy Days*, was produced in 2009 by Malthouse after its 2005 rebrand of the long-running Playbox Theatre. This change of company name from Playbox to Malthouse heralded a significant refocus in artistic direction. The new artistic director, Michael Kantor, opened Malthouse in 2005 with a production of Patrick White’s *The Ham Funeral* which also featured this actor, Julie Forsyth. In 2014, Malthouse produced Patrick White’s *Night on Bald Mountain*, shortly before another change in artistic directorship. The director of this production, Matthew Lutton, went on to become the artistic director of the company. Although a comparison of the productions may collapse significantly different historical circumstances, the analysis interconnects companies in transition and specific plays featuring this actor. These circumstances of artistic realignment also engender the socially determined practice of classic-ing.

Unlike the dramas in the other case studies of this dissertation, *Happy Days* by Samuel Beckett and Australian Nobel Laureate Patrick White’s *Night on Bald Mountain* are modernist works. John McCallum claims that in Australia, modernist plays have a particular meaning – that is ‘non-naturalistic’, as they work in reaction to a predominance of naturalism on the stage (McCallum 2009: 93). Plays by Beckett and White are not central to the repertoire of mainstream theatre. However, their literary works and plays receive much scholarly attention, generating a “pulviscular cloud of critical discourse” (Calvino 1999: 6). This appears to enhance their classic aura. Assessment of mainstream theatre programming during the time period of this study shows increased interest in these playwrights. This may be an attempt to shake off the particles of that discourse or perhaps to secure the proof of critical classic to its production. Naturalism may long be considered a mainstay of Australian mainstream, but the modernist design of these works shapes a mode of classic-ing that effectively reroutes Australian mainstream theatre.

The scripts of *Happy Days* and *Night on Bald Mountain* have a formal structure that tends towards symbolism. The symbolic design of character and dramatic form engages a different type of theatre experience. Yet, their status as classic is not merely consequence of the playwrights’ standing. The productions shift audience expectations and point towards a future

unlike the past. Moreover, the productions have wider resonance than innovation. Producing these plays becomes a symbolic swerve of artistic priority, not only to push naturalism out the back door, but also to reposition a rebuked theatrical inheritance. The Malthouse productions in particular, actively call upon specific theatrical memory. The productions stimulate a sense of innovation while simultaneously rooting the company into an artistic ancestry. It is the idiosyncratic work of this actor that carries this paradoxical artistic move. It is the classic framework that sets the scene for its achievement.

This case study will look in detail at how characterisation and individual traits endow a classic mode. These elements recapture a specific cultural and theatrical past that echo through performance. Particular qualities of the actor generate the mode of doing classic: her characteristics of voice, physicality, stage energy and comic timing encapsulate a specific theatrical identity and open up the classic-ing opportunities of the production. As the company styles artistic change with theatrical modernism, distinct echoes sound around this actor in audience reception. Tacit agreement on the classic status of the work must be negotiated through the actor, who is the immediate live connector for the audience and the conduit between playwright and director. It is the actor who must deliver the production as a classic for the audience.

Marvin Carlson contends that an actor can ghost previous theatrical roles. This perception is important in audience reception: it may be “a source of distraction, a valuable tool for interpretation, or a source of enrichment and deepened pleasure in the work” (Carlson 2001: 72). The combined effect of a regular theatre-going public and a relatively stable group of actors can strengthen the haunted operations of the body of the actor. Carlson points to differences in the European tradition of ensemble and the “lack of institutional stability and predictability” (Carlson 2001: 68) of current American theatre culture, and maintains that audience reliance on memory and association is central to the process of audience reception. The focus in this case study on an actor reveals the critical function of haunting in the reception of classic. The analysis of Julie Forsyth’s performance will explore this link between theatre tradition and audience reception in Australian circumstances to show her work in these productions recalling previous performances in previous roles.

Forsyth’s individual characteristics as an actor manifest a version of Anglo-Celtic settler. Physical characteristics such as her red hair, her distinctive husky vocal quality, and a femaleness that slips between androgyny, child and woman, combine to engender grounded energetic characteristics of ‘the bush’. The two roles she plays in these modernist dramas

generate certain Australian identity tropes. Samuel Beckett's Winnie in *Happy Days* is buried in the ground while keeping up appearances. Her circumstance suggests an idealised spirit of survival set against the ravages of the environment. The cruel irony of the drama emerges from Winnie's denial of her actual situation. Miss Quodling of Patrick White's drama is an isolate who lives with goats. Like Winnie, she is a lone figure. Her rejection of society is her ultimate fall; the hubris to believe she can escape the emotional wounds of love. The harshly physical state of these two characters has metaphysical dimensions, and their struggle with their environment activates a recognisable cultural trope of the settler. As symbols of the settler's battle with the place they find themselves, both Winnie and Miss Quodling go at it alone. Winnie's singular determination pulls her through the disaster of the made modern world falling in shards around her. Miss Quodling finds her only solace and companion in grumpy, fractious goats. Forsyth is central to these classic productions as she encapsulates the Anglo-Celtic settler in postcolonial modernity: both country and city, both European and 'quintessentially' Australian.

A prelude: Julie Forsyth and Australian Nouveau Theatre

The Australian Nouveau Theatre, also known as Anthill or ANT, operated from 1981 to 1994 under the artistic directorship of Jean-Pierre Mignon. The company consisted of a circle of performers and a core ensemble working out of an old temperance hall in South Melbourne, which was converted into a theatre seating around one hundred people. Their work was with predominantly experimental and classic European dramas and many of the actors associated with the company had European backgrounds. The company pioneered a European classic repertoire, a practice that has now become standard in mainstream theatre.

Original core member of ANT, Julie Forsyth is remembered for her tragicomic roles with ANT and recognised for her work with Beckett and White, more recently with Malthouse and other mainstream theatre companies. Her acting work spans the last forty years, predominantly in Melbourne and Sydney. One of a generation who followed the Australian theatre's New Wave, Forsyth did not train as an actor. Unlike many other actors now working in theatre, television or film who are graduates of Australian acting institutions – NIDA, the Victorian College of the Arts or Western Australian Performing Arts Academy – Forsyth's training was an apprenticeship under Jean-Pierre Mignon after a time as a student at Monash University.

> Even though I have worked mostly for 'mainstage' theatre companies for more than half my career, I don't ever feel quite comfortable that I belong anywhere in particular. It wasn't just the Anthill experience of being a core member of an 'alternative' theatre company throughout the '80s and early '90s that contributes to my feelings of 'nostalgia'. Before that, something was pushing me towards seeking theatre that was more alternative, experimental, raw. Student theatre at Monash University in the late 70s was vibrant and anarchic, and where I was introduced to the work and ideas of Beckett and Albee, Brecht, Ionesco, Artaud, Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Kantor and Grotowski ... it's a long list of mostly European theatre directors and ensembles. But also locally, Melbourne companies like the Australian Performing Group (APG) and Circus Oz were part of a movement, a global movement really, that pushed against 'establishment' culture, and their work really made an impact on me. Meeting and auditioning for Jean-Pierre Mignon and Bruce Keller at the APG and becoming a part of the new company they were creating, ANT at Anthill, instilled in me the idea of a company being a family and the space being a home. It was of that time. There were many 'ensemble style' companies in Melbourne in the '80s, substantial government support for the arts and many small, vibrant "fringe theatre" spaces operating outside the mainstream. Over time, many of those alternative companies eventually folded, while others continued and over the years became defined as mainstream themselves. Perhaps that's how I've survived! (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019).

In her work with ANT, Forsyth was part of the evolution of a specific performance style of European classics, particularly through the production of ANT's Molière and Chekhov. Originally, Molière's comic characters functioned in the highly structured and regulated Comédie Française, where particular character types became attached to certain actors. In some way, these character types and casting structures were also upheld in the Molières produced by ANT. Soubrette roles of the "young comic woman, frank, vivacious and gay" (Pougin cited in Carlson 2001: 55) were always played by Forsyth, who reflects:

> I didn't know much about Molière until Jean-Pierre introduced his plays to the company. Working together over the years on several of Molière's satirical comedies forged a bond amongst the ensemble. Molière's plays created a 'family' of characters for an ensemble to play – the soubrette, the young lovers, the

> wronged wife, the foolish husband and so on – and they offered the opportunity to work in the vein of a European model of a theatre ensemble. At that time, it was a diverse group of actors who were drawn to working at Anthill. It was a company of actors of different accents, both Australian and European, and of different levels of training and experience. Working together on Molière merged the diverse 'energies' of the group and a new 'hybrid' house style seemed to emerge. It consolidated an ensemble, a pool of actors who continued to work at Anthill over the years. It established a core. (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019).

As the company's popularity grew around their versions of Molière, Forsyth's stock character was the soubrette witty maid. ANT's history is extensively discussed in Meyrick's *Australian Theatre after the New Wave* (2018). There he notes the early work of ANT as exploiting "[c]reative disjunction as a vivid collision between play and production" (Meyrick 2018: 143), so that, for example, in performance the action of the characters became separated from the spoken dialogue. This disjunct between text and staging can be illustrated by these moments in ANT's 1983 production of *Tartuffe:* [73]

The stage is mostly empty, two doors are the stage set. The characters are dressed in elaborate period-like costumes made from recycled materials such as plastic and paper. The actors' faces are washed with white make-up that emphasise lips or eyes yet reduce facial details. Forsyth, as the maid Dorine, counsels the young lovers. Dorine runs around and around the pair who stand still back-to-back in the middle of the stage. Her dashing is not propelled by a natural impulse. Dialogue happens between characters while facing away from each other or looking at the audience, there is little eye contact between those onstage. The physical rushing and dashing works as a motif throughout the performance, established in the initial moments of the performance when all the characters trot behind each other in a circle around the stage.

ANT's Molières exhibited strong fidelity to the text and to the exaggerated character types, and at the same time they used the text as choreographic and visual inspiration. Rather than confusing the line of narrative, this inspiration brought clarity and access to the production. The production attracted excellent reviews, with one reviewer noting:

[73] Described from one-camera video documentation of a performance from the *Tartuffe* ANT season, 15 November to 19 December 1989. Recording supplied by Julie Forsyth.

> The commentary on the hypocrisy of the rotten apples in the religious barrel of Molière's day bears an exemplary resemblance to the social and political life of our time. The director, however, has chosen to ignore this completely and simply let the story work on its own, aided by a style which attempts to find physical images for moments in the text.[74]

The production did not thematically draw direct links to wider society, rather it developed a distinctive physicality in performance. This expression coalesced with a European sensibility brought by the director and the artistic networks of the company to become a signature of ANT's work. Forsyth performatively separated the wit and speed of Molière's dialogue and farcical action to exemplify the ANT style, repeating the role of the crafty servant in three Molières over the next three years, five across the life of the company. These were productions that repeatedly drew on European classic text using a unique visual and physical house style.

ANT's production of *Tartuffe* in 1983 was their first popular European classic production and drew serious attention to the company. Subsequent Molière productions become an important part of their cultural capital, "broad-appeal classics" that defined ANT's repertoire (Meyrick 2018: 126). Their production of *Tartuffe* opened in the small Anthill Theatre for a four-week season and was later remounted in the larger Universal Theatre for one week. The next year, in 1984, the company produced *Don Juan* in the grounds of an abandoned girl's orphanage, and then, in 1985, *The Misanthrope*. In 1988, the company took part in the Spoleto Festival, the founding event of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, where it performed Mikael Bulgakov's *Molière*, in a kind of retrospective metatheatrical reflection of their association with the playwright. The festival also presented the Comédie Française production of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, thus programmatically aligning the Melbourne and French institutions. In 1989, as the funding fortunes of the company took a downward turn, ANT defied this negative spiral by producing *The Imaginary Invalid*, which toured with great critical response to the Perth International Arts Festival and the Adelaide Festival. ANT's final Molière production, *School for Wives*, was in 1992 at its new home, the Gasworks Theatre, shortly before the company finally closed doors after fourteen years of operation. Forsyth was in all five Molière productions but did not play in Bulgakov's *Molière*. Production of this playwright remains firmly associated with this time and the work of ANT

[74] Well worth the trip, NT 20/5/1983.

(see Appendix: Performed Repertoire, ANT Molières). Molière rarely features in the subsequent mainstream repertoire. In the twenty-five years since the closure of ANT there have only been three mainstream Molière productions in Sydney and Melbourne. Forsyth performed in two of these: in 1995 as part of a season of short plays at Melbourne Theatre Company and in 2004 with Jean-Pierre Mignon as director at the Sydney Theatre Company.[75]

Expectations of Forsyth's performance are principally shaped by her stage work; she has accumulated comparatively few television or film credits over forty years as an actor. Julie Forsyth reflects on her acting: "I have never felt entirely comfortable acting in the 'realism' that some television work requires. I used to refer to it as 'straight' acting. I felt very self-conscious. It wasn't really me, or it was so much like me that it was terrifyingly bad (acting!)." (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019). Forsyth's work is different to mainstage 'name' actors who may have greater screen celebrity or wider influence. Forsyth is deeply connected to theatre and is well-known to a core audience in Melbourne and Sydney.

At the time of ANT, the audience developed around the popular productions of Molière. Audience reception was steered by increasing recognition of types of characters and the physical approach to the playtext. Regular production of certain European playwrights structured the company repertoire, with Molière as well as a Chekhov triptych developing a sense of theatre history for the audience through a production experience guided by those productions gone before. The growth in popularity of the company was closely aligned with their Molière works, in a model of repertoire of European classics now seldom seen, outside of Shakespeare, in the mainstream. By programming a particular playwright's works in regular rhythm, the company built audience familiarity, associating French classic farce and stock character with emphasised performance experiments. The stylistic disjunct of the performances were also ground in the familiar, taking a repertoire of European work and developing a new performance style and meaning. Meyrick argues that their triptych of Chekhov productions:

> […] push past the assumptions accreting around a play text […] and connect with the energy inside. […] this fidelity had nothing to do with 'style'. The stereotype was not just a technique of representation, but also a dimension of on-stage meaning. ANT, never more multicultural and 'European' than when engaged in its Chekhov triptych, was never more Australian.

[75] This production information has been drawn from the AusStage database and (Milne 2004: 260-263).

> That the category of Australian drama as it then stood could not claim the shows for its own, indicates not that they were not Australian, but that they presented a force surplus to its definition. ANT had run up against the boundary of the national imaginary. (Meyrick 2018: 147).

These productions challenged the definition of Australian drama, revealed the restrictions of a category defined by the nationality of the playwright rather than that of the production, and exposed the complex tensions of European and Australian inheritance.

Repeated production of playwrights is an unfamiliar practice in Australian theatre. The mainstream rarely works with an ensemble and infrequently maintains productions in repertoire to be performed over subsequent years. Each production is stand-alone, with communication across a season usually an experience of variety, rather than of conversation. Through the programming that was singularly driven by its artistic director, Jean-Pierre Mignon, ANT created a sense of past that ultimately engendered a sense of audience ownership. Even though the company worked from a small one-hundred-seat theatre, the reach through touring and festivals built a wider cultural reception and reputation. ANT broke new ground in the extent and reach of its touring: "outside its home ANT was one of Australia's best-known theatre companies" (Milne 2004: 261).

Some ANT shows stayed in repertoire for extended periods. Forsyth's signature solo show, Raymond Cousse's *Kids' Stuff*, was in the company repertoire for ten years, touring internationally, nationally and regionally.[76] This performance featured Forsyth as a young boy on a bare white stage, using a door at the back of the stage and the actor's face and voice as structural principles. The production was a trenchant adaptation of the French original, again focusing the company's imaginative Australian approach to what were considered to be European works. *Kids' Stuff* narrative is principally conveyed through the aural layer of performance. Forsyth's husky and singular voice creates the many characters of the play and evokes the naivety of the boy as he interacts with the village world of adults. Forsyth's idiosyncratic vocal quality became a characteristic of an ANT aesthetic. This aspect was a recognisable theatrical force that simply carried through to other roles. Reviving *Kids' Stuff* over a decade authenticated and embedded a theatrical history that was led by this actor.

In 1994, when the ANT company lost government funding and shut its doors, some of the actors went on to work with other companies. Forsyth continued acting, primarily with

[76] This production information was drawn from the AusStage database.

mainstream Melbourne Theatre Company and director Simon Phillips. This dissertation does not focus on her work directly following the collapse of ANT. The analysis looks at Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, a play she has performed twice in her career. The first with ANT in 1989, the second with Malthouse in 2009. The revival of this role draws on "the operations of repetition, memory and ghosting [that] are deeply involved in the nature of the theatrical experience itself" (Carlson 2001: 11). The experience of Forsyth's performance in the Malthouse production of *Happy Days* cites the current as well as previous performances and previous roles. Theatrical recycling and the haunting function of theatre have three main operations, according to Marvin Carlson. Firstly as "a means of attracting an audience" (Carlson 2001: 166). In a common approach to casting, Forsyth's previous work was emphasised in the press for the second Malthouse production of *Happy Days*.[77] It is also important to note that the connection between Forsyth, ANT and Beckett is familiar to sections of Melbourne theatre audiences. Malthouse consciously employs this sense of revival for the 2009 production. The choice to cast Forsyth in this play was an intentional act of theatrical recycling.

A second function of haunting in the theatre, suggests Carlson, is as a type of reception shortcut, which provides orientation for an audience to navigate through a short space of time in the theatre. Forsyth intimates this shortcut when reflecting on the link between her experience of Molière, Beckett and White:

> Playing a Molière character is sort of like wearing a mask. They're so theatrically heightened, they're so strong, influenced by the style of commedia dell'arte, but they are subversive too, and expose human folly and injustice. That's why I love doing Beckett and attempting Patrick White. Their characters require the actor to explore beyond the superficial clown, to discover the multiple layers of character complexity. (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019).

These are characters fully exploited by the actor. The audience comes to expect the sight and sense of detailed exploration as the shortcut to orient their experience of Forsyth's classic-ing. This contention is further examined later in this case study through more detailed performance analysis. The final use of conscious theatrical recycling according to Carlson, is ironic purpose, mostly found in the dramatic script where incongruity exists between the

[77] For example: "Many happy returns for Beckett veteran", *Age* 5/7/2009; *SN* 11/7/2009; *Tn* 23/7/2009.

stage situation and what seems to be the real situation. This is the dramatic basis of Beckett's *Happy Days* and the stage situation of the central character Winnie.

The consideration of specific aspects of this actor's career, such as the nature and position of ANT, Forsyth's soubrette stock character in Molière productions and her decade-long solo show, point to characteristics of the theatrical memory produced by this actor. There is an expectation of detailed and diverse characterisation within defined types, and an emphasised physical approach to texts that lean on modernist theatre. Her stage presence provokes a sense of theatrical experiment that entwines European sensibility with Australian stage innovation. The loss of ANT within the theatre landscape has possibly sharpened Forsyth's presence on stage, made the experience of repetition more vivid, particularly for a certain audience. This impulse of theatrical memory will also be explored in a more detail in later performance analysis. These performances give cultural shape to theatrical memory which connects to a practice of classic-ing.

As a first step, however, the 'classic aura' of Beckett's dramatic text will be considered through productions of Beckett in Australia. The next section considers Beckett in the Australian mainstream and illustrates ideas of an import and tributary culture. This investigation shows some of the distinctively Australian aspects of the playwright's aura of classic.

The aura of Samuel Beckett in Australia

High-profile international tours are an essential feature of Beckett in Australia. The 1984 Adelaide Arts Festival premiered three Beckett plays by San Quentin Drama Workshop before touring to Melbourne and then onto Europe. Together entitled *Beckett directs Beckett*, this season merged the playwright and the staging of his plays. The productions were later adapted for television under Beckett's "creative vision which moved the whole enterprise" (MITH n.d.). The title of the touring production attests an exacting artistic control. Beckett directs. Even though the plays were directed by Walter Asmus who was Beckett's assistant for the 1975 production of *Waiting for Godot.*[78] Earlier productions of *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* together with *Waiting for Godot*, were re-rehearsed in London supervised by Samuel Beckett for ten days.[79] Beckett had directed *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Endgame* in 1977

[78] Asmus later worked on the Gate Theatre productions of *Waiting for Godot*, *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame* and *I'll Go On* that toured to the 1997 Melbourne International Arts Festival.

[79] Adelaide Festival Program 1984.

with the San Quentin prison inmates and Drama Workshop founder Rick Clutchey, who was the key actor in these productions. The next Adelaide Arts Festival in 1986 saw a second Beckett visitation featuring Billie Whitelaw, "the voice, body and soul of Samuel Beckett",[80] in three Beckett playlets: *Enough*, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby.* These also toured to Melbourne. More than ten years later, in 1997, the Gate Theatre Dublin presented *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Krapp's Last Tape* at the Melbourne International Festival and a decade later, in 2007, the Sydney Festival presented Gate productions of *Eh Joe*, *First Love* and *I'll Go On*. In 2010, an English production of *Waiting for Godot* featuring Ian McKellen toured through the major capital cities. Each decade of the last thirty years has seen major international tours of Beckett's work come to Australia.

In comparison to these prominent touring productions, professional Australian Beckett productions are a diverse undertaking. Over the last thirty years, programming Beckett has moved from the role of alternative companies into mainstream repertoire. The first Australian mainstream state company production of a Beckett play was in 1991, in a joint production by the STC and the State Theatre Company of South Australia (STCSA), of *Happy Days* which featured Ruth Cracknell and was directed by Simon Phillips. Aside from productions for the 2003 Beckett Symposium in Sydney, there were no other mainstream Becketts produced until STCSA's *Waiting for Godot* in 2006. In the ensuing decade, STC produced *Waiting for Godot* in 2013, and in 2015 there were a range of Beckett productions across the country. STCSA produced *Footfalls*, *Eh Joe* and *Krapp's Last Tape* with the Adelaide Festival, the Queensland Theatre Company produced *Happy Days*, and both MTC and STC produced separate productions of *Endgame*. This more recent programming focus by mainstream state companies suggests a growing sense of confidence with Beckett (see Appendix: Performed Repertoire, Beckett Productions in Australia).

In 2003 in Sydney, Belvoir and STC took part in the International Beckett Symposium, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the first performance of *Waiting for Godot*, with productions of *Endgame* directed by Benedict Andrews for the STC and *Waiting for Godot* directed by Neil Armfield for Belvoir. This symposium was the opportunity for the major companies and academics to fraternise, mingle and exchange viewpoints, and the chance for The Beckett Estate to be directly challenged by an Australian mainstream company. Belvoir's *Waiting for Godot* hit front page news as Beckett's nephew and literary executor, one of the

[80] Adelaide Festival Program 1986.

"po-faced delegates to the Beckett Symposium at Belvoir" (John 2011: 164), took umbrage with the sound score for the production. Efforts to close the Belvoir production were avoided, however contractual arrangements for the play were tightened for future productions. The musical director of the Belvoir *Godot* recalls the moment when, "the lack of explicit prohibition of sound design or music put a pin in Mr Beckett's inflatable high horse. The omission was quickly rectified for future productions, however, and that's why I'm the last person ever to write a 'score' for *Waiting for Godot"* (John 2011: 165). In an address to the Beckett symposium at the time, Armfield depicted the effort to minimise the gap between the play on the page and on the stage as control of creative freedom, suggesting, "[…] in coming here with its narrow prescription, its dead controlling hand, its list of 'not alloweds', the Beckett estate seems to be the enemy of art" (Armfield cited in Prince 2002: 98). Smith and Ackerley (2009) observe that before the contractual controversy, reviews for the production were mixed and infer that media interest ensured the subsequent success of the season. After noting the "astonishing admission for a theatre director" that he had never seen a production of *Godot*, they suggest "we should never have expected much from Armfield" (Smith and Ackerley 2009: 114). This reflection on the director reinforces the canonical position of Beckett and overlooks a scarcity of professional local production. Such debate is also characteristic of wider discourse over the decade on the distinction between authorial intentionality and directorial freedom. The strictures of the Beckett estate in this case interacted with international perception of Beckett's authoritative persona to create an Australian constitution for Beckett productions. Subsequent programming confidence could be seen in the light of this interplay. Initial mainstream reticence to program Beckett may be considered a form of cultural cringe, a reaction to the authority of international import. Perhaps a lack of confidence in the capacity of local production meant that Beckett could not even be considered. However, mainstream reticence at the time does not reflect the wider reception of Beckett in Australia. Confidence with Beckett can be considered as central to the realm of the alternative Australian artist.

Already in 1980, ANT had produced their inaugural season in the small La Mama Theatre of Beckett's *Embers*, *Breath, Not I* and *Krapp's Last Tape*, which then toured to Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide and regional centres. Playbox Theatre produced *Happy Days* in 1986 at

the St Martins Theatre.[81] ANT produced three major Beckett plays: *Happy Days* in 1989, *Waiting for Godot* in 1990 and *Endgame* in 1991, only a short time before the company closed in 1994, but all before any state mainstream company production. Unlike mainstream and international presentations, the ANT Beckett productions defined their alternative status. Their productions point strongly to Beckett as a repertoire source with little relation to a playwright's authority. Julie Forsyth considers the introduction of Beckett into the ANT repertoire as connected to the native language of its artistic director. As Beckett wrote in both French and English, he was more accessible for the recent French migrant director Jean-Pierre Mignon. However, Forsyth also notes the importance of playwrights such as Beckett and, more broadly, absurdist plays, during her time at Monash University. A place where she and many colleagues who were exploring theatre felt part of a new movement as they observed the demise of the APG at the Pram Factory. Through circumstances, Forsyth had the opportunity to take part in a very different theatrical venture: "I suppose, really early on, some of the crazy things that were being done in university student theatre were very exciting for me, in stark contrast to my early experiences of theatre at school in the country town where I grew up." (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019).

At the beginning of the period under consideration, the work of Beckett was performatively located as either alternative to naturalism or as an authoritative international playwright. However, over the period of this research, there has been a significant shift in mainstream Beckett, most particularly in the last decade. For ANT, Beckett generated a cultural aura that challenged the aesthetics and style of the naturalistic mainstream of the time. Beckett became an emblem of the company's alternative status. In 2009, this identification was revived by Malthouse to illustrate their 'new' artistic focus. At the same time, this was used to claim their position as a mainstream theatrical force.

Just as the cultural position of Beckett can be viewed through a shifting attitude to production, so can dimensions of the playtext be seen as penetrating broader cultural concerns. Staging Beckett takes place at the edge of theatrical possibility. The exacting requirements and detailed stage directions almost imply there is no space for the actor to bring interpretation to a role. W.B. Worthen suggests Beckett puts an actor, "under such difficult physical conditions that his [sic] ability to complete the performance becomes

[81] Meyrick points to the parallel programming tendencies of Playbox and ANT and notes a competitive stance between them. This was argued as one of the main reasons ANT lost public subsidy. However, Meyrick shows this loss was the result of an opportunistic decision by the funding bodies to free up funds for other emerging companies (Meyrick 2018: 155).

questionable" (Worthen 1984: 206). This condition creates an onstage presence where the attention of the audience oscillates between the demands of the text and the clearly uncomfortable playing situation of the actor. In *Happy Days*, physical restriction and a painstaking rhythm of pauses and gestural business set such challenges. These demands highlight the "vital duplicity of acting" (Worthen 1984: 206), that of representation and of interpretation, to reveal the fiction of role embodiment. Almost mathematical conditions of pauses and movement regulate Beckett's scripts. On the Beckett stage, following Beckett's directions may not always be possible, or may not even be desirable. Specific cultural signals arise in the pressures of these demands.

Visual emblems signal Beckett. For example, the strict visual frame of *Waiting for Godot* acts as a surrogate for the play itself. These associations have implications for producing companies and for the kinds of actors that play the roles. For STC in 2016, public success was symbolised by the large photograph that hung over the entrance to the main Wharf Theatres. Hugo Weaving and Richard Roxburgh in the 2013 production of *Godot* in Beckettian garb could be read as emblematic of the company's leading mainstream position, both as Beckett's characters and in their persona as renowned actors. The 'star power' of these actors closely aligned Beckett with the position of the company. The aura of Julie Forsyth does not operate in this way. Nevertheless, the image of Winnie trapped in an industrial mound of scrap in the 2009 production appeared to resonate with the new direction of Malthouse. The mound could even be read as symbolic of the discarded Playbox Company. The cultural capital of Beckett creates expectations in the reception of his plays. Despite these expectations, cultural specificity can be observed as the actor negotiates the tightly scripted constrictions within the playtext. Tensions created between the didaskalia of the script, the staged performance and cultural assumptions can be exploited to generate cultural meaning. This dimension is an accentuated force for Beckett in the Australian mainstream, a force that was actively harnessed in the ANT and Malthouse productions featuring Forsyth as Winnie.

Happy Days by Samuel Beckett

The task for the actor

The *Happy Days* script contains as many stage directions as scripted lines for the two characters, and words spoken are more a monologue for the female protagonist, Winnie, than dialogue with her mostly offstage husband, Willie, who is largely an absent presence. Onstage time unfolds through Winnie's light chatter and disjointed memories. The

actor/character is physically constrained, with Winnie buried waist-deep in a mound of "scorched grass" (Act 1: 138). The stage directions demand exacting and restricted manipulation of props, specific directed gaze and regulated pauses. Winnie's arms and face are the only parts of her body that are free. Winnie's flow of words is tempered by repetition, variation and pauses that create rhythmic and poetic effect. Rarely do action and words occur simultaneously. Winnie begins her day at the start of the play by creating business with the contents of her handbag and with the reach of her umbrella. The character is unable to move from the waist down and tests the limits of her strange situation that traps her body in the mound. While Winnie acknowledges her physical situation and does everything she can within these confines, the spoken lines do not reveal the reason she is buried. The situation is beyond sense and reason – it just is – and this predicament forms the symbolic resource of the drama. What Winnie does to deal with the place she finds herself in, her compounding entrapment and increasingly fragmented utterances, develop as a symbolic archetype, the embodiment of the societal constraints of being a woman (Ben-Zvi 1990: xiii). Winnie may be interpreted as a representative of the 1950s female, trapped in her role by society, all the while making the most of her predicament with the limited means she has at hand.

In the absence of dramatic cause and effect, and with spoken words at odds with physical demands, the play amplifies the actor's experience of playing the role. "Beckett's plays maintain a dialectical tension between rhetorical capability that the text exacts and the bodily privations of the actor's physical performance." (Worthen 1984: 206). The attention of the audience oscillates between watching the character deal with her strange predicament and seeing an actor endure the playing situation. This can be the source of dramatic tension in production. The task of portraying Winnie is physically demanding and highly exacting, even though Winnie chatters brightly and belies her dire physical circumstances. Beckett is profoundly aware of the actor's work and embeds this task into the script. The duality of representation of the character and interpretation by the actor becomes a theme of the performance.

Interpretation of Beckett's strict text is explored in Linda Ben-Zvi's *Women in Beckett* (1990), which includes interviews with actors who have worked with Beckett. These interviews convey interpretations from various European perspectives and explore the experience of working with Beckett's text and with Beckett himself. Discussion of playing Winnie emphasises an affiliation between the character and the actor who brings individual perspectives onto performance. Billie Whitelaw, understood to be Beckett's prime interpreter,

along with Dame Peggy Ashcroft, are the English representatives, and there are also interviews and statements from French, German, Irish, Israeli and Polish actors who have played Winnie. The discussions build a picture of playing his female roles under the guidance/control or influence of Beckett in the rehearsal room. There has been little scholarly focus on Beckett's female characters and these experiences of performing provide insight into the importance of the roles. At the same time, particularities emerge through the book about the tendencies of each actor. For example, Peggy Ashcroft's observation of her "humanized" interpretation as opposed to "the 'metronome' principle" of Billie Whitelaw (Ben-Zvi 1990: 12).

The conversation between Katherine Worth and Dame Peggy Ashcroft contemplates performing *Happy Days*. After talking about her desire to do the part and her involvement in an early production by Peter Hall, Peggy Ashcroft says: "Winnie is one of those parts, I believe, that actresses will want to play in the way that actors aim at Hamlet – a 'summit' part." (Ben-Zvi 1990: 11). An observation that was also taken up in the press coverage for the Malthouse production of *Happy Days*, which emphasises the play as a classic through association.[82] This comment also draws the play as more than symbolic representation. The act of performing Winnie is a feat, and its achievement a pinnacle of artistic expression. Performing the character thus produces a felt sense of artistic conquest. For the audience to witness this is to witness the achievement of a classic. So that just as playing Hamlet is considered a force that impacts the aura of the actor, so can playing Winnie enable the actor to endow a sense of classic.

While for *Hamlet*, interpretation of narrative and predicament is central, performing Winnie is not primarily concerned with character interpretation. Grasping detailed stage directions and fragmentary dialogue is central to this role; commanding the character while confined by Beckett directives: where to look, what to pick up, place down, how long to pause, what to do with hands, face – are all highly specified. As the actor gains control of the rhythm and the restricted action, individual particularities or qualities of persona, more than specific interpretation, come to the fore. Moreover, signature idiosyncratic traits can emerge when the directions of the script are not followed to the letter. Like the instant that cracks the façade of illusion as an actor falters a line, in the Malthouse production, moments where Beckett's directives and the actor's actions diverge also semaphore the action of classic-ing.

[82] Happy Days, Beat Magazine 11/7/2009.

***Happy Days*, ANT 1989; Malthouse 2009**

The early actions of the play, as Winnie urges herself to begin her day, are a series of detailed business with objects, beginning with teeth cleaning. Turning towards her handbag, rummaging in the bag, examining the handle of her brush, laying down brush, taking off her spectacles and so on, make the many different stage directions of stage business details of prop manipulation.

Early in Act 1 is written so:

> …Begin, Winnie. (*Pause.*) Begin your day, Winnie. (*Pause. She turns to bag, rummages in it without moving it from its place, brings out toothbrush, rummages again, brings out flat tube of toothpaste, turns back front, unscrews cap of tube, lays cap on ground, squeezes with difficulty a small blob of paste on brush, holds tube in one hand and brushes teeth with other. She turns modestly aside and back to her right to spit out behind mound. In this position her eyes rest on* WILLIE. *She spits out. She cranes a little further back and down. Loud*) Hooo-ooo! (*Pause. Louder*) Hoo-oo! (*Pause. Tender smile as she turns back front, lays down brush.*) Poor Willie – (Act 1: 139).

In both the ANT and the Malthouse productions, twenty years apart, Winnie's modest turn aside to spit out could be seen as:

Toothbrush acting: the prop in the ANT production is made strange by slight oversize and black bristles, in the Malthouse production the brush is very oversized, and as Winnie brushes, she looks like a child brushing with an adult's toothbrush. Squeezing the blob of toothpaste onto the brush is done by rolling and flattening the tube to force the very last bit of paste out. Brushing is done automatically and thoroughly, staring straight ahead but also with interior concentration, particularly for the tooth in the right upper corner. Winnie stops to push the paste back into her mouth with her tongue. With a glint of a plan in her eye and a swift side glance towards the audience, Winnie cranes and turns purposefully to behind the mound. She looks for, she searches, she spots Willie. Winnie hawks up and then forcefully hoicks out the pasty saliva, spitting the distance to Willie.

In these first three minutes of the performance, we see many character/actor aspects: an innocence, forced cheerfulness, mischievous delight, calculated attack, crude playfulness. These create multiple levels of characterisation. Here the "spit out" is a deliberate missile aimed at Willie. Winnie's eyes do not "rest on" Willie but seek him out. Is he within spitting distance? Can she disturb his comparative freedom? This playful slip from the script, where childlike attention to toothbrushing becomes a targeted launch of projectile spittle, typifies

the comic timing and swing that Forsyth can bring to the stage. The actor prises open performative space to interpose routines that demarcate her distinctiveness. Such recognisable moments draw the audience close and activate the sensation of classic-ing. This small scenic moment, where a scripted 'modest turn' becomes an improvised yet calculated act, sees the actor endow the production as classic. Forsyth takes a playful slip out of the regulated playtext to generate a shared cultural action with the audience and harnesses the experience of classic-ing (See Fig. 4.2). [83]

Fig. 4.2 Julie Forsyth in Malthouse's *Happy Days*, 2009. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

The critics unanimously lauded both Julie Forsyth and Peter Carroll in the roles of Winnie and Willie in the 2009 Malthouse production: "a great performance of a great play by two of

[83] From notes taken in performance on Wednesday 17 June 2009, Merlyn Theatre, Malthouse, and subsequent multiple viewing of the one-camera documentary video in the Malthouse archives. Season 3 July to 25 July 2009, Malthouse, Melbourne. 14 November to 6 December 2009, Belvoir, Sydney. ANT documentary video from season 15 November to 17 December 1989 was provided by Julie Forsyth.

our great actors",[84] "among the finest living Australian actors",[85] "two of Australia's most brilliant stage actors",[86] "world-class performance".[87] The critics see the production as a vehicle to experience the acute talent of these Australian actors and this underpins the claim of classic. Certain qualities define Forsyth's performance: "seemingly the most emotionally vulnerable, with her childlike voice, yet as fearless as any, is Julie Forsyth. We could not ask for a more articulate, nuanced and 'heart-rending' performance",[88] "a once-in-a-life-time tour-de-force as Winnie, the inimitable, heartbreaking, adorable, mesmerising Julie Forsyth".[89]

Winnie in the 1989 ANT production appears to convey a striking self-consciousness, particularly compared to the self-confidence of Malthouse Winnie in 2009. ANT Winnie has a pale white face, a visual signature of ANT style, with painted lips, dots for cheeks and dark, emphasised eyes. Winnie's red hair stands on end like she has had a fright. Forsyth's vocal delivery is more deliberately sing-song. The character is clearly assumed, could be considered as non-naturalistic, as though making efforts as a battered clown. *The Australian* observed: "Julie Forsyth as Winnie brings to the role a natural gift of a born comedienne. Her face puckers, her eyes widen – she controls the audience by virtue of the extreme mobility of her gifts, despite the Beckettian constraints".[90] The Malthouse Winnie, however, has smooth confidence and depth to her voice and imparts a fluidity of character. She is nicely dressed in pink, flouncy off the shoulders "[…] *plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom, pearl necklace* […]*"* (Act 1: 138), her necklace is a broken set of pearls, her red hair is curled in 1950s style. Despite the fragmentation of the spoken text and the symbolic nature of the setting, Malthouse Winnie is grounded as a recognisable type, as matured as the actor. The state newspaper, *The Age*, observed: "Julie Forsyth comes of age in her (re)incarnation of Winnie".[91] This assurance undergirds the status of classic.

[84] Happy Days care instructions, Tn 10/7/2009.

[85] Review Happy Days, Guerrilla Semiotics 9/7/2009.

[86] Happy Days, JW 9/7/2009.

[87] Happy Days, Australian Stage 14/7/2009.

[88] Happy Days Review, HS 8/7/2009.

[89] Happy Days, JW 9/7/2009.

[90] Happy Days, Aus 21/11/1989.

[91] Many happy returns for Beckett veteran, Age 14/7/2009.

The staging at ANT reflects Beckett's description. This is a raised box stage, with "Maximum of simplicity and symmetry" (Act 1: 138). The mound is of scorched grass, as indicated in the script, and is so too placed at the centre of the stage. Blazing light makes the box stage bright. The audience are seated on the level floor looking into the stage. There is a simple painted backdrop suggesting clouds and huge empty landscape. The Malthouse stage design, in comparison, liberally interprets the stage directions. It appears that the Beckett estate took a more lenient view here. A high mound traps Winnie, and this is circled by a long curtain that slowly opens at the beginning of the play, glaring stage lamps are seen above. These set elements emphasise the theatricality of the situation. The mound itself is not made of burnt grass or anything natural. It is an industrial pile of metal junk, perhaps suggesting the disintegration of the Twin Towers, maybe the detritus of an industrial world, or even the waste of a rejected past. Winnie is trapped high up on the mound, above the eyeline of the audience. To watch Winnie, the audience needs to look up into the bank of bright lights that shine onto her. In part, her discomfort becomes theirs. In this way, the audience enters into the world of the stage. At the same time, they remain removed and uncomfortable viewers of the action. This contrasts with the framed ANT stage that allows the actor to play across the footlights at eye level with the audience. At ANT, the audience was separate from the staged world, yet direct connection could occur through eye contact, an exchange between the actor and spectator that foregrounds the artificiality of Winnie's situation. Such shared recognition is not possible in the heightened theatricalised setting of the Malthouse production.

A more recent *Happy Days* (*Glüchliche Tage*, Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, Dir. Katie Mitchell, premiere 12/2/2015), rejected any theatricality in Winnie's predicament. Winnie stood in a kitchen filling up with muddy water. Mitchell's production staged the terror of a catastrophic climate change reality and with this forced authenticity onto the stage (Mitchell and McMullan 2018: 127-132). The Malthouse production of *Happy Days* also establishes an interpretive contemporary reality. However, the post-industrial pile of sharp metal rubble that traps Winnie is clearly a theatrical invention, a contemporary symbol for Beckett's barren earth. Julie Forsyth as Winnie may be uncomfortable, but she is not in physical danger, unlike the evident emergency the actor must endure in Mitchell's terror situation. The contained Malthouse stage frames and imprisons the theatrical figure, but this is not a felt representation of 'real-life'. At the same time, the Malthouse production represents but does not stage theatrical conceit. The set does not allow direct actor-audience connection to acknowledge its artificiality. The oversized theatre curtain and glaring stage

lights transmit artificiality, but Winnie is not only trapped in the mound, she is also caught high within the stage frame. The Malthouse audience sits at the edge of the stage in a semi-circle on seating raked upwards, they look up at Winnie and she can only look across and over them.

Winnie's restricted movement over the course of the performance creates challenges for the actor that the audience perceives. This becomes part of their experience of the performance. The physical limitations can also guide the attention of the audience so that their concentration corresponds to that of the actor. Forsyth recalls:

> People would say that in the second half, when they watched the head for about 40 minutes, when they just watched the head, after a while it looked like the head was just floating. It became a bit like an optical illusion, it was warped and strange to have to focus on something like that for so long. Uncomfortable for the audience I suppose, to concentrate and not to have any other dynamic onstage, nothing else. (Julie Forsyth interview 2/6/2019).

The shared discomfort could reiterate the experience of classic, with the actor's artistic conquest directly in line with the audience's expectations of the production.

The second act begins with considerable dramatic effect as the actor is now revealed buried up to her neck. The audience watch as an older woman sinks or is being sucked into the detritus of modernity, or a mound of scorched grass, while maintaining the trappings of polite society. The stage functions like a reversal of a mask, rather than hiding the face to emphasise the body, it is the body that is obscured and the face that becomes emphasised. The transition between the acts could also anticipate a third where the character would be completely buried, but her mind still made to think. Winnie keeps up her physical appearance, her hair, teeth, eyes, and keeps her spirits up too. Metering out a day of repetition as ritual; doing and waiting must strike balance so she can remain conscious in the blazing light. Otherwise, she is subjected to the bell, the emergency alarm that pre-empts her attempts to sleep or lapse into unconsciousness. *Happy Days* is the first instance of Beckett completely immobilising his actor, a device that he goes on to exploit in many characters and plays, including *Not I* (1972), where only a mouth is visible.

In the second act, with only Winnie's head free of the mound, stories and memories replace the rituals of the bag. Winnie becomes more incoherent in this act, pauses are longer, sentences become fragments, language begins to fail her. The Malthouse production uses

shifts in lighting states to establish moods for the shifts and changes in the monologue. Winnie recounts a story towards the end of the play, where it appears that she transforms into someone else or perhaps she recollects and so replays an event from her own childhood. This is one of the moments in the play that is most open to interpretation. Is this a recollection of a real event? Does Winnie have a flashback precipitated by her physical distress? Such narrative interpretation seems to contradict the established ironic situation of the play.

Winnie relates fragments of a story about Milly's episode with dolly and the mouse. They could be interpreted as a psychological dimension of Winnie's character or may suggest a violent incident in her childhood. For this scene, the Malthouse production recycles past performance as the interpretive thread. Forsyth's performance actively calls on an aural ghost of her role in the frequently revived *Kids' Stuff*, a character with an innocent yet knowing perspective conditioned by the adult world.

Winnie begins to tell the story of Mildred/Milly:

> She is now four or five already and has recently been given a big waxen dolly. (Pause.) Fully clothed, complete outfit (Pause.) Shoes, socks, undies, complete set, frilly frock, gloves. (Pause.) White mesh. (Pause.) A little white straw hat with a chin elastic. (Pause.) Pearly necklace. (Pause.) A little picture-book with legends in real print to go under her arm when she takes her walk. (Pause.) China blue eyes that open and shut. (Pause. Narrative) The sun was not well up when Milly rose, descended the steep … (pause) … slipped on her nightgown, descended all alone the steep wooded stairs, backwards on all fours, although she had been forbidden to do so, entered the … (pause) … tiptoed down the silent passage, entered the nursery and began to undress Dolly. (Pause.) Crept under the table and began to undress Dolly. (Pause.) Scolding her … the while. (Pause.) Suddenly a mouse – (Long Pause.) Gently Winnie. … (Act 2: 163).

Over this monologue, there is a light change that darkens the mound and highlights the face. Forsyth's voice transitions to the register of a child of four or five, a voice with a slightly caught palate and astonished tone. This is the modulation of Marcel in the ANT production of Raymond Cousse's *Kids' Stuff*. A child character returns through the voice of this actor, a theatrical past is recalled and reinforced in this aural repetition. Winnie's story is a ghostly guise of disjointed memory staged within the echoes of a previous role. A recycled experience that sharpens theatrical memory and restores a rejected theatrical past. In the embedded practice of Australian classic-ing, this performed memory creates the sensation of theatrical history.

Observations of how the classic is endowed through character type and individual qualities of the actor will now be further explored through performance analysis of the 2014 Malthouse production of Patrick White's *Night on Bald Mountain*. Following the approach to Beckett, the revivals of White's first four plays will be discussed. These form a historical backdrop for the analysis of the production. Dramaturgical analysis and directorial assessment of *Night on Bald Mountain* give comparative perspective to challenges presented by the script. Interviews with directors Matt Lutton, Benedict Andrews and Neil Armfield, who have all directed a Patrick White play, provide the basis for observations of a wider discussion of *Night on Bald Mountain* as a classic. The following section moves through critical reception, artistic legacy, company programming, and dramaturgy to assemble a wider context for the examination of the actor as classic-er.

Patrick White's classic aura

Patrick White is regarded as one of the twentieth century's major English language novelists. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973, "for an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature." (Nobel Prize n.d.). As a playwright, White's status has been fostered by a level of academic attention that in many ways outweighs the professional production of his plays. White's plays reflect his ambivalence about Australian culture and people, and are imbued with his reputation as a sharply perceptive and cantankerous public figure.

Patrick White lived and was educated in London before returning to Australia in 1947. This is a reversal of the artistic expatriation that characterised Australian culture at the time. His very first plays, now lost, were produced in London. His biographer David Marr suggests there was some interest in putting up his first known plays, *The Ham Funeral* and *A Season at Sarsaparilla* in both London and in New York.[92] White wrote a total of eight plays over two periods, during the 1960s and then later from the 1970s to mid-1980s. *Night on Bald Mountain* is the last of this first series, which were premiered between 1961 and 1964.[93] In

[92] Marr suggests that only because *The Ham Funeral* was rejected by Broadway and the West End, did White decide to present it to the Adelaide Festival. AusStage notes that a London premiere of *A Season in Sarsaparilla* was planned, but at the last minute the play was rejected as indecent (Marr cited by Drewe 2010: 39).

[93] *The Ham Funeral* (1947) Premiere 1961, Adelaide University Theatre Guild; *A Season at Sarsaparilla* (1961) Premiere 1962, Adelaide University Theatre Guild; *A Cheery Soul* (1962) Premiere 1963, Union Theatre Repertory Company, Melbourne; *Night on Bald Mountain* (1963) Premiere 1964, Adelaide University Theatre Guild (AusStage).

1965, they were published as the collection *Four Plays by Patrick White*. Professional mainstream production has primarily focused on these first four plays.

When these modernist plays first arose in the 1960s, Australian theatre was transitioning between two major movements: from the 1950s *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* school to the New Wave of the late 1960s. In Australia, modernist plays were not restricted to Patrick White, although his renown overshadows a wider modernist movement that includes the work of Rodney Milgate, Hal Porter and Ray Matthews. The initial appeal of White's plays was to a "small, self-conscious urban intelligentsia" (Meyrick 2017: 45). Even so, Patrick White is now seen as one of Australia's most influential playwrights and his plays are regarded as revolutionary for the Australian stage (McCallum 2009: 91). At the time White was writing his first phase of plays, the Union Theatre Repertory Company was the only professional company in Australia and there was no structure of mainstream companies across the states.[94] John McCallum calls White, "the last playwright of the golden age of amateur theatre" (McCallum 2009: 93), with three of White's first four plays premiering in Australian amateur productions.

Initial pursuit of professional staging of White's early plays became embroiled in the programming hierarchy of the recently established Adelaide Festival, which was founded in line with post-war international festivals such as Avignon and Edinburgh. The intrigue around programming White's plays began with the Adelaide Festival drama committee's commitment to *The Ham Funeral* and the Festival's Board of Governors' subsequent rejection on the grounds of respectability. The first Australian productions of both *The Ham Funeral* and *Night on Bald Mountain* were rejected by the Adelaide Festival Board of Governors in 1961 and 1964 respectively. Denise Varney points to a broadly accepted argument that "feelings of disgust helped fuel strict censorship practices across the arts in Australia. Feelings of disgust for White, shown by the Governors, is made palpable in the historical record." (Varney and D'Urso 2018: 59). The controversies that surrounded these events have become characteristic of a conflict between conservative establishment and modernist progressives and have been read as a historical gauge for a maturing Australian theatre culture (Marr 2012; Varney and D'Urso 2018).

[94] The Union Theatre is situated on the campus of the University of Melbourne. The Union Repertory Company later became the Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC) and is Australia's longest running state theatre company. The association with the University of Melbourne remains, although the MTC now has its own theatre complex.

Initially White's plays were perceived as failures by many audiences and critics, and were certainly overlooked or forgotten by the theatre repertoire in the subsequent decades. Critic Katherine Brisbane remarked in the introduction to the 1985 edition of White's first collection of plays that they appeared to be valued for their literary worth rather than performative potential. However, although the number of productions to date remains low, the plays are now considered central to an Australian dramatic canon and repertoire. This shift in the cultural relationship to Patrick White's drama offers a rich example of an Australian dramatic consciousness, articulated in landmark productions and the directors and actors associated with the revival of these works.

The cultural force of the plays appears to lie in the interaction of their structural features and the context of production. The plays have "dramaturgical links with the surrealists, Strindberg, the German expressionists and the post-Second World War absurdists", as well as drawing on the popular traditions of vaudeville (McCallum 2009: 93). White's plays appear to rally against a predominance of naturalistic drama. Benedict Andrews sees that White "keeps coming back because he is a great writer who did these experiments for the theatre that still have a force in them that their form can't always contain. They're unruly bastards. Simultaneously literary and wildly theatrical." (Andrews interview 11/12/2018). Andrew Fuhrmann observes that the first revival of *A Cheery Soul* in 1979 "carried its audience into a world that baffled naturalistic conventions of meaning and connection, broke with cliché and successfully created something new for the Australian theatre" (Fuhrmann 2017: 90). As surreal, expressionist or psychologically symbolic, this group of plays have force outside their formal structure, one that mobilises strong directorial interpretation. The theatrical accord between the text and the creative interpreters for the stage strengthen Patrick White's significance in the national repertoire.

Initial interest in reviving White's plays came with the establishment, in the mid-1970s, of mainstream STC and MTC. These revivals, like the beginnings of the companies, were associated with the work of specific theatre artists, just as the work of these artists came to be recognised through their interpretations of White's plays (McCallum 2009: 101-103). Two famous productions that marked White's return to playwriting were Jim Sharman's *A Season at Sarsaparilla* with the Old Tote in 1976 and then, in 1979, Sharman's version of *A Cheery Soul* for the first season of the STC together with Paris Theatre. The latter was the first revival of the play since its premiere sixteen years previously. This "confirmed the play as an Australian classic" (Parsons 1995: 638), a critical nomination actively constructing a sense of

theatrical history. Benedict Andrews observes: “Jim’s revivals, more than the original productions, liberated the plays and put Patrick White at the centre of the Australian canon. [John] Tasker and [John] Sumner brought them into the world, but Jim [Sharman] and then Neil [Armfield] made a home for Patrick White on the Australian stage.” (Andrews interview 11/12/2018).[95] White wrote *Big Toys* immediately after Sharman’s *Sarsaparilla* in 1976. This was again directed by Sharman and premiered with the Old Tote in Sydney in 1977. White’s final three plays were written and premiered with the Lighthouse Theatre in Adelaide, where Sharman established an ensemble of actors and directors who today remain some of the leading theatre artists in the Australian mainstream. Neil Armfield worked as associate director with Lighthouse and was also closely associated with White and his return to playwriting. Despite their proclaimed position as Australian classic theatre repertoire, the first four White plays have received only fourteen revival mainstream productions in the more than fifty years since they premiered. White’s later plays – *Big Toys* (1977), *Signal Driver* (1982), *Netherwood* (1983) and *Shepherd on the Rocks* (1987) – are rarely revived. (See Appendix: Performed Repertoire, Patrick White Revival Productions.)

Directing White’s plays

Literary analyses have often sidelined White’s plays as mostly unsuccessful forays into the world of theatre. His biographer David Marr characterises White as “Stage Struck” (Marr 1991: 385-413) and details White’s childhood fascination with the stage (Marr 1991: 37-38). More recently, as White’s literary influence has appeared to wane, critical discussion has turned to White’s influence on Australian theatre (Varney and D’Urso 2018). Over the time since first produced, White’s plays have been rarely performed, however, the productions have been received as theatrical landmarks and have freighted the reputation of the director along with the playwright. Jim Sharman drew a connection between artistic reputation and White’s plays: “It was Sharman who declared that in order to succeed as a director in Australia you first had to tackle Patrick White.” (Fuhrmann 2013). Benedict Andrews talks of the “Patrick White legacy”, as Patrick White being a member of directors Jim Sharman and Neil Armfield’s “theatrical family”. Andrews was aware of this thread when he staged *A Season at Sarsaparilla* with the STC Actors Company in 2007. As one of the first directors to

[95] John Tasker directed the premiere production of White’s *The Ham Funeral* for The Adelaide University Theatre Guild in 1961, and then *The Season in Sarsaparilla* in 1962, and *Night on Bald Mountain* in 1964 (Parsons 1995: 577). John Sumner directed *The Season in Sarsaparilla* in 1962 and *Night on Bald Mountain* in 1964 for the Union Theatre Repertory Company in Melbourne (Meyrick 2017).

stage a major production of the play since Patrick White had passed away, he felt the influence of these directors "in aspects of the staging, especially in the cross-dressing casting of Peter Carroll as Girlie Pogson and Alan John as Diedre." At the same time, Andrews was aware of the need to "meet the demands of White's theatrical imagination in a fresh, unique way" (Andrews interview 11/12/2018). To herald a rebranded Malthouse in 2005, Michael Kantor directed White's *The Ham Funeral*. Current artistic directors Kip Williams at STC and Matt Lutton at Malthouse have also taken on the challenges of staging Patrick White. These productions have "unlocked new energies [in the plays] a generation later" (Andrews interview 11/12/2018).

Neil Armfield considers the series of revivals by directors over generations of White's plays as defining a certain type of boundary in Australian mainstream theatre practice. Armfield also identifies the interpretive opportunities these plays offer a director:

> Patrick created a set of plays which have become, for a certain renegade mainstream, a radical theatrical edge. Reinterpretation began with Jim Sharman, and before Jim, John Tasker and John Sumner. Jim was the first reviver, then me, Benedict, Kip, Michael Kantor and Matt Lutton. The plays have a rich imaginative field that are never specifically about a particular society or a particular time. That said, a play like *Big Toys* was very much about what he saw as the corruption in the Australian ruling class in the 1970s. But there's a theatrical parade about them, a human puppetry, a sense of pageantry, not quite the right word, but a sense of spectacle that about the works that allows them to be interpreted. Productions can draw them towards circus, or towards an intense Brechtian experience, or into a vivid colour field towards clowning. He writes in this brilliant high key that forces you to confront the works with big imaginative gestures, and I think that's why the plays continue to come back and surprise. The works are hard. But they are very satisfying to shake into shape. The plays are waiting for each generation to find the theatrical light in them anew. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Benedict Andrews considers staging a classic as "a simultaneous conversation with the past and an act of renewal". For his 2007 production of *A Season at Sarsaparilla*, this was reshaping the "tired trope" and "too easily familiar" setting of three suburban houses and backyards cut into cross section:

> Working with designer Bob Cousins, we located all three families inside the same enclosed, revolving brick veneer house, and peered at their lives through the windows and by using surveillance cameras. With the ensemble, we discovered a joyful, new way to stage the play's poetry of overlapping suburban lives. It revealed the play afresh and brought it into dialogue with the present. […] A repertoire demands continual risky, energetic inquiry – digging into the radioactive core of plays to release them afresh – or the canon becomes fixed and dead. It's interesting that the plays that come to form our repertoire somehow all exceed their bounds, they make impossible demands of the stage, the actors, the emotions and the audience. They probe limits of being. The plays of Patrick White, like the plays of Shakespeare, Sarah Kane, Chekhov and the Greeks, are impossible to pin down, they're messy, living things. (Benedict Andrews interview 11/12/2018).

Andrews emphasises the heightened theatricality of White's plays. Matt Lutton, the director of the Malthouse production of *Night on Bald Mountain*, discusses his initial choice of the play in relation to the Andrews production:

> I came to it because I had seen Benedict Andrews' *Season at Sarsaparilla* and was interested and impressed by the way he was able to interpret that play. At the time, that was the only Patrick White play that I knew and really loved. I then went back and read the repertoire of Patrick White. It felt like a repertoire that had a lot of room for invention, and, to be honest, it was a little bit of a process of deduction, because I don't think that any of his last four plays are particularly strong, and of the first four plays, the other three had been done. So, *The Ham Funeral* had already been done at Malthouse, *A Cheery Soul* is too large, we could never afford to do it, and *Season at Sarsaparilla* is also too large, and it had just been done. So, by elimination, I was looking at *Night on Bald Mountain*. And I had fallen in love with it enough to want to do it. (Matthew Lutton interview 25/5/2019).

Lutton's straightforward deduction led him to propose the play to the then Malthouse artistic director, Marion Potts, who, according to Lutton was keen to take up his suggestion and required no detailed discussion about his ideas or relation to the play (Lutton interview 25/5/2019). Potts and Lutton worked together through the four-and-a half years of Potts' artistic directorship, with Lutton as associate director. In this case it may be that

programming came down to practical concerns of finding a suitable play within the season. After Potts left in March 2015, Lutton was appointed the artistic director of Malthouse.

Matthew Lutton considers the challenges of directing *Night on Bald Mountain* in the following way:

> I reflect on it now, and I don't think it's a brilliant play, but I think at the time I thought it was a very good play, a very intriguing play. … Working on the play was quite difficult because it has distinct style. That style was often difficult to find because there is a level of melodrama in the writing. You can see it is drawing on the American canon, such as *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the isolated alcoholic, the family locked away that has a history, so there is a lot of references there. Also because of White's poetics, it has a melodramatic mode. I was not eager to push the melodrama. I was more interested in finding a gritty and grotesque reality to it. There was a constant difficulty of finding exactly what the performance language is. (Matthew Lutton interview 25/5/2019).

Lutton considers the performance language and style as central challenge to directing the play and indicates inconsistency in the writing and in particular a level of melodrama that was difficult to overcome. In her monograph, dramaturg May-Brit Akerholt (1988) assesses *Night on Bald Mountain* as a less than successful play in a similar vein. Akerholt brings this lack of stylistic uniformity as ultimately a problem with the plot, where the play does not bring together the disparate symbolic characters or sustain dramatic tension towards a central action. The characters revolve around two or even three partly linked plots. Thus, the formal attempt to combine naturalism and metaphoric expression ultimately leads to its weakness (Akerholt 1988: 101-102). Gus Worby points to the structure as a "collision of three parallel plays", where the characters move across "to add force, tragic potential and finality to otherwise unfinished business" (Worby 1996: xvii). Similarly, Worby points to "a mix of genres" in the play, which he claims appeal to the postmodern sensibility, through a self-conscious mix of theatrical strategies (Worby 1996: xxi), thus using apparent structural weaknesses to leverage dramatic innovation. The directors perceive these structural flaws as challenges. Matthew Lutton needed to constantly search for a performance language, Benedict Andrews sees White's plays as exceeding their boundaries to make impossible demands, Neil Armfield points to their interpretive potential and value as "a radical theatrical edge". It may be that such dramaturgical challenges or flaws strengthen their status as Australian classics despite the relatively thin revival record. However, is this the achievement

of directorial interpretation, or can this status also be considered through the work of the actor?

The following section focuses on Matthew Lutton's 2014 production of *Night on Bald Mountain*, initially in comparison with Armfield's first revival in 1996, then in close analysis of two scenic moments from the 2014 production. This will consider the proposition that a particular actor endows the cultural position of these productions. Although there have been strong arguments advanced that the director creates the classic when remounting a Patrick White play, certain actors have also come to typify the cultural value of the plays. There are 'iconic' performances associated with the productions: Robyn Nevin as Miss Docker, Carol Skinner as Miss Quodling, Julie Forsyth as Alma Lusty. These performances are also strongly associated with the plays' position in the repertoire. "Actors want to keep returning to those juicy, mysterious roles" (Andrews interview 11/12/2018). The following analysis does not view the actor's performance as emblem of White's canonical status or as sign of a director's talent but considers the actor as creating the felt sensation of classic.

Revivals have been discussed as the task for ambitious young directors, yet critical reception glowingly emphasises the actor. It was the performance style that became the elevated challenge for Matthew Lutton, where *Night on Bald Mountain* moves from a gritty realist style of American drama towards an expressionist end. This is a challenge that is ultimately met and delivered by the actor. What are the elements performed, conveyed and endowed onstage that contribute to the classic experience of this production?

Night on Bald Mountain by Patrick White

First revival: The Australian Playhouse 1996

This play's first ever revival was as part of a concerted mainstream institutional choice to express and shape a national canon of Australian plays. The presenting company was the Australian Playhouse, which was a reformulation of the State Theatre Company of South Australia (STCSA). The company launched a competition in the national The Australian newspaper at the beginning of 1996 to call for plays to make up an all-Australian program over five years between 1996 and 2000. This was a structured classic-ing processes for Australian drama through engagement with a wider public. According to the company, the focus of Australian Playhouse was:

> [f]ramed with an awareness that we are at the beginning of the end of this millennium, the constant refrain in official culture of "the search for our identity", debate on the

> Republic, discourse about citizenship, and the tensions between regional, national and global spheres of influence. (Theatre Program in White 1996: iii).[96]

The emphasis on an all-Australian program engages an active mindset in the desire for classic. With a new programmatic emphasis, the company also restructured, and was headed by an executive producer rather than artistic director and administrator. David Williamson's *The Club*, a highly successful and characteristic play of New Wave writing, launched the first season. White's play was the second presented. More than thirty years after its 1964 premiere, this first revival of White's *Night on Bald Mountain* was directed by Neil Armfield, with assistant director Benedict Andrews, and also toured to Belvoir Street Theatre. However, soon after the first season of Australian Playhouse, the ambitious all-Australian focus became an ill-fated experiment. There was little support from traditional subscribers and significant pressure to return to more orthodox programming. Executive Producer Chris Westwood resigned at the end of 1997, with the company then resuming a conventional state company season mix of local and overseas works. The Australian Playhouse was a conscious but failed attempt to actively curate and create an Australian classic canon.

Of Patrick White's first four plays, *Night on Bald Mountain* is considered his most naturalistic. There is an apparent unity of time, place and action that suggest a more traditional form. White wrote this play around the same time as Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1961), yet the couple in *Night on Bald Mountain*, Miriam and Hugo Sword, lack the majestic struggle of Martha and George, and their drama could make the play feel parochial and outdated. The play has been assessed as "grounded in the unrelenting tropes of psychological realism" (Varney and D'Urso 2018: 60). However, Akerholt argues that White intended to exploit a more symbolic design using traditional form. Forces of nature reflect the turmoil of the characters, so setting the wild and free nature of Miss Quodling, the goat woman against the dry barren intellect of the Swords to form opposites that explore an ambivalence of life forces (Akerholt 1988: 106). These opposing characters work symbolically rather than as types, suggests Akerholt. With this analysis, the central dramaturgical challenge is seen as the lack of parallel plot engagement between the groups of characters. For Neil Armfield's 1996 production, this structural challenge was transformed by a theatricalised connection that drew the separate plot strands together.

[96] The 1996 Currency Current Theatre Series publication of *Night on Bald Mountain* accompanied the production and includes the theatre program for this first revival.

The stage setting for the 1996 production was planned around the organising idea of the Belvoir corner, a spatial arrangement that tends to dissolve the separation of audience and performance. The set backed into a granite rock wall that looked like a majestic Blue Mountains escarpment, with a scaffolding staircase suggestive of a high mountain path leading up to a gantry above the stage (Andrews interview 11/12/2018). Armfield connected the partially linked plot strands of those that live on the mountain– Miss Quodling and the Sword household – by doubling the household as Miss Quodling's goats. This theatricalised visual connection guided the audience towards symbolic interconnection of the actions of the groups of characters.

This production was received by The Australian as "one of the most transcendently illuminating, stirring and exciting productions we have seen in this country for a long time".[97] Previously, critical discussion had tended to focus on White's emphatic production embargo of the play or to analyse the plays from a literary perspective (Comer 1984; Akerholt 1978, 1988). The reaction to the Australian Playhouse production reshaped this perception, in an interpretive layer brought by the director that "transforms the text".[98] Heightened theatricality using the actors, a signature style of Armfield's direction, resolved the literary challenges of the drama. So that, "[f]rom the opening moments, when the actors fall to their knees to take up positions as Miss Quodling's goats, the level of dramatic conceit and daring are set.".[99] Within the active mindset of Australian canon creation, the production accentuated the director as interpreter and determiner of the play's success.

Second revival: Malthouse 2014

For the 2014 Malthouse production of *Night on Bald Mountain*, the Merlyn Theatre stage is filled from floor level to the high ceiling with an immense structure of multi-levelled wooden platforms.[100] The set fills the height and width of the stage space. Four long playing levels are stacked on each other. At the highest level is a musician in the right corner who accompanies the stage action on cello and electronic equipment. Each level is fairly narrow and the actors often play their scenes face-on to the audience. These playing spaces constrict the movement and compress the stage picture. Even as the massive stage space overwhelms the human

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[97] Night chillingly excites, Aus 13/7/1996.

[98] Night chillingly excites, Aus 13/7/1996.

[99] Armfield glows with White magic, SMH 12/7/1996.

[100] From notes taken in performance on Friday 9 May 2014, Merlyn Theatre Malthouse, and subsequent multiple viewing of the one-camera documentary video in the Malthouse archives. Season 5 July to 24 July 2014.

forms, it focuses acute attention on the actors, who are both emphasised and restricted by the playing space. The actors are pinned like specimens on a bare wooden mounting board. The towering height of the stage is separated from the audience by a deep gully across the front, like a narrow orchestra pit. Raked seating raises the audience, yet the stage structure also overshadows the audience. The size creates a soaring frame accented by the musician at its vertex. The space pushes the action to its edge while simultaneously restraining its reach.

The “ziggurat of plywood terraces”,[101] creates an almost two-dimensional playing space with the actors precarious on precipitous edge high above the audience. Each playing level is transformed into rooms and exterior spaces when lit. Windows and doors are created by moving panels in the walls, which reveal dark voids behind. Action disappears and reappears at the various levels of the stage through doors hidden in the walls. The playtext describes in detail the interior of the house on Bald Mountain which includes a central curved staircase to connect the upper and lower levels of the house. On the Malthouse stage, access between the levels occurs behind the wooden panels, offstage and not seen by audience. The actors are able to exit on one level and appear on another, a farce-like function that at times gives frenetic chase pace to the action. The set evokes an unbounded mountainscape as well as an interior and isolated space of the house, fitting the gothic overtones of the grand dark tragedy. Even so, representing the bald rock mountain by large plywood panels constructs an austere economical form that suggests Nordic noir rather than Australian gothic. The form is underscored by an operatic live soundscape created at the top of the mountain by the Danish composer Ida Duelund Hansen.

The indomitable Miss Quodling follows a vein of older female characters that inhabit White’s early plays. Miss Quodling’s monologues open and close *Night on Bald Mountain* and characterise stylistic dimensions of an Australian Modernism. Quodling is round and squat, close to the earth, and lives alone on the mountain with her goats. In the opening monologue, she talks to her goats, who all have names: “[…] My Dolores! […] You’re my darling *thing*! […] Finished with you, Fairy. Never saw such an ugly lookun udder.” “Jessica”, “Elspeth” and the “big bugger” buck “Samson” (White 1996: 2). Miss Quodling is vehement and forceful, full of life, “abusive and tender by turns” (White 1996: 1). Within moments she “screams” at her goats, is “sentimental”, “exalted”, “admonishing”, “cold”, “soft and tender”, “remorseful” and “enraptured” (White 1996: 2-3). These swift moves between heightened

[101] Scathing satire and sensual tragedy, G 9/5/2014.

emotional states afford a full exploitation of character. In the Malthouse production, these emotional highs and lows and extreme interactions contradict the two-dimensional ligneous setting. The grand dimensions of the set frame Miss Quodling's impassioned interactions with her goats to convey a sensation of Australian Modernism.

Fig. 4.3 Julie Forsyth in Malthouse's *Night on Bald Mountain*, 2014. Photo: Pia Johnson ©

The goats are portrayed as two-dimensional plywood cut-outs that rise up and down out of the floor, entering in and out of interaction with Miss Quodling (see Fig. 4.3). They are accompanied by an echoing electronic bleating sound, that contrasts with a smooth evocative cello underscore. Their appearance as they pop up and down out of the stage floor, raises laughter from the audience. To begin the play, sharp bleating responds to Miss Quodling's scolds and petting. The wild he-goat, Samson, is unseen but heard, and is locked under one section of the stage, up-lit as he bellows and kicks for freedom. The unadorned set emphasises the lone figure of Miss Quodling, simple props indicate her life with goats: a metal bucket, a rag used to wash herself. Alone on the vast towering stage, Miss Quodling tends goats that are portrayed by outline and sound only. The grandeur of the set elaborates the gravity of the goat woman's existence.

Miss Quodling's opening monologue is characteristic White that combines "vigorous vernacular" and "poetic expression" (Akerholt 1988: 2). Miss Quodling's speech as the "risen sun hits her" is designated as a "hymn" (White 1996: 4). It is delivered face-front to the audience and lent emotional weight by the undertone of cello.

> MISS QUODLING Mornun … I love it when it skins yer! Oh yes, it can hurt! … When the ice crackles underfoot … and the scrub tears the scabs off yer knuckles … and the spiders' webs are spun again … first of all … out of the dew … it's to remind that life begins at dawn. Bald Mountain! (Act 1: 4).

At this moment, stepping forward to deliver this "hymn", Julie Forsyth's Miss Quodling embodies and transmits Australian classic. She is singular, grand, extraordinary and ordinary. The opening monologue is given full force in its heightened modernist setting. Miss Quodling's performance juxtaposes colloquial and poetic language, grand and quotidian scale, giving cogent emotional and visual dimensions to create the sensation of classic.

Patrick White attracted very mixed critical attention for the Malthouse production: "White's lumpy, ugly and ultimately ridiculous script",[102] "Complex, insightful, interesting and sharply funny script",[103] "Patrick White's Australian tragedy".[104] The playtext is critically assessed as awkward as well as insightful, both comic and tragic, observations that probably reflect its mix of styles as well as the preferences of the critics. The Australian Book Review saw that "The play is a tragedy but an unusual one, a brooding, restless work full of narrative ambiguities and jagged tonal shifts, awkward exposition and toppling melodrama. For all its virtues, *Bald Mountain* is a difficult play to make sense of".[105] The Saturday Age considered the play as a cultural obligation: "the comedy and darkness in it remain peculiarly our own […] We should be grateful to see White played in a way that grapples fiercely with this unstable material".[106] The audience need only be grateful and appreciate the experience of production.

Unlike the playwright, Forsyth's performance attracts effusive and uniformly positive comment from the critics. The Guardian associates understandings of the classic category,

[102] Blackened by White, HS 14/5/2014.

[103] Night on Bald Mountain, Arts Hub 12/5/2014.

[104] The bald and the dutiful, Limelight 1/7/2014.

[105] Night on Bald Mountain, ABR 13/5/2014.

[106] Admirable staging of dark White comedy, Sat Age 10/5/2014.

"Forsyth is dream casting as Miss Quodling: she is at once a clown and a seer, a character in the tradition of Shakespeare's Fools, and she compellingly unites the vulgar, the lyric and the tragic".[107] Other critics continue such praise: "Julie Forsyth as Miss Quodling, the crazy goat lady who acts as oracle, chorus and clown, whose broad vernacular and obsessively narrow focus give the play its tragi-comic texture. She's wonderful – funny and relentlessly eccentric, bellowing and cooing and wailing over her goats on the monumental set",[108] "Julie Forsyth delivers her usual magic and is hard to take your eyes from",[109] "The cast are stellar, particularly Forsyth",[110] "The evening's highlight is a brilliant performance by Julie Forsyth as Miss Quodling, the ancient goatherd whose rambling, rural dithyrambs, full of pits, exultation and dread, bookend the play. This rough, oracular spirit, herself part goat in wisdom and simplicity, is a remarkable creation and it is hard to imagine a better interpreter than Forsyth",[111] "Miss Quodling is one of Patrick White's great creations. She turns coarseness into poetry, the vernacular into the lyrical. She's tough and funny and fleshy. Julie Forsyth is quite perfect in the role. In a way, Forsyth has been playing Miss Quodling for 30 years, snake charming us with Strine".[112] This is a critical response from the national newspaper The Australian that emphasises the haunted experience of watching the actor.

The director may be considered as the key interpreter of a classic and is the creative position that secures their reputation with production. In comparison to Forsyth, the critical reaction to Matthew Lutton's direction is relatively muted: "Lutton poses as many questions as he offers answers. It is a thoughtful, even mature treatment, and Lutton never forces a naturalistic explanation where the script can't support it. His emphasis, sensibly, is on the rhythm and music of White's words. Indeed there is something operatic in the experience",[113] "[e]ven in this fumbling Matthew Lutton production, which exhibits nothing so much as the daring of its pretentions, there is the remote but unmistakable glow of greatness",[114] "Matthew Lutton's lucid and symphonic production",[115] "Matthew Lutton's production is spacious and

[107] Scathing satire and sensual tragedy, G 9/5/2014.

[108] Admirable staging of dark White comedy, Sat Age 10/5/2014.

[109] Night on Bald Mountain, Toorak Times 11/5/2014.

[110] Blackened by White, HS 14/5/2014.

[111] Night on Bald Mountain, ABR 13/5/2014.

[112] Glitter of White's rough diamonds, Aus 12/5/2014.

[113] Night on Bald Mountain, ABR 13/5/2014.

[114] An unmistakable glow of greatness, S 24/5/2014.

[115] Scathing satire and sensual tragedy, G 9/5/2014.

unhurried, as grand and impressive (not to mention surprising and delightful) as Dale Ferguson's vast multi-tiered set".[116] These comparisons indicate the production sharply gains classic status through the performance of the actor.

The final section of this case study will look at a key scenic moment from the production, a dialogue between Miss Quodling and Miriam Sword. Mrs Sword is an alcoholic, locked away in the house on Bald Mountain by her husband, who is a supressed and sententious academic. This character draws on the tropes of Eugene O'Neill to comment on the withheld emotional life of an intellectual elite using "a polished form of intellectual rhetoric" (Akerholt 1988: 101). The scenic moment is a rare interaction between the two households of Bald Mountain. Disjointed dialogue between the two women is juxtaposed to complement through associations and key words. The dialogue works like a monologue to suggest these two characters are two halves of "one powerful figure" (Akerholt 1988: 112-115).

This scene is the high turning point of the second act, with Miriam Sword finally succumbing again to her alcohol addiction, kept at bay up to this point by her treatment. Miss Quodling decides to join her:

> MIRIAM (formally) Can I tempt you to a drop?
> MISS QUODLING Seeing as you've fallen ... I'd be prepared to follow suit. (Act 2: 49).

Director Matthew Lutton called attention to this scene:

> There was a particular scene, between Miss Quodling and Marion Sword, the big scene where they are drunk in the middle of the show, this was a rare moment in rehearsals of feeling like I was in an acting masterclass. I had nothing to offer Julie Forsyth and Melita Jurisic, they would do that scene and it would just be phenomenal every time. I think it was both of them sinking really deeply into the characters that Patrick had written and it was a brilliantly written scene. It was quite rare, something that you rehearse, and are afraid of rehearsing too much. It was quite rare to feel that you were afraid of rehearsing it too many times, not wanting to lose its playfulness and honestly, I think that the production's best feature was that scene. (Matthew Lutton interview 25/5/2019).

[116] Glitter of White's rough diamonds, Aus 12/5/2014.

This perspective was also shared critically. Australian Stage saw "The highpoint of this fearless production is in the scene in which Forsyth and Jurisic share the stage, and a bottle of whisky. The energy generated by these two women is phenomenal. It is the women who pull the emotional strings in this play".[117] Miriam Sword is performed by Melita Jurisic, who early in her career played in the Playbox premiere production of Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age*, (the subject of the next case study) and who by this time had achieved an international career working with Australian director Barrie Kosky in Vienna and Berlin, as well as with Benedict Andrews. Her career may be the result of the small pool of Australian actors, yet certainly thrives as a result of the international networks of directors such as Kosky and Andrews.

The earthy vernacular of Miss Quodling works as an opposing type to the intellectual rhetoric of Miriam Sword. These two actors and these roles embody fundamental identity tropes that interact to create the sensation of classic in this production. In this scenic moment, these figures together constitute a liminal version of Australian identity. Miss Quodling as colloquial nature, Miriam Sword as hyperbolic anguish, Jurisic as expatriate exotic, Forsyth as antipodean familiar. All play drunk in the space between Australian and European identity.

The scene is mostly played sitting at a table facing out to the audience, at the centre front of the stage at the floor level. The women perform as though extremely drunk, so that the associative dialogue is a product of their inebriated state, rather than affected juxtaposed independent speech. As one speaks, the other listens intently, closely, to then connect to their own ongoing story.

> MISS QUODLING: Dust! Dust! It was all tables. Little Tables. And things. I've never seen so many things…
> MIRIAM: The physical… Now the physical … But oh, no! Raise your mind to a higher plane …
> MISS QUODLING: I bust a shepherdess once. A bit of a china ornament! You wouldn't of known as anyone could create like Auntie did on that day. …
> MIRIAM: (suddenly stretching her arms above her head in an attitude of languid sensuality) … when the body is such a beautiful thing … (Lets her arms fall in hopelessness and disgust) Was is perhaps the word.
> MISS QUODLING: …'Pull the blinds,' she said. Mind you, there was no need … we practically lived behind the Holland. 'Pull the blinds,' however, she said … 'my head … couldn't be more broken than a little china shepherdess. …'
> MIRIAM: (earnestly) I understand. … (Takes a good long pull at her glass)

[117] Night on Bald Mountain, Australian Stage 9/5/2014.

MISS QUODLING: (happy) Don't it get yer down? (She follows suit and drinks) (Act 2: 131).

This scenic moment begins with Miss Quodling banging the seat of her chair with her hat to knock out the dust, a familiar gesture of cleaning house, ironic from one herself so filthy. As Miriam exclaims, "when the body is such a beautiful thing", she cups her sagging breasts, and then lifts them up on "*Was* is perhaps the word". Miss Quodling watches her with a smile, and then grabs her own breasts and jiggles them up and down. Physically they share their aging female bodies, and both laugh hysterically and long, accompanied by the audience. Miss Quodling takes another swig of her drink and then screams out to the audience, "Pull the blinds". Miriam looks at her closely as though fascinated by her story and refills both their glasses. This scene is played with high emotion, sudden swings of mood, with many extra comic exchanges added by the actors. The script provides minimal stage direction, and the actors improvise and emphasise their mutual experience with comic-tragedy.

The scripted direction of "MIRIAM (*bitterly unhappy, rocking*)" (Act 2: 131), is performed as accentuated melodramatic loud sobbing, Miriam face down on the table as Miss Quodling worriedly pats her on the back. Miss Quodling tells a story up close to Miriam's ear as way of comfort. Their stories and types of language are opposites, but the context of drunken conversation allows physical action to overlap and emotional reaction to feed the other's need. They are very drunk women taking care of each other yet making little sense. Talking nonsense. Sharing their woes. This is also a rare moment in the production where there is a sense of genuine care and connection. Not because they are drunk, but because of the acceptance that comes from being drunk. A drunk mind speaks a sober heart. The performers exchange emotional states. As one is ecstatic, the other is mournful and then the reverse. They tell stories about their past, Miss Quodling's trapped childhood and freedom gained, Miriam's sexual pleasure and then captivity and subjection. They are opposites that feed each other's need, the sensual creative woman controlled by the dry intellect of the academic, the single earthy goat woman whose freedom comes at the expense of human connection. Their emotional states exchange and recast notions of a contemporary Australian female settler.

This is the emotional highpoint of the play. The dialogue, apparently at cross-purposes, generates emotional power through the characters' comprehension of each other despite the communicative failure of their words. The actors solve challenges in the playtext performatively by using a sense of high-toned tragedy that is regulated by comic contemplation. Both the characters and the actors epitomise and negotiate between Australian

settler and European yearning. This scenic moment has postcolonial resonances generated in the practice of classic. Classic-ing that is recognised and felt through the work of the actor.

This case study has considered the process of classic-ing through the lens of an actor. On the stage, Julie Forsyth evokes a cultural memory that consolidates a sense of theatre legacy and generates an impression of temporal depth and purpose. Forsyth's early performances haunts her work in other productions and in other roles. This ghosting entails the history of ANT, a company whose signature work was European classic texts with stock characters that equated with particular actors. ANT's programmatic approach built a comparative experience for audiences, steering reception through recognition of character type and a stylistic physical approach to playtexts. However, the haunting experience of Forsyth's performance is only one dimension of a complex process of classic endowment by this actor.

A multidimensional process of classic-ing was examined through two productions that occupy a category of 'modern classic'. Even though the plays have infrequent revival patterns, these productions were unmistakably classic. This status may emanate from the tributary nature of Australian culture as much as manifest changes in Australian culture or indicate an emerging urbane audience responsive to modernist drama. The absence of cumulative experience over time appeared to bolster the classic status of the plays. Critical reaction indicates a turn-about in the reception of both Beckett and White, with a surfacing mainstream cultural connection to the playwrights' works. White's plays, which produced initial distaste on their premiere transformed to canonical acclaim with their first revivals. While Beckett's work moved from the realm of the alternative artist or lauded international visitor to take up position as emblematic modernist mainstream. Critical discussion has coordinated this phenomenon with the ambitions of the director. In this way, for example, the classic value of White's plays is strongly associated with young (often male) directorial reputation and vision.

This case study took account of the director's role in relation to classic. The productions were viewed in the context of the companies in artistic transition, an unstable state that emphasised a sense of directorial control. Yet the category of classic is also a practice that must ultimately be proven in performance. This actor's endowment of classic in performance had contingent effect on artistic reputations. Even with playtexts that freight an authoritative classic aura, the status remains socially derived and requires testing through staging. In these productions, this actor *endowed* classic. This was an action that materialised through congruent effects: in the experience of ghosted performance, in the embodiment of resonant

cultural tropes that mediate the settler, and in the *sensation* of artistic accomplishment. This classic-ing is a tacit socially determined process generated by the presence of this actor Julie Forsyth.

Generating the cultural position coined as classic is more than an intrinsic potential of a playtext, production repetition over time, or the skills and ambition of a director. In these productions, classic emerges within an axis of expectations and actions embodied by actor Julie Forsyth. Assessing this process of classic-ing emphasises the transactional process between actor and audiences. Forsyth performing classic validates a theatrical past that remains, despite and because of a thin Australian theatre tradition. As the performance is delivered as classic, the effect of taking part in this cultural endowment becomes a felt sensation of its own success.

4. An Unearthed Classic: *The Golden Age*

This third case study centres on the STC 2016 production of Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* (1985), produced thirty-one years after its premiere as a new Australian play. The play received no mainstream attention since its premiere, yet in 2016 it was presented as an Australian classic. Two other productions are included in this analysis. I did not see these live, they are reconstructed for comparison in other ways. One is the 1985 premiere production at Playbox, which is investigated through the Playbox production archive. The second is the postcolonial scholarly framing of the play by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins in *Post-colonial Drama* (1996). These bring comparative perspective to the interplay between postcolonial resonance and classic in the 2016 STC performance.

The reading of *The Golden Age* as characteristic postcolonial drama is taken to be part of its performed life. Gilbert and Tompkins put the affordance of the play to particular use when they envisage its post-colonial dramatic strategies. W. B. Worthen suggests that:

> While it is sometimes thought that a critical reading of plays is merely "theoretical" as opposed to the "practical" reading undertaken by a director or actors involved in staging a play, their reading is no less "theoretical" in this sense. Rather than deriving the essential design of the play, they, too, are reading the play within a specific scene and purpose of meaning-making. (Worthen 2010: xiv).

This perspective on critical reading appears accurate in relation to *Post-colonial Drama*, where the allocation does not determine the play's fundamental design but rather is a performance. This case study uses the reading as 'practical', as a postcolonial interpretation that also has impact through reception.

Historical production perspectives of *The Golden Age* as a new play illuminate the shaping of its cultural status. What remains of its life as a new play? Do these fragments precipitate its status as classic? A new play highlights the playwright's work while a classic play emphasises the work of the director. By looking into the archive as well as onto the stage, this case study further considers this aphorism. The 2016 designation of the play as a classic operates as a mindset that flows through the producing company STC. Associated with existing understandings of classic in a number of ways, this 'affinity classic' also develops its status in relation to the postcolonial resonances of the play. As discussed earlier, the invented language of the play is used as the proof and vehicle of the play's status of classic. Performance analysis of the 2016 production further engages with post-colonial strategic

expectations. The second part of this case study looks in detail at the post-colonial dramatic strategies in specific scenic moments of the STC production.

The Golden Age by Louis Nowra

The scene of discovery of an isolated family group in the Tasmanian wilderness prefigures *The Golden Age* as characteristic postcolonial drama. These forest people are made up of escaped convicts and first settlers who have developed their own language and culture over generations away from imperial influence. They are interpreted symbolically as a young colony forming identity away from imperial influence (Turcotte 1987) or as a metaphor for the lost Aboriginal tribes of the same area (Kelly cited in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 224). Nowra originally heard this as a "true story" from a university academic. Apparently, such a group was found in the 1930s and subsequently died in an asylum (Nowra 1989: x). Rather than search for the 'truth' of the tale, Nowra uses the idea as figuration for the narrative and as inspiration for the invented language of the forest group. Advancing the story as a hidden truth of the early colony lends the play a level of authenticity and historically anchors the play. In the narrative, initial lively scenes of first contact and the forest group's return to civilisation move quickly to scenes of their physical and mental destruction. This bleakly parallels the devastation of a young soldier in the Second World War. The emotional interest of the play between two young outsiders is subjected to these destructive forces. Their experiences set values of those seen as primitive against those considered as enlightened.

The play is epic in dimension, involves eighteen characters, and moves between upper-class Hobart, working-class Melbourne, south-west Tasmanian wilderness, an asylum and war-torn Berlin. Structurally, the play intercuts short scenes into a linear narrative. The wider influence of Europe on Australia expiates major turning plot points, where the rise of Hitler catalyses the fate of the forest group. To begin the play, young working-class Francis and his well-to-do friend Peter go bushwalking in the Tasmanian wilderness and encounter the forest people. Romantic fascination kindles between Francis and the young girl of the group, Betsheb. The forest people are faced with genetic extinction, so their matriarch Ayre decides to follow the young men back to Hobart and lead her group back into 'civilisation'. The outbreak of the Second World War and the interests of the government mean that Francis goes away to fight and the group are locked away in an asylum. As the forest people deteriorate and die leaving only Betsheb to survive, Francis faces a moral turning point in the final days of the war that ultimately proves to himself how savage he has become. When Betsheb and he are reunited,

they return to the Tasmanian forest, a resolution that suggests assimilation into a new world. Whether they survive or not is unanswered, drawing an impossible or ambivalent conclusion.

Historical production perspectives of a new play

In 1984, Playbox commissioned Louis Nowra to write *The Golden Age*. Nowra was playwright-in-residence over a two-year period, and this was his final commission. This new Australian play was produced three times over the following three years. The Playbox production premiered on 8 February 1985, in the new Studio Theatre of the recently opened Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne. Two years later, in 1987, Sydney had its professional premiere with Nimrod at the Seymour Centre. The year before this, in 1986, the graduating students of the national drama training institution, NIDA, performed the play in Sydney and in Canberra. Logical and astute use of resources meant the development needs of a new play could be met: to be produced, performed and polished over a number of seasons and in front of a range of audiences. This was reinforced by local Currency Press who published and republished the play. This appears to be a robust model of script development.

Following these premiere seasons, the play had a rehearsed reading at the Lyceum Theatre in London in 1988, Australia's Bicentennial year, as part of a theatre event *Oz '88*.[118] After this, *The Golden Age* was produced in Australia by theatre training institutions and at an amateur level.[119] The play was referred as being produced 'overseas' and as adapted for film (Kelly cited in Holloway 1981: 535). Yet, over the ensuing period, the play did not receive a single mainstream Australian production. Then in 2016, thirty-one years after its premiere as a new play, *The Golden Age* was programmed by the STC as an Australian classic.

Since Nowra began writing plays in 1977, many have received regular professional

production with mainstream theatre companies in Melbourne and Sydney. The playwright is called a "one-man repertoire machine" (McCallum cited in Kelly 1997: 4). Nowra is one of a few Australian writers to have continuing presence in the professional mainstream theatre. His prominence is possibly enough to ensure this play would be revived. *The Golden Age* could be simply seen as a neglected work that was waiting in the wings for the right time to

[118] *The Golden Age* was planned for production along with Stephen Sewell's *Dreams in an Empty City* and Hannie Rayson's *Room to Move* in September 1988 at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith as part of Britain's celebrations of Australia's Bicentennial. Sewell's play was produced; the other two received rehearsed play readings. Britons shun Aussie Shows. Runs of play, films cut short, DT 27/6/1988; The Bicentenary, Age 12/8/1988; Cultural Cringe Corner II, SMH 12/8/1988.

[119] AusStage database and the NIDA Archives show these theatre student productions include Rusden 1990, NIDA 2000, Monash University 2008.

make its entrance. However, the Australian category of classic is more than the result of a playwright's reputation. The cumulative production history process and a production's creative team also influence its ongoing life and status as classic. This fundamental shift in the play's status, from new play to classic, gives insight into the construction of a modified category of classic.

To identify some of the features of this category, I firstly turn to the play's production history, focusing on the premiere production. What were practical implications of producing a new play? What characterises the production of *The Golden Age*? Perspectives of this life are drawn from archival materials. Vestiges of the premiere production housed in the Playbox archive include costume lists, sound plot, a prompt copy, opening night cards, letters, contracts, and financial records of the season. In different ways, this archive shows the constraints, challenges and outcomes of making this new work. Published interviews with the author at the time and Nowra's memoir were also used for this account of the beginnings of this new play.

Script development

The script was published with the premiere performance, in Current Theatre Series by Currency Press, as "the complete text as presented on the first day of rehearsal by the Playbox Company" and "does not include any subsequent revisions by the author." (Nowra 1985: xi). The archives contain three different versions of the script.[120] *A Working Draft: The Golden Age: An Australian Tale by Louis Nowra*, which includes a number of characters and some scenes and dialogues that were not in the first published script.[121] This draft includes a list of characters numbered with pen, and a note "36 costumes" also on the page. There is also a quote from James Merrill handwritten at the bottom of the title page. This is possibly the script that the director worked with in the pre-production phase. Another bound script, *The Golden Age by Louis Nowra*, contains a list divided into character groups numbered one to eight. The quote from Merrill is typed on its own dedication page. This copy is archived as an early draft. Finally, there is a prompt copy. This is a patchwork of renumbered pages, pages with a differing typeface, handwritten pages, and scenes with cuts and rewritten dialogue. As usually seen in a prompt copy, there are directions for sound, lighting and cast

[120] *A Working Draft: The Golden Age: an Australian Tale* (1985.005.006); Early draft *The Golden Age* (2008.006.163 4/4); Prompt script *The Golden Age* (2008.006.164 2/2), Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

[121] A news release issued one month before the premiere performance states: "*The Golden Age* is subtitled an Australian Tale". News Release from Playbox 9/1/1985: Wolanski Archives, University of NSW.

calls. In the absence of a video recording, the prompt copy indicates much about the premiere performance and season.

The prompt has a different base text to that published by Currency as an initial complete text. This 'original' script has been cut up, rearranged and pasted upon to form the prompt copy. The order of the pages is shuffled about and additional scenes, such as the speech from Iphigenia/Elizabeth and the final Greek play scene in Act 2 Scene 17, are handwritten by Nowra. The hotchpotch of typeface indicates continuing development of a performance script.

In some of his critical writings, published posthumously, director Rex Cramphorn reflects on this production: "*The Golden Age* provided a fine example for me of the excitement of putting together a structure which cannot reveal its full range of potential meaning until it is performed for an audience." (Cramphorn quoted in Maxwell 2009: 292-3). Cramphorn suggests his directorial work involved creating meaning through structure that is then tested and adjusted in front of an audience. This process is reflected in the prompt copy and the range of drafts in the archive. As an integral part of making a new work, it appears important to exercise the possibilities of the script and reshape the play during the season. A central development task of the first production was to solve structural challenges of the script.

There are two intervals marked in the prompt copy. The technical cues suggest the interval happened after Scene 10, rather than Scene 13 as published in the first Currency script. At the same time, the prompt also indicates Act 1 of the play was intended to finish after Scene 13, rather than at Scene 10. This means an interval break was taken at either the decision to lock up the forest people in the asylum, or with Ayre's decision to leave the forest. Yet, it is unclear when this change was made. The critical response gives conflicting perceptions of the running time, of the scenes performed and when the interval took place. This probably reflects a process of cutting and reshaping over the season.

It is difficult then to gain a fixed view of a performance from the versions available in the archive. In fact, the prompt copy indicates that there were quite different performances. The changes across the time of development of the script span the writing, production and performance phases of the work. However, such changes during the premiere season appear to be the result of more than a creative process. The Playbox archive indicates the practical influences of the production of a new play. In a Valentines card from the playwright addressed to Jill Smith, then company administrator, Nowra writes he "never had to make

cuts because of matinees and overtime – distresses me greatly. It hurts me to lose the funeral scene. Ah well, when the play is done again, I'll restore it".[122] However, in an extensive review of the play for *Australasian Drama Studies*, Peter Fitzpatrick points to "the extraneous scene at the mother's coffin" (Fitzpatrick 1985: 141). It appears this scene was cut after the opening. Although the prompt copy indicates two places where interval might occur, it retains the funeral scene. Perhaps the archived prompt is a combination of earlier and later performed versions. The archive also contains a memo to the cast from Kim Bowen the executive assistant dated 11 February, four days after the opening. There is written: "we've just had a phone call from Louis saying he is happy with the cuts". This may also suggest that changes to the script were negotiated by the administration of the company a few days after the first performance, rather than by the director or artistic management.

Closer consideration of the show's running time and performance schedule also highlights the practical implications of the length of the performance. The performance begins at 8pm, and each Saturday there are two shows scheduled at 5pm and 8.15pm. Even if the performance ran for two and a half hours, the Saturday schedule would be challenging for the artistic and production team, with only a forty-five-minute turn-around between the two performances. The play previewed on 6 and 7 February and opened on Friday 8 February 1985. There were two shows scheduled the following day. The play was first offered as part of a subscription package with preferential mail bookings closing on 15 December 1984.[123] This package was most likely released some time before the deadline. It appears that decisions about box office and patron comfort differ to those made in the rehearsal room. These differences had significant effect on the script development. The length of the performance must have been of concern, as Nowra's card to Smith indicates. The pressure of box office income is a producer's reality, and here there is discrepancy between artistic and administrative production. Factors of communication and tight resources compound this challenge. The archive indicates that these were solved by cutting scenes. Ultimately artistic aspirations had to concede to practical pressures. Yet further mitigating circumstances can be inferred from the archive. Circumstances that may also have impacted the critical reception of the play.

Rex Cramphorn was the director of both *The Golden Age* in February/March 1985 as well as the next production in April of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* in repertoire

[122] Card from Playwright (2008.006.163 1/4), Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

[123] The Playbox Season 1/1985 Play Calendar and Easy Playbooking Form, Playbox (1984): Wolanski Archives, University of NSW.

with the Actors Development Stream (ADS) of the company. This following season was "a remarkable repertory season" (Milne 2004: 271). New Australian works were the principal charter of Playbox. This said, the company was at that time producing and presenting a range of works, juggling the lack of physical resources, touring regularly, and hosting Cramphorn's ADS. The artistic support and collaboration between playwright and director required to bring a new play such as *The Golden Age* into professional production may have also been constrained by the director's artistic priorities and the company's range of activities.

The Playbox archives reflect the relative importance of the two seasons. *The Golden Age* 'Publicity Schedule' is a half-page list of press and radio coverage, while the file for the following Shakespeare repertory season holds a set of press cuttings collected by Media Monitors of pre-season and critical reaction.[124] The relative spend on filing publicity also indicates the company's resource allocation. Critical reaction to an artistic experiment with Shakespeare was worth documenting, while a shaky new play merely worth noting.

Critical reception

Nowra relates in his biographical memoir that *The Golden Age*:

> [...] had a disastrous reception. Everywhere it was produced the critics berated it. The reaction to my previous play, *Inside the Island*, had been a mixture of extreme distaste and confusion but the critical reception of my new play was uniformly bad. A few years later I ran into a university student who said he was writing a thesis on *The Golden Age* and the bad critical reaction it received. *And you know what*, he said enthusiastically, *there was not one good review anywhere!* (Nowra 2004: 80-81).

It is common knowledge among many Australian theatre workers and theatre historians that this play of Nowra's was critically 'panned flatter than a saucepan lid'. In many ways, Nowra has become, through his own construction as much as the situation he found himself in, a prototypical Australian postcolonial playwright. He was deeply misunderstood and emotionally hurt by the reaction to this production. He gave up writing for theatre as a result. Despite this, Nowra went on to carve out a distinguished national and international career in theatre, television and film and became an acclaimed author of fiction and non-fiction. The narrative of his career path makes a great read, as do his memoirs. In an Australian postcolonial narrative, this writer faces the emotional consequences of attempting to change

[124] *The Golden Age* Publicity Schedule (2008.006.163); *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* Press Clippings (2008.006.165): Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

cultural values. Despite the ‘colonial’ reactions to his work, he rises and succeeds. His success reflects changes in society. Nowra’s personality and his professional story are firmly entwined and add vivid temperament to this period of Australian theatre history. Searching the archives for this performance in part assesses the narrative that Nowra constructs. The first step into *The Golden Age* was to chase up those reviews, to test Nowra’s university student’s thesis. What exactly did the reviewers say?

The archived media package is a one-page typed list entitled ‘Publicity Schedule’. It was a matter therefore of using the resources at the State Library of Victoria to obtain the reviews listed. At a later stage, other sources provided perspective on the marketing of the production. For example, the publicity brochure produced by Playbox, which exploited Nowra’s lack of local production. “Not only is Playbox proud to be premiering this play, but it is also proud to be the first Melbourne company to stage a full-length play by this celebrated Melbourne playwright”.[125] The Australian also commented: “At long last Louis Nowra is being presented in his native city of Melbourne”.[126]

According to Nowra, the reviews of the production gave him a personal critical beating, so it is interesting to see what the critics made of his skills. In the same review from The Australian*, The Golden Age* is referred to as “complex and difficult”, “rambling” and “a play of power and purpose”.[127] Another major national newspaper, The National Times, observed: “*The Golden Age* is an intriguing work. One of the most interesting aspects is to see how Louis Nowra can write so well and yet so badly, so imaginatively and yet so conventionally, all in the same play.”[128] A state-based newspaper was more direct: “Nowra has spun a web of brain-numbing complexity through the play.”[129] A damning statement indeed. Even so, almost all reviews are mixed, at times about the same issue. It is interesting to note the critical analysis of the play’s style. The play is a “powerful docudrama”,[130] “like a rehearsal”,[131] “a Dream play”,[132] “a flashy Hollywood Epic … like a Monty Python sketch”,

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[125] Playbox Brochure 1985 Season 1. Playbox (1985): Wolanski Archives: University of NSW.

[126] Nowra…not so simple, Aus 11/2/85.

[127] Nowra…not so simple, Aus 11/2/85.

[128] A rich and distinctly international diet, NT 22/2/85.

[129] Not so nice age of gold, S 12/2/85.

[130] Not so nice age of gold, S 12/2/85.

[131] Who’d be a non-conformist?, MT 13/2/85.

[132] An experience in discovery, H 11/2/85.

[133] and “anti-naturalistic”.[134] Each assessment grapples with structural and stylistic challenges. This variety equally suggests difficulties with the play itself and with the perceptions of the critics. What were these critics gauging the play against?

The length of the play often drew critical comments: “a marathon work of more than three hours”,[135] and, most likely from the same performance: “An attentive appreciative audience were treated to two and a half hours of a most inventive and thought provoking theme.”[136] The concern for length is coupled with the demand on the audience as: “

> The Golden Age is earnest and painstaking in its progression and mentally very demanding in the expression of its ideas. … the overall impact of a play that reflects great concern on the part of the author would be more forceful if the length (some three hours) were trimmed more than just a bit. […] there are a number of scenes (particularly the coffin scene at the start of act two) which, while theoretically relevant to the theme of alienation, are distracting and have a ring of catharsis for the author himself.[137]

This critical assessment connects the writer’s personality, with his competence as a playwright and the themes of the play.

Financial implications

In his memoir Nowra continues:

> It was not only the reviewers who loathed my recent plays but also the audiences who stayed away. It is distressing to watch actors perform in front of a handful of distracted or unmoved spectators. Added to this as a sharp sense of guilt at having put the theatre company, the staff and actors through a costly project that so obviously failed. Theatre is one of the most public and immediate of humiliations. […] So I stopped writing plays and had no intention of returning to the theatre. (Nowra 2004: 80).

The box office receipts from the season are also in the Playbox archives. The income and houses for *The Golden* Age compared to the next Shakespeares in repertoire season, perhaps most sharply reveal the financial damage of *The Golden Age*. When comparing the final box

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[133] A rich and distinctly international diet, NT 22/2/85.

[134] A play on words, Lot’s Wife Feb. 1985.

[135] Not so nice age of gold, S 12/2/85.

[136] The Golden Age, Campaign March 1985.

[137] Clash of cultures on two fronts, The Advocate Magazine 21/2/85.

office income, *The Golden* Age brought in sixty percent less ticket sales for the same number of performances and the same cast size.[138] The repertory Shakespeare season, however, was twice as long as *The Golden* Age, so there may have been a greater impact of word of mouth. *The Golden* Age season only ran for three-and-a-half weeks compared to the ADS season of seven weeks. The critical response most likely had more effect on the size of the house, and there was little opportunity to build positive word of mouth.

However, what is striking in these financial statements is the cost of using the new Studio Theatre at the recently opened Victorian Arts Centre. The hire agreement is calculated based on a base rate per night, plus a percentage of the income and staffing costs. Broadly, box office income was around $21,500 while the cost of the venue around $19,200. Almost ninety percent of the income for the season went to the cost of hiring the venue, with approximately forty-five percent of the cost of the venue for backstage and front of house staff.[139] More detailed financial assessment of the season is out of the realm of this study. However, these figures indicate the financial effect of both the actual audience numbers and of the use of the new Arts Centre venue. It is likely that these venue costs had crippling effect on the expected income for the season.

This premiere season of *The Golden Age* also marks the beginning of a period of artistic foundering and infrastructural challenges in the wider context of second-tier Australian theatre companies and for Playbox itself. While Playbox was one of the few survivors of widespread subsidy cuts in the mid-1980s (Milne 2004: 271), at the time of this play's development, the company faced significant challenges. A fire had largely destroyed the physical base of Playbox, the company's theatres and offices in Exhibition Street, Melbourne, almost a year before *The Golden Age* premiere. Playbox then temporarily operated from the Victorian Arts Centre and St Martin's Theatre. This most likely placed additional financial strain on the company. Playbox planned to establish a new permanent base by the end of 1985.[140] In fact, this process took more than six years. The new home, donated in 1986 by the Carlton and United Brewery to the Victorian Government for the company, was an historic

[138] VAC Hiring Statements *The Golden Age* (2008.006.164 1/2): Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

[139] VAC Hiring Statements *The Golden Age* (2008.006.164 1/2): Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne. Leonard Radic reported the costs of theatre rental at the Victorian Arts Centre as roughly equivalent to the subsidy given by the Victorian Ministry of the Arts, noting that the rents for The Studio had been reduced since it first opened, nevertheless Playbox incurred a weekly cost of $3000 plus staffing costs. Rental is breaking Arts Centre users, Age 5/7/1985. The Playbox production of *The Golden Age* was the first play performed in The Studio.

[140] Along with cast and crew biographies, the Currency Theatre Series script discusses Playbox and the effects of the fire.

and derelict 1892 brewery. Reconstruction and refurbishment of this building lasted five years, until 1990. Logistical and artistic pressures may well have impacted on the production and rehearsal process for *The Golden Age*.

1984 saw the departure of founding artistic director Carillo Gantner, with a new artistic triumvirate of executive directors, James McCaughey and Jill Smith, and co-artistic director, Rex Cramphorn. The 1985 season was launched as “Playbox Strikes Back – the year of change. Following a year that would have crushed lesser companies, Playbox strikes back with more purpose, spirit and determination to remain Australia’s best contemporary theatre company”.[141] The season program was entitled “A New and Classic Season”.[142] Despite this bravado, McCaughey resigned in mid-1986 sometime after Cramphorn had left the company.[143] This meant that the company operated without an artistic director until Peter Oysten was appointed in August of the same year. Oysten promised an expansion of activity for the company into film and television production.[144] Regardless, in 1987 Gantner returned as artistic director. “In reality Playbox foundered about without a home, without continuity and with little identity in terms of repertoire, house style, or artistic personnel” (Milne 2004: 271). “In 1984, this company lost its theatre in a devastating fire. Shortly afterwards, director Rex Cramphorn departed, leaving its management mired in internal dispute.” (Meyrick 2018: 147). Cramphorn’s departure from the company did not attract significant remarks in the press, whereas McCaughey’s departure gained substantial interest in major newspapers.[145]

The Golden Age was commissioned, written and produced within an environment of conflicting artistic priorities and for a company struggling to maintain a position in the Melbourne theatre landscape. The conflicting demands of creation and practicality, and an unstable artistic leadership, form the backdrop to the demands of creating this new work. In 1989, *The Golden Age* was again published, this time as a revised edition, where the “author” notes:

[141] Playbox Company Brochure Season 1 1985. Playbox (1985): Wolanski Archives, University of NSW.

[142] Playbox Company Brochure Season 1 1985. Playbox (1985): Wolanski Archives, University of NSW.

[143] McCaughey resigns from Playbox, Age 24/4/1986.

[144] New artistic director, Playbox Press Release 21/8/1986. Playbox (1986): Wolanski Archives, University of NSW.

[145] Playbox Press Release 22/4/1986. Playbox (1986): Wolanski Archives, University of NSW. McCaughey resigns from Playbox, Age 25/4/1986; Director resigns, Australian Jewish News 2/5/1986; Playbox argues over the issues of art or money, NT 9/5/1986.

> This version of the play is the complete one and differs in many ways from Currency's Current Theatre Series edition. One of the most obvious differences from the earlier edition is that I have added a new scene in Act One. This scene was in my original script but was left out of the premiere production for several reasons. (Nowra 1989: xi).

Revisions are expected in play development. Rehearsals and production refine a script. The opportunity to revise and republish effectively reflects the process following premiere. However, the two published scripts give two slightly different roles to Nowra. In 1985 he is the author and in 1989 the playwright. Both roles are required to make a new work. The differences between a "complete text" in 1985 and a "complete and original script" in 1989 indicates an underlying friction between play-wrighting and play-producing. This may indeed exemplify the challenge of matching artistic ambition with physical resources, the industrial demands of developing a new Australian play. Did these antagonistic circumstances characterise new play development at the time? How have these circumstances shaped the cultural memory associated with the play? A classic play speaks to audiences past, present and future, those then, now and yet to come. Despite being largely forgotten then, the play has cultural memory. For the STC, *The Golden Age* generated an aura of classic despite its negative reception as a new play and subsequent lack of professional production. What influenced the shift in status of the play? How do artistic motivations and theatrical inheritance coincide in its programming?

The 1989 revised Currency Press publication of *The Golden Age* includes seven production still photographs. On the front cover is Melita Jurasic as Betsheb in the Playbox production. Inside, the script has five stills from the NIDA production and one from the Playbox. The 1986 NIDA production was directed by Neil Armfield and featured the newly graduating actor Richard Roxburgh as the young protagonist, Francis. Roxburgh went on to achieve a highly successful acting career and regularly appears on the STC stage. These photographs credentialise the NIDA production as enduring images of the new play.

In an interview at the time Nowra said:

> When Neil Armfield did the production at NIDA I restored the scenes that had been cut out of the Melbourne production and I also put in an original scene which had been cut out of rehearsals, […] I think the NIDA production proved that it was crucial to the undercurrent (of the play). […] The Nimrod production was very, very intellectual and

> my plays are not intellectual, they're very emotional, and once you start to accentuate the intellectual quality, they seem pretentious and silly. (Turcotte 1987: 57-58).

The writer considers the NIDA production as the landmark that truly reflected his 'intention' for the piece. Neil Armfield recalls the early production:

> I did that play at NIDA. It was for a group of twelve or fourteen graduating students. The play has great parts for women. Louis throws up an imaginative challenge in the work which makes the play fantastic for the students. The student designer at that time was Tess [Schofield]. This was an opportunity to explore a totally non-naturalistic theatrical frame. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Kip Williams considers the NIDA production as the signature production of the play. "I think it [*The Golden Age*] has a cult following. It occupies a place of reverence in Louis' body of work and I think Neil's [Armfield] production has contributed to that." Williams elaborates further:

> I had heard a lot about Neil Armfield's production at NIDA that he had done when Rox [Richard Roxburgh] was a student there and I had seen a couple of images of that. I had heard about the premise of the play, about the sort of myth around how it was written and the conjecture around whether it was the story of the lost people and if it was true or not, but I had never read it. I knew a lot of other Louis Nowra plays, *Cosi* obviously, *Summer of the Aliens*, but I had never read *The Golden Age*. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams comes to the play through his artistic networks and for him it is the NIDA production that secures the play's status.

As a classic, the play no longer talks to those past audiences of the first shaky productions at Playbox and Nimrod. Its aura, its ability to speak to audiences then, now and in the future, reaches back and forward through a specific director and a signature student production. For Williams, this narrow legacy circumscribes its aura of classic. The cultural memory of the play is shaped by the playwright and secured by those in the student production. While the archive reveals the complexities of circumstances surrounding new play development, the play remains because of a particular artistic network. Williams reflects:

> I think that's part of the interesting history of the play, in that when it first opened it wasn't received very well at all. Louis is quite open about how debilitating an experience it was for him and how he didn't write for a number of years. When he told

> me that I was terrified about him coming to see it because it hadn't had a professional production since Neil's production in NIDA. I think that a lot of the reason for that is because the play was so radical. I'm not sure how ready audiences were at that point in time to receive a work of such ambition and such invention. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

One Sydney critic commented on its 2016 STC programming:

> I do believe Sydney has seen this play professionally before – Nimrod or Belvoir? Who directed it? Who was in it? I can find no reference to it – and the Sydney critics have been delighted, all round, with the finding of this, in their words, this Great Australian Play! Not seen for some 32 years![146]

The shift in status from new to classic play

The choice of this play as the representative classic for the year meant that the thin thread of cultural memory surrounding the play needed to be bolstered. Subscription marketing of the 2016 STC production centred on the name actor Sarah Peirse. Director Kip Williams discussed the initial challenge of securing production: "it was going to be expensive and I needed a name actor to get it programmed. I thought Sarah Peirse would be incredible in that role [Ayre/Mrs Witcombe], and she came on board which was helpful in getting the production secured." (Williams interview 9/2/2018). The leading marketing image for the STC production is a portrait photograph of Peirce looking straight to camera, wearing an oversized black coat, a crochet jacket underneath and a single earring. Her hair is gathered onto the top of her head. The photo is black and white, and on it is written at her shoulder: "9 AYRE 7.4.1939 565.L.B". The photograph creates the ethnographic evidence supposedly taken on that date in 1939 when the forest group came into civilisation, drawing on the apparently factual incident that inspired the play. This publicity shot reproduces 'proof' these people lived in the deep wilds of Tasmania for several generations. The portrait emphasises Peirce's strong and aging face which conveys a deeply ambivalent sense of melancholic disdain.

The most enduring image of the premiere Playbox production is a portrait photograph of the actor Melita Jurisic as young Betsheb, used on the cover of the 1989 Currency publication. Her costume is a nineteenth century dress, full skirt and tight bodice with lace at the sleeves

[146] The Golden Age, Kevin Jackson's Theatre Diary 29/1/2016.

and the neckline. Jurisic as Betsheb holds a large blue-tongue lizard (a common native Australian lizard) up to her face and is sticking her tongue out towards it as if attempting to communicate with the reptile. This references a scenic moment from the play when Betsheb, "[…] takes out a large lizard (from a rough cloth bag). She stares at it intently and hisses at it, her tongue flicking in and out at it. She seems mightily intrigued by this reptile." (Act 1 Scene 2). This wild female in cultured dress is also how Nimrod two years later chose to promote the show.[147] Melita Jurisic was featured in both productions and was frequently singled out as the performance to watch. The Australian observed her as "the simple child of nature astray in a strange, incomprehensible land, her slowing movements matching the spreading confusion of her mind",[148] The National Times saw "a very good performance in a difficult and crucial role",[149] and The Sydney Morning Herald "as wild and beautiful and as vulnerable as a bird and, intensely moving at the end as the tribe's sole survivor".[150] Critical praise is almost uniform for Melita Jurisic in both the Playbox and Nimrod productions.

These productions chose the wild young girl and new young talent to represent the new play. The STC production associated Pierce's reputation and physical appearance to give weight to the claim of classic. The critics highlighted Peirce's abilities, "Nowra has invented a language for the group, which Sarah Peirce, in a wonderful performance, speaks like a native",[151] "every time Peirce steps onto any stage she seems to reveal a new aspect of her dramatic talents, and this performance is no exception".[152] The programming and marketing builds the classic category on Peirce's reputation, and this carries through to the reception of the play.

Under Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton's tenure as STC artistic directors from 2008 to 2012, and then under Upton from 2013 to 2015, the STC programmed an Australian classic each year. This programming approach operated as an active mindset that flowed through company operations. Marketing *The Golden Age* as a classic associated the play with existing understandings. Key features were the auricular dimension of the play's language, the 'name

[147] Leaping lizards upstage!, Daily Mirror 24/8/1987; Melita Jurisic stars in The Golden Age, Showcase 14/8/1987; Melita's role almost carrying things too far, Daily Telegraph 28/7/1987.

[148] Nowra…not so simple, Aus 11/2/1985.

[149] A rich and distinctly international diet, NT 22/2/1985.

[150] The Golden Age, SMH 7/8/1987.

[151] The Golden Age: worlds collide in revival of an Australian classic, SMH 21/1/2016.

[152] The Golden Age, DR 20/1/2016.

actor' and the director's position as key artist. One newspaper interview with the director before the opening performance emphasised the playwright Nowra's "hands-off approach", affirming the director Kip Williams as the key artist for the production. As a new play at Playbox and Nimrod, critical reaction took on Nowra, discussing the playwright's rising prominence and criticising the structure of the play.[153] For the STC classic season, Williams, ""shared a boozy lunch" with the playwright. "We discussed the play at length but in the end he said, 'Just surprise me', says Williams."[154] In a gesture of relaxed exchange, the playwright effectively ceded creative leadership to Williams. The play was accorded with a general expectation that the director leads the production of classic.

This affinity classic category also interacted with the career trajectory of Kip Williams, a mindset that links classic production and artistic ability. When *The Golden Age* premiered at the STC, Kip Williams had been resident director for three years and the artistic director Andrew Upton had just finished his tenure. This production was one of the first of the 2016 season under Upton's successor, British director Jonathan Church. However, this appointment was controversial and short-lived. Church resigned within nine months of commencing the position. In August, Kip Williams was appointed interim artistic director, having worked as resident director since 2013. In September, Williams directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the STC, and in November was appointed its artistic director. *The Golden Age* was staged at a time of instability in artistic leadership. Williams' creative intelligence and capacity with recognised and claimed classics indicates the formative influence of the classic mindset.

The status of *The Golden Age* as classic is described by Williams in the following way:

> In terms of programming, the play's mission was to be the classic play for the year. In some ways, the company tries to be a bit culturally self-conscious around the idea of an Australian canon. With a play like *The Golden Age*, the fact that it has been revived by the company in 2016 increases its chances of being revived in 2030. In some ways it helps to solidify the play as being one that people want to reinvestigate, in the same way that Jim Sharman's and Neil Armfield's productions of *A Cheery Soul* draw my attention to it. So, I think that the company's mission of investigating the classics is

[153] Nowra…not so simple, Aus 11/2/1985; A play on words, Lot's Wife Feb. 1985; A rich and distinctly international diet, NT 22/2/1985; Not so nice age of gold, S 12/2/1985.

[154] Lost tribe of Louis Nowra's Golden Age make timely return, SMH 15/1/2016.

> partly to establish plays that really should be considered classics. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams asserts that the STC's "self-conscious" assessment of classic also reaches forward into the future to constitute a prospective classic. The status proves its capacity to talk to audiences then, now and in the future. This also reiterates a type of revival observed with other Australian plays. Williams' reference to Patrick White's *A Cheery Soul* associates a lineage of directors who critically secured White's plays as modern classics. Williams was programmed to direct *A Cheery Soul* later that year. Director Benedict Andrews, who famously revived Patrick White's *A Season at Sarsaparilla* in 2007 after earlier Sharman and Armfield productions, labelled this pattern "the Patrick White legacy". Andrews further suggested that the classic operates as a director's proving ground. Andrews also directed Belvoir's 2004 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another classic that functions as a test of a director's abilities. As already discussed, this model of classic is critically constructed around a set of directors and signature productions, rather than built through repeated production over time.

When asked about how he came to *The Golden Age*, Williams related the following:

> Under Cate [Blanchett] and Andrew [Upton]'s tenure, STC attempted to stage a classic Australian play every year, and if you are looking at the classics, Louis Nowra is a fabulous writer to investigate. I was going overseas at the end of 2014 and Andrew gave me *The Golden Age* to read on the plane. I fell in love with it. I thought it was extraordinary. I thought the scope of the ideas within it as well as the formal ambition of the work was truly unlike a lot of plays I had read, both classic and contemporary, and I felt very compelled to explore a story that was written in the '80s, set in WWII, spanned from Tasmania over to Berlin, and has this ancient Greek myth as a framing device, through the lens of contemporary Australia. I felt like there was a really fruitful conversation to have about Australian cultural identity through the play. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams identifies structural elements that contribute to the play's classic design. This formal ambition is achieved through devices such as the use of the ancient Greek myth and the epic range of settings. Some of these aspects have been assessed as key post-colonial strategies, and their staging at the STC will be discussed in detail in the second part of this

case study. Williams' compulsion to explore Australian cultural identity is also connected to his personal concerns as a young director.

> I suppose, regarding your question about why it is a classic, for me it's a piece that comes from a period in Australia's history just before I was born, a really important time in Australia's history when the country is reflecting on itself. When I directed it, I was coming into this period of my life where I want to talk about my own country, and the play was a fascinating lens through which to do so. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams points to a function of classic as exploratory material to place himself within a particular theatrical and social history. He correlates a historical impetus of the play, just before the bicentenary celebrations, with his own concerns as a young director. Williams also observes a series of revivals of Australian works at the time as examples of a wider coincident cultural interest.

> Louis was writing at a point in time when Australia was asking a really important question about who we are. Australia was coming up to the bicentenary celebration so there is a state of the nation quality to the writing which I think coalesced in its revival here with a whole host of Australian writings on stage - you had *The Secret River* back in the Roslyn Packer Theatre, at Belvoir you had *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, and Griffin had a play [*Thomas Murray and the Upside Down River* by Reg Cribb]. There was a synchronicity of its revival. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

While acknowledging the director's observations of personal commitment and cultural synchronicity, the classic-ing of this production will be explored from another perspective. That is by using a comparative model to analyse specific scenic moments in performance.

The Golden Age, Sydney Theatre Company 2016; postcolonial reading 1996

The status of *The Golden Age* is conditioned by a range of dimensions. Looking back over its production history shows that, like many other new Australian plays from the 1980s, the play quickly disappeared after its premiere. A close look at the 1986 Playbox production suggests company pressures as much as critical reception shape the cultural memory surrounding the play. Shifting the status of the play to classic, the 2016 STC production assembled an affinity classic category by associating known classic features with the play. This demonstrates a mindset that flowed through the company operations and the production marketing. But the mindset reaches further and develops as an intricate interplay of postcolonial resonance and

classic. This further dimension leads to its scholarly framing. *The Golden Age* is considered characteristic postcolonial drama, and this aspect becomes a dimension of its classic status. In the next section, postcolonial perspectives contribute to the analysis of the 2016 STC production.

Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics (1996) uses *The Golden Age* to demonstrate key post-colonial dramatic strategies. Postcolonial drama operates in particular ways. For this play, its postcolonial political effect is achieved through the invented forest people's language, the integration of canonical drama into the play's structure and by the type of bodies that are represented onstage. The following section compares these post-colonial dramatic strategies with those staged by the STC. Using performance rather than the playtext as the analytical tool, post-colonial strategies can be revisited and revised. This process consequently considers the production's postcolonial dramatic consciousness. At the same time, the evaluation observes the interaction of postcolonial resonance and the status of classic. How does the STC production engage with post-colonial strategies? What is the interaction of postcolonial resonance and the practice of classic-ing? The example given in the introduction of this dissertation argued that Nowra's invented language was associated with existing indications of the classic category to credentialise the play as a classic. The postcolonial resonances of the stylistic language feature were consequently appropriated as part of the play's classic status. However, the question remains whether the edge of postcolonial critique stays intact in the classic-ing practice. To again explore this question, the next section will look further at the interplay of postcolonial resonance and classic. Firstly, by considering the post-colonial strategic use of canonical drama, where *The Golden Age* directly incorporates scenes from a classical Greek play to frame the central narrative of the play.

Post-colonial use of the canon

Postcolonial drama counters the "homogenizing tendency" (Mishra and Hodge 1994: 282) of a master narrative represented by the canon. *The Golden Age* uses the canon to "derive new forms and models that depict an Australian way of life" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 24). Short scenes from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* bookend *The Golden Age*. A structure that brings a mythological frame to the central narrative. *King Lear* is also appropriated in the play, in a version that communicates first contact between an isolated society and urbane elite. Embedding classical canonical texts is at the core of the play's strategic post-colonial effect. Veronica Kelly states, "*The Golden Age* contains the most extensive examples of

"'counter-discursive' metatheatre; the reworking and taking possession of canonical texts in order to perform the history and meanings of a subjected group" (Kelly 1998: 146). The inserted canonical classics are used to reconstruct cultural identity by placing an irrelevant "static" performance of a Greek classic against the "vital counter-story" of the *King Lear* (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 24). The plot of *Iphigenia in Tauris* and the version of Lear are also interpreted intertextually to figure the central characters of *The Golden Age* within actions of colonisation and civilisation (Kelly 1998: 149). The 2016 STC production shapes another perspective. The mise en scène of the Greek classical performance builds a powerful initial image for the performance, a striking version of ancient culture. In the opening moment of the performance, corporality becomes a visual signal of intention. The actor's body does not extend symbolic inferences of the playtext but significantly reinterprets its mythological frame.

This analysis focuses on the key scenic moment of the classic Greek play at the beginning of the performance. The incorporation of the classic co-opts the canon for both structural and narrative use, and defines its postcolonial purpose. In a postcolonial narration, the classic Greek play foretells the fates of the characters and encodes their cultural representation (Kelly 1998: 146). An intertextual interpretation that splits the characters and the action to reflect and refract Iphigenia between the three female characters in *The Golden* Age, forming a "complex and ambivalent" cultural reading to garner and overlay imperial, settlement and invasion histories (Kelly 1998: 148-9). The scene thus functions as a structural foil for the ensuing story. In the 2016 STC production, this opening moment uses canon otherwise, as an image of classic and a defining mark of intention.

The Euripidean frame begins with a monologue by the exiled princess Iphigenia, who without realising is preparing to sacrifice her brother Orestes in a savage ritual. This frame closes in the second-to-last scene of the play, as the siblings recognise each other and escape the island. The classical cultural moment evoked in the scene must appear incongruous in its setting and be performed as culturally indicative of a colonial outpost. A clear sense of incompatible classic is crucial to its post-colonial strategic use.

The script establishes the scene in this way:

> Act one, Scene one. Hobart. 1939. It is a hot Australian night full of the sounds of cicadas and crickets. Elizabeth Archer, a middle-aged woman, stands in front of a small, crumbling Greek temple. She wears a copy of an ancient Greek dress. For a moment is seems we are in ancient Greece, but she is playing Iphigenia from *Iphigenia in Tauris*." (Act 1 Scene 1).

According to a postcolonial reading, Elizabeth Archer characterises the settler as coloniser, an upper-class settler who promotes and maintains the importance of high culture. "*The Golden Age* introduces the dominant ego-ideal through the statuesque (white) bodies of Elizabeth and William Archer (arch-colonialists) whose affected gestures and manners indicate how completely they have internalised imperialism's constrictive norms." (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 224). The 1987 Nimrod production featured Daphne Grey in the role of Elizabeth Archer. English born and known for her subsequent film roles as a 'society dame',[155] Grey most likely performed the prototypical colonist, portraying a thin imported culture especially when confronted with the rich and dense local culture of the forest people. The Nimrod doubling of Elizabeth Archer with the psychiatrist in the asylum, Dr. Simon, also created a clear colonising/anthropological gaze. This doubling was the same in the Playbox production. The cues for this framing scene in the Playbox prompt script indicate sound effects of crickets and cicadas, and the costumes suggest ancient Greek costumes.[156] The first archived version of the script also includes a number of characters and some scenes and dialogue that are not in the first published script. This early version overtly parodies the Greek classic performance using an extra character, Tom the Gardener, who mocks the performance for the maid: "I'll cut off me legs after me hands! I'll cut off me nose to spite itself. I'll cut off me titties, to spite themselves! I'll drown myself. I'll eat dragon's vomit for brekkie! But ye Gods, don't let Orestes have a blood transfusion!".[157] However, this was cut by the performance. The mockery was achieved in a different way. The casting and staging of the first production emphasised a high culture rendition of the classical Euripides by alluding to another production of the time.

A mainstream Greek classical drama was staged around the time of the script development of *The Golden Age*. In 1984, during Nowra's writing commission period, MTC remade and restaged a 1948 production of Euripides' *Medea* starring the Australian born Zoe Caldwell, whose acting career had taken her through the Royal Shakespeare Company in London and onto Broadway. Caldwell was protégé of the iconic Australian expatriate actor Judith Anderson, who portrayed Medea in the first AETT production that toured Australia in 1955.

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[155] For example: *Struck by Lightning* 1990, in the role of the Prime Minister's Wife; *Shine* 1996, in the role of a society hostess.

[156] Prompt script *The Golden Age* (2008.006.164 2/2); Costume Maintenance (2008.006.164 1/2): Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

[157] *A Working Draft The Golden Age: an Australian Ta*le (1985.005.006): Performing Arts Collection, Arts Centre Melbourne.

In Australia, Greek classics were imported over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a series of "visitations by (often aging) overseas stars playing in the protagonist roles" (Monaghan 2016: 39). Productions through to the mid-1980s interpreted the Greek classic in an acting style that Monaghan terms "hysterical realism", where:

> Emotionally charged actors tend to feel they must experience and express the emotions they feel their 'characters' (a dubious term at best when referring to even Euripidean tragedy) are experiencing. […] An exaggerated physicality and/or 'tragic' vocal tones are then introduced to cope with the grandeur of the emotion, but it is an awkward physicality and vocality based in realist techniques that have been developed for a far subtler mode of expression. The effect of this non-fitting of theatrical elements is similar to that produced when an actor wears a mask but retains his/her naturalistic body in performance. The performance style is at odds with itself. (Monaghan 2016: 41).

In 1984, the critical reception of Caldwell's *Medea* was overwhelmingly positive of her performance and the 'realistic' experience of ancient Greek theatre. However, there were others who did not share these observations: "My own reaction at the time to Caldwell's antics were, shall we say 'different' to the majority of reviewers" (Monaghan 2001: 41).[158] In Nowra's play, it is the performance style that comes in for parody, a style of performance that reveals an internalised pretension and the cultural disconnection of the upper-class settler characters. The premiere of *The Golden Age* produced by second-rung theatre company Playbox, relied on the audience's recognition of a style of first-rung mainstream acting. Theirs was a parodic interpretation of the classic, a referential layer reliant on mimicry.

The director, Rex Cramphorn suggests a more tempered view of this aspect of the play. He identifies the missed opportunity for a dramatic rather than parodic interpretation: "I believe that a season should be made up of interrelated material. I am well aware in presenting *The Golden Age* earlier this year, that only a season which put it side by side with plays like *Iphigenia in Taurus* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* would direct audiences' attention to its real dramatic context." (Cramphorn quoted in Maxwell 2009: 294). His assessment suggests this dramatic effect was not achieved by his production. It is difficult to gain a clear picture of the Playbox stage design by Shaun Gurton, and so to then gain an impression of the

[158] I also saw the production at the time and can remember being somewhat bemused by Caldwell's apparent star status, particularly observed during her intense and extended curtain call.

mise en scène. Cramphorn was known for his spare, and actor-focused directorial style (Milne 2004: 138). Some of the critics refer to the design as "sparse and abstract",[159] "utilitarian",[160] or as played in a "flexible and uncluttered in an anti-naturalistic style".[161] One university critic said: "The play is staged on a set reminiscent of a Greek temple, a dated symbol of modern civilization. However, the stark angularity and imposing inflexibility of the concrete structure challenges any assumptions they might have about the value of civilization".[162] The prompt copy includes a simple design sketch of the stage layout, a rectangular shape with what appears to be steps across the front. Various set pieces were brought on and struck for scenes, such as a stool or a bucket of water, and there was a regular cue to roll carpet out for the scenes in the forest. An action which another university critic saw as "visually disappointing, a lazy translation of wilderness with a roll of green carpet".[163] This apparent economical staging contrasts significantly with the STC staging.

Even though the resonant potential of the Euripidean plot provides thematic consonance, a strategic post-colonial rendition of the play requires the performance of an amateur-style *Iphigenia*. A "comically solemn" and a comparatively "static" recitation heightens the irrelevance of the classical work in an Australian setting (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 24). Furthermore, the comparison of the initial rendition of classical Greek theatre with a happy version of *King Lear*, performed for the young adventurers by the forest people on first contact in the Tasmanian wilds, counters and accentuates the irrelevance of an imported culture. This emphasises the *Lear* version as reflecting local identities (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 24). The 2016 STC production, however, inflects this differently and creates specific purpose for the classical Greek performance. In doing so, the production questions precepts of post-colonial strategic relations to the canon.

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[159] Who'd be a non-conformist?, MT 13/2/1985.

[160] Search for sunlight on life, Victorian Weekly 17/2/1985.

[161] The Golden Age, Campaign March 1985.

[162] A play on words, Lot's Wife February 1985.

[163] The Golden Age, Farrago March 1985.

Fig. 5.1 Ursula Yovich in STC's *The Golden Age*, 2016. Photo: Lisa Tomasetti ©

Postcolonial canon in *The Golden Age*, Sydney Theatre Company 2016

The intimate acting space of STC's Wharf Theatre I, where the audience surrounds and looks down into the acting space from three sides, is dominated by a large hill of deep brown loamy earth. When standing at the top of the mound, an actor is at eye level with the upper rows of the audience, this is the most commanding position in the acting space. At the beginning of the play, the lights in the theatre go down quickly on a faint undertone of one deep note of music that elicits a sense of dramatic tension. The lights come up on a woman who walks to the top of the mound from behind. As she climbs, she appears to emerge from the earth. She wears a white high-waisted classic-style dress – long to the ground, one shoulder bare, folded fabric. The starkness of the white gown emphasises the dark earth and her dark skin; the dress is pristine white, and the woman and the earth melt into one against the white-washed background. Lit from behind, the scene has stark contrasting tones. This initial image juxtaposes symbolic ancient Greece and Aboriginal skin and earth. This is not a parodic double view of amateur ancient Greece, but an emphatic double vision of antiquity. The

actor's cultural identity is newly placed, reorganised. The image is arresting not amusing (See Fig. 5.1).[164]

While the script suggests a mocking double of Australia and ancient Greece to frame the play, this most recent version presents a resonant representation of antiquity, superimposed Aboriginal skin onto classical Greek form. Rather than denoting colonised culture, the image connotes ancient culture. The striking tragedian scene uses restrained emotional tone in a monologue of savagery, portentous dreams and death. The actor delivering the lines is not how a classical actor 'should' be: incongruity is at play. At the same time, this unexpected connection is not awkward, but is a salient and intriguing opening for the play. The image claims the classic as its own. Australian in tone and articulation, appropriately rounding vowels and punctuating significant words – "island", "savage"; a veneer of classical Greece interrupts and interrogates expectations of an Australian play. The mythic quality of Orestes' tale is heightened and placed in an Australian narrative. The mythological framework does not parody classical Greece but is a resonant image to frame the ensuing story.

The mise en scène does not establish an amateur 'hysterical realistic' quality, nor is it 'static recitation', no parodic play of high culture drama set to the tune of cicadas. The setting of a charity performance is explained in the following scene when the actor as upper-class matron stands outside the mythical frame. In this initial scenic moment, the vocal tone is contained, and the gestural language is simple. Dissembling the classical model of European drama comes through cross-casting, the director bolsters the Greek classic as myth and sets this as coordinate to ancient Australian culture.[165] As the actor playing this role, Ursula Yovich remarked: "Well, I like to think that blackfellas were the original philosophers, so I felt quite at ease being able to go into this Greek tragedy" (Ursula Yovich interview 14/2/2018).

Kip Williams emphasises representation through his cross-casting. This initial image visually encodes classic with the actor's characteristics and undergirds this with solemn and simple expression. At the same time, the story of Iphigenia and Orestes is secondary to the image of ancient culture, and with this the notion of myth becomes stronger than the myth itself.

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[164] This analysis of the production is based on notes taken during performances on Friday 19 February 2016 at 8pm and Saturday 20 February 2016 at 2pm and subsequent repeat viewing of the one-camera recording of the performance in the STC Archive offices on 7 February 2017.

[165] Noting another Greek classic production staged in 2005 may suggest directorial influence, where classical Greek performance can be conveyed as relevant to local production. In 2000, the STC developed an early draft of an Indigenous rewriting of Euripides' *Medea*. This then went into production as *Black Medea* in 2005 at Belvoir and Malthouse. Monaghan observed that despite the strong impact of the piece and an expressed desire by the director Wesley Enoch to appropriate the Western classical form, the production replicated the hysterical realist style (Monaghan 2016: 53). However, it may be that the interpretation of the classic Greek myth as an Indigenous story moved assumptions about the playing of such classic.

Rather than expectations of familiarity with a classical plot, the production works in the trope of myth; the scene does not undercut cultural relevance of classic antiquity but rather builds a resonant interconnection. Williams maintains the invitation to read the play through the prelude, but the production is not a textual reading. Ancient tradition frames the Australian narrative and bolsters the internal play-within-a-play as a mythologically resonant Australian tale of settlement.

To perform the play on the page allows extensive expansion of the many thematic strands of the Orestes' myth to accentuate the Australian tale. This most recent performance plays the emotional impact of this scene within a representational framework. This scene brings particular moments of the Iphigenia tragedy forward through vocal emphasis and creates a sense of portent of what may happen in the play. "You will die in pain and lie in an unmarked grave" (Act 1 Scene 1), suggesting a parallel fable of being locked in a violent ritual, of past sins controlling present actions, and denial of sibling relationship. On the stage at the beginning of the performance the mound of earth is clear of any human marks, and as the actor walks down the mound at the end of the scene, her footsteps leave the first footprints in the dirt. Broken up untouched earth looks like human scars, and become a sign of invasion.

In this 2016 production, the director newly interprets the postcolonial resonance of canon. Gilbert and Tompkins state that, "Canonical counter-discourse is one method by which colonised cultures can refuse the seamless contiguity between a classical past and a post-colonial present that the empire strives to preserve." (1996: 51). Contrary to this, the production seamlessly spins contiguity between classical past and ancient resident history. Williams upends postcolonial representations and interrogates assumptions therein. To begin he recasts ancient Greece as ancient Australia, and then he detaches the characteristics of the arch-colonist from the characteristics of the actor. The production critiques the formation of cultural identity, rather than proposing representative identities. Furthermore, by questioning specific cultural identity as essential to construct an Australian narrative, the production may probe the basis of what composes Australian drama.

Post-colonial bodies

The use of the body as a post-colonial strategy in *The Golden* Age means the forest group come to allegorically represent the subjugation of colonialism. Their "bizarre and excessive" corporality engenders a vital postcolonial power which destabilises and "carnivalises classical form with grotesque formlessness" (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 223-224). The playtext describes the forest people as beset by congenital disfigurement through inbreeding: cleft

palate, epileptic fits, muteness, spasticity and physical deformation, ultimately signals their destruction (Act 1 Scene 12). They are destined to die out within their genetic group, and over the course of Act 2, almost all die locked away in an asylum.

The postcolonial scholarly framing of the play analyses the forest people as post-colonial derogated bodies (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 221-231). The playtext introduces the character of Stef as, "a boy aged between fifteen and eighteen […] Wears only a filthy pair of long johns, years old […] his legs and arms don't function properly […] like a crippled child in a Muybridge photograph" (Act 1 Scene 4). Stef and Betsheb can be seen in a photographic still of the Playbox production sitting on the ground facing each other. Stef wears only trousers with ragged braces, his hair is knotted and bedraggled. Betsheb sits facing him, leaning back on her hands with one leg raised, her foot is turned to the side moving towards Stef. Her mouth is open, and her tongue can be seen. The image suggests they are communicating through silent touch and the proximity of their bodies. To the critics Betsheb is "the howling predatory daughter of the lost tribe",[166] Melita Jurisic is "at once smiting and stroking us with her offering of Betsheb".[167] Like the leading image between reptile and forest girl, these animal qualities seem to be emphasised in the performance. This appears to reinforce the post-colonial dramatic strategy, where the physical presence of these characters undermines the orderly colonial world in a carnivalised subversion that upturns the rules of a colonial centre (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 224).

Kip Williams discussed the audition process for the 2016 production and the casting of Betsheb:

> I auditioned so many young women for that role, and Rarri [Rarriwuy Hick] just had the most incredible way of performing. Partly because she's a dancer, so her physicality was extraordinary. Her humour within it was extraordinary, her relationship to the language was extraordinary, and then I had found Brandon [McClelland] and another actor who I was thinking about. I brought them in to play against Rarri, and Brandon and Rarri just had this extraordinary energy and so it was done. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams cast Betsheb based on her physical abilities, her physical fluency as a dancer, and uses this grace to portray the silent communication between Betsheb and Stef. Theirs was not

[166] A rich and distinctly international diet, NT 22/2/1985.

[167] Search for sunlight on life, Victorian Weekly 17/2/1985.

acute and grotesque physicality but had an elegant and corporeal fluency. Betsheb and Stef have two scenic moments which are carried by their physical action rather than dialogue (Act 1 Scene 4; Act 2 Scene 5). Betsheb's physical expressive presence facilitates the character's communicative abilities. The connection between the two characters does not suggest genetic retrogression. The actor playing Stef, Liam Nunan, is young, tall and long, slim and muscular. In Act 2 Scene 5, his naked body is seen as Betsheb bathes him. Although Stef has physical difficulty standing in other scenes, he stands tall and straight in this scene, in a small metal tub as Betsheb washes him with a sponge. The body of the actor playing Stef is not grotesque but lithely beautiful.

In other scenes, Stef's physical deformation is created through an angular use of arms, and an unsteady and unpredictable ability in his legs. Stef does not speak but makes sounds, at times communicating through groans. He then retreats to his own world, staring out at nothing. Stef's disability is also difficult to gauge, as seen early on when Peter first comes across Stef.

> (PETER walks over to STEF)
>
> PETER: Hello! Hello!
>
> (The boy doesn't seem to notice him. …
>
> (Suddenly the boy's hand snakes out and grabs PETER's hand. PETER is startled. The boy laughs, then bites the hand. PETER cries out in pain.) (Act 1 Scene 4).

Stef's behaviour is unpredictable and extends to physical slapstick as he upturns the dining table at the dinner party. (Act 1 Scene 12). In early scenes with the group, Stef is often positioned at the centre of the stage, lying up the slope of the mound. A silent presence that physically balances the mise en scène and juxtaposes the action that takes place in his presence.

This depiction conveys disability while acknowledging the actor's able body. During the performance, actors are seen in the transitions between scenes, when in half-light they bring on pieces of the set to establish the next setting. This theatricality emphasises the storyteller as well the role the actor plays. However, the depiction of Stef may also raise questions of equity and authenticity. A lived experience of disability could be staged by a disabled actor, whereas an abled body is only able to mimic the movement. While there was no clear criticism of this in the STC production, the problematic arose a short time later in reaction to the MTC 2019 production of Louis Nowra's *Cosi* (1992). This play is lauded as a classic, but its depiction of a group of inmates in a mental asylum in this production was uncomfortably

received. Such characterisations were no longer seen as comic, but as uneasily inauthentic.[168] In addition, the casting of the disabled actor in the 2019 Malthouse revival of the Australian classic *Cloudstreet* (1999) was considered to be a step to contemporising the stance of the production.[169] In *The Golden Age* there is little doubt that the actor playing Stef acts the physical requirements of the role. Yet, Stef and Betsheb convey a sense of fluid physical elegance. And their scenic moments emphasise their physical dexterity. A post-colonial strategic grotesquery of derogated bodies and subversive carnivalesque is not brought forward in this production.

The portrayal of bodies may also be restrained by the practical demands of the script. As the script calls for a cast of eighteen, doubling of roles has been an interpretive decision for each professional production. These roles can be filled by a theatre training institution production, where the strong female characters make this also an effective choice. However, the three professional productions to date engaged fewer actors than there are characters in the play. Each production doubled characters in slightly different ways, and all have foregrounded characters by not doubling, by having one actor play one role. The young protagonists Betsheb and Francis were not doubled in any production. The STC cast had nine actors playing a total of eighteen characters, the role of Elizabeth Archer also did not double. The Playbox production had eight actors and Peter did not double. Nimrod had more resources, and featured ten actors, with Peter, Steff and William not sharing their roles.

This casting dynamic requires awareness and agreement from the audience of the theatrical convention of playing multiple characters. Various casting combinations have different production effects. However, the audience must be firstly willing to accept the notion of one actor playing multiple characters. Sometimes this conceit is not so clear. One critic reviewing the Playbox production assumed that the doubling of Dr Simon and Elizabeth Archer was conveying a single character where "the doctor's wife worked as the psychiatrist in the asylum".[170] Here this critic patched together the narration in a realistic mode. In a similar way, during interval at STC's Wharf Theatre, one audience member commented to her friends on the casting in the final scene in Act 1 that involved all the forest group except for Angel and Melorne. The audience member said: "Angel didn't have pulmonary tuberculosis,

[168] Cosi review – something deeply off kilter lurks at heart of Louis Nowra's farce, G 6/5/2019.

[169] Encountering a cultural landmark: Cloudstreet, Witness Performance 16/5/2019.

[170] Who'd be a non-conformist?, MT 13/2/1985.

she was working as their maid Mary!".[171] Similarly, Sarah Pierce's appearance in the role of Mrs Whitcombe at the beginning of the second act bewildered some audience members as to why the character Ayre appeared in this way. This confusion was clarified in post-show foyer discussion between audience groups.[172] These comments point to the imaginative agreement required of the audience with such casting. The practical necessity of role doubling can wreak confusion within assumptions of a realistic frame.

Fig. 5.2 (back) Robert Menzies as Melorne, Sarah Peirce as Ayre, Anthony Taufa as Mac, (front) Liam Nunan as Stef, Rarriwuy Hick as Betsheb and Zindzi Okenyo as Angel in STC's *The Golden Age*, 2016. Photo: Lisa Tomasetti ©

Each production has maintained the actors playing Betsheb and Francis in single roles, assumedly to ensure fluid characterisation of the central protagonists. The STC production places Elizabeth Archer in the other single actor-character relation. Perhaps the existing difference between her role as upper-class settler and her as Indigenous actor did not need additional confusion of doubling. Through a mise en scène that echoes in composition, the

[171] Notes made of audience conversations at the interval, Saturday 30 January 2016.

[172] Notes made of audience conversations after the performance, Friday 29 January 2016.

emphasis on the role of Elizabeth Archer reinforces the role of Ayre. These are both senior and central female roles in the production. These matriarchs both take up a commanding stage position at the top of the mound of earth. Elizabeth Archer bestrides this in the opening scenic moment, Queenie Ayre dominates there as leader of her tribe (see Fig. 5.2).

A task of casting is a key role of a director. Williams described the process of casting for *The Golden Age* in this way:

> I auditioned extensively for all of the roles, but particularly for my three young leads. They ended up being a Caucasian boy playing Francis, a Chinese-Malaysian boy playing Peter and an Indigenous woman playing Betsheb. That had its own particular resonance, the cultural identity of the performers and how they intersected with each other. I had to think really long and hard if I felt comfortable casting Rarriwuy [Hick] in the role of Betsheb given the potential to read the lost tribe as a metaphor for Indigenous Australia. I think that can be largely unhelpful and a really reductive way of reading the play. Sarah playing Queenie Ayre is a mitigating factor in that way of reading the production. Ursula playing the upper-class matron is a mitigating act of casting in that sense. I think that one of the dangers of colour-blind casting is that you [can be seen as] trying to obliterate the colour of your performers, and I don't believe that at all. I think that the actors' cultural identity is something they have to bring to the table and it should be a part of how the audience is reading the production. I felt that it ended up being a very powerful trio, those three. (Kip Williams interview 9/2/2018).

Williams is most careful to formulate the decision to cast Aboriginal actor and dancer Rarriwuy Hick. Williams wants to avoid a "reductive" reading of the tribe as an allegory for the Tasmanian Aboriginals. He sees the challenge as trying to work against this allegorical potential of the forest peoples. Neil Armfield pointed out this specific allegorical capacity in the script, and gauged Williams' interpretation as drawing out this potential.

> *The Golden Age* is a kind of a fable which doesn't directly at all address the actual history of Tasmania or of the country. It's kind of a tribe that is no doubt a metaphor of the Indigenous history of Tasmania. It's maybe Louis trying to write about that by trying to create a parallel symbolism on stage. Interestingly Kip Williams directed a production of *The Golden Age* where there is an attempt to shine a light into that symbolism and try and make the work more overtly declare its intention of being about a long Indigenous history of Tasmania. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

According to Armfield, the drama works as an allegory for the history of Indigenous Tasmania. A symbolic parallel, for Armfield bought to the fore by William's casting. Delineating indigeneity is an interpretive challenge of *The Golden Age*. The allusion to Indigenous peoples in the script is ultimately created through an absence of such characters.

Williams suggests that his cross-casting decisions were not purposeful broad cross-cultural representation. This was something that happened as the result of an extensive casting process. Finding the best actor for the role despite their physical features would be called colour-blind casting. A method of 'non-traditional' casting and an effort to diversify the stage (Schechner 2010). Yet Williams considers cultural identity as a fixed feature of the actor, something obvious on stage and characteristic of an actor's performance, associations that the actor carries with them through their physical appearance and skin colour. Williams' purposeful casting across type brings questions of racial subjectivity to the fore. The cultural identity of these actors, defined by the complexion of their skin and their physical features, are significant visual markers, however, the connotations of these become unstable within the roles they play

Within a character constellation of oppositional types, casting against type and foregrounding race, questions representation itself. The upper-class matriarch, her son and a government official, are not white. This casting is not reasoned within the world of the play, as there is no attempt to add extra dialogue or to explain how a multi-racial family came about. This casting means that the most overtly racist statements in the dialogue are given to these characters. The upper-class characters elevate their culture as civilised by pointing to the forest people as primitive. The government official takes the decision to incarcerate the group to prevent them being used as proof of racist propaganda, yet he is the most troubled by the unpredictability of the young disabled boy Stef: "you know, in some ways the Nazis are right. It took only three generations to get to him, only three generations to lose a language, the power to speak. They are a genetic graveyard." (Act 1 Scene 12). A similar polemic comes from the matriarch Elizabeth Archer when she suggests: "they are not children, Francis, and they are not adults; they are a poor contaminated people" (Act 1 Scene 12) and, later: "What a pathetic group they look, like those aboriginals in shanty towns." (Act 2 Scene 3). The incongruity of the actor cast in these roles, of non-white people delivering such racist views, makes these statements uncomfortably ironic. By performing them, the actor comments on their effect. Yet, the construction of such an alternative contention relies on the actor being seen as

Indigenous or other than white. The cultural identity of these actors is the basis of this theatrical reversal.

This potential was not realised in the first Playbox production with a largely Anglo-Saxon cast of actors. The prompt copy indicates that Elizabeth's comment about Aboriginals in shanty towns was cut, although the line is published in the first edition Current Theatre Series. (Act 2 Scene 4). William Archer's statement, "Their culture is more authentic than ours. We Australians have assumed the garb of a hand-me-down culture, but at our heart is a desert" (Act 2 Scene 3), has been crossed out in the Playbox prompt copy. There seems to be an attempt to remove some of the more blatant rhetorical statements that, when delivered by white actors, may not achieve a sense of irony. Perhaps these cuts in the initial production also reflect the observation at the time that the play illustrated "a new strain of didacticism", and that the "painstaking spelling out exposes a lack of substance" (Fitzpatrick 1985: 140).

The blind or cross-casting could perhaps better be identified as colour-conscious casting, and an attempt to alleviate a conceit of the script. Race was the complicating factor when watching this production. However, this may also lessen the play's allegorical effect. There is no allusion as to who the forest people might represent. It is racial representation itself that comes under question. Interestingly, Ursula Yovich notes the audience reaction to the casting in the following way:

> The amazing thing was having discussions after the piece and people grappling with idea of a black woman and Asian son being in those roles, of having stature in their society. I didn't mind that, it didn't bother me at all, because that perspective is a reflection of how much you, the audience members, have bought into a certain construction. In my discussions I would always bring it back to them. Why do you feel that way? Is it really a far cry to have somebody like a Condoleezza Rice in that position, or is it that you believe that these particular groups of people could never quite rise to this? Yeah, so I thought there was a bit of the past being thrown up but also now - how we are now as a society. (Ursula Yovich interview 14/2/2018).

Yovich parallels the historical setting, and current views about appropriate casting, to suggest that the audience still needed to assess the roles through a realist framework. The audience found the casting against type challenging in its realist effect. These comments suggest fixed assumptions of race. For Yovich, the task was not to argue for an ambivalent dynamic that the casting might provoke, her concern was the fact that such roles could be real. Yovich

further commented that she thought Rarriwuy Hick as Betsheb, assumedly clearly in the role of an Aboriginal member of the forest group, did not raise such reaction from the audience. Perhaps this portrayal was not so far from how the audience perceived her identity as an actor, and notions of authenticity based on skin colour. It was easier to accept aboriginality as wild, rather than as operating in a powerful class.

Such perceptions emphasise the director's attempt to show cultural identity as constructed. Rather than a proposing a postcolonial cultural identity, this production questions the construction of identity itself. Even so, by presenting as classic, the interpretation leverages a sense of Indigenous belonging to recast the postcolonial resonances of the drama and accomplish the sensation of classic. The postcolonial drama thus loses its political edge to become an ambivalent source of proof of the play's classic status.

This case study has looked at the production of a rarely performed Australian play as a classic. The discussion initially considered accepted notions of classic: that the director is emphasised over the playwright, that the play is an old one and not new, and that repertoire across time builds opportunity for comparison. Each of these aspects were explored in reference to the production history of the play, the career of the playwright, the interests and inheritance of the director and the programmatic approach of the company. To establish a comparative model for the performance analysis, two other productions were identified. The first was the premiere Playbox production. This was researched at three levels, that of creative process and script commission, logistics, resources and industrial company context, and initial and later critical reception. The second production for comparison was the postcolonial reading of the play, which also provided opportunity for critical engagement with post-colonial dramatic strategies. Close performance analysis has prompted revision and contemporary reflection on the postcolonial aspects of the drama.

The play was presented as an "unearthed classic" Australian play in a "culturally self-conscious" programming decision by STC. This brought together a range of actions and expectations that modified the category to that of 'affinity classic'. The company aligned expectations of classic and directorial vision, as the director built his reputation on recognised classics with the company, and as the playwright ceded creative control of *The Golden Age*. Williams was the principal interpreter, thus fulfilling a conventional axiom of classic. The director's role was apparent on the stage at an aesthetic level through the cross-casting in the production. Casting against type was a significant directorial statement which used irony and

allegory to focus on assumptions of cultural coherence. The casting foregrounds racial identity through the choice of actors to play the colonial characters.

The themes and allusions of the script portray postcolonial Australian cultural identity. Post-colonial dramatic strategies directly engage with the canon, with the role of language and with corporeal representation onstage. The STC production amplifies notions of cultural identity and uses casting and mise en scène to connect settler postcolonialism with an Indigenous sense of belonging. For example, by portraying indigeneity as analogy for classical Greece. Postcolonial use of the canon is reconfigured to move away from ideas of imperial imposition towards local possession and representation. The STC production transforms an appropriated classical text through an image of Indigenous ownership. This reinterprets the relationship between settler and coloniser and reconfigures apparently colonising canonical texts the be locally reflective. Using the canon as mutable material, canonical Greek drama can be co-opted as culturally representative. Settler postcolonial resonance thus more strongly aligns with an Indigenous sense of place.

The invented language of the forest people reflects local culture separated from imperial intrusion. Timbre, poetic intonation and assured delivery in performance, elevates this language, imparting gravity and import that is carried by the craft and maturity of the actor who plays the matriarch of the forest people. The language of this group is performatively heightened to that of classic language, drawing associations with Shakespeare's stage language. In performance, this postcolonial invention does not strategically disrupt the authority of English but develops as a rich and expressive performative component of its status as classic. Accordingly, the postcolonial effect of this invented language embeds classic in the performance.

Existing postcolonial assessment reads the types of bodies of the forest people as subversive. In this performance, subversion is alternatively portrayed as elegance, grace and physical capacity. The forest people gain gripping emotional effect with their physical presence that brings a sense of artistry to the production. Physical spasticity of the character Stef is portrayed as an actor's skill, rather than as an authentic disruptive element. The actor is visible as storyteller as well as character onstage, and one scene presents his naked body, countering its physical inability in previous scenes. In turn, the older actor, who is emphasised by the company in marketing materials, visually becomes a central figure through mise en scène. Whereas the first performances of this new play emphasised the young, wild female of the group as a central protagonist, the STC classic production uses the

calm gravity of the mature actor to afford expectations of classic. These are not postcolonial interruptions but maintain mainstream expectations of a classic theatre experience.

The STC production brilliantly reworks some of the central postcolonial premises of the play and recasts the settler strongly in relation to Indigenous authenticity. However, there remains a sense that the postcolonial potential of the piece is corralled by expectations of mainstream tastes. The production does not challenge, rather reinforces mainstream expectations. This is the revival of an existing play that highlights the role of the director, takes up themes of cultural identity, integrates an Indigenous perspective into the central narrative of setter identity and conveys a sense of emotional gravity within the experience. Above all, it is the experience of a fluid and complex grappling with what it is to be Australian that brings the sense of classic to this mainstream audience. Perhaps the production tempers some of the political postcolonial dramatic effect of the play, however, this is a significant and affective reinterpretation of an important Australian play. The STC production, analysed in comparison with previous productions, amplifies the flexible interpretive qualities of the playtext. *The Golden Age* may, therefore, be counted as an Australian dramatic classic.

5. An Instant Classic: *The Secret River*

This final case study considers a high-profile example of Australian dramatic classic, *The Secret River*, which was afforded a high level of resources and achieved a wide audience reach. A team of leading and respected artistic personnel, a cast of eighteen, and an extended development process led to presentations by major performing arts centres, festivals and companies across the country and internationally. In addition, the play assumes a critical function of postcolonial drama in its dramatic retelling of colonial settlement history. In what was to be the final performances of this STC production, the 2019 season at the National Theatre in London and the Edinburgh International Festival was potentially a powerful deliberation on the repercussions of colonial deportation. The London performances appeared to assuredly fulfill the aim of "taking it back to where the story begins" (Bovell 2016), presenting *The Secret River* in the place where the convicts were originally sent down. The production gained performative purpose by 'acting back' to the centre, dramatically showing Britain the ongoing consequences of their colonial history.

Most importantly, this is a case study of a classic play with a very short production history. This was a brand new play and an 'instant classic'. The following case study approaches this singularly Australian phenomenon from various perspectives, again developing insight into classic from the meanings created by performance. The overlay of postcolonial resonance and classic status is a feature of this production. What are the postcolonial resonances that arise in the performance? How does the classic category interact with these? To begin this analysis, the critical reception of the novel on which the play is based, provides an illustration of the postcolonial truism that history is both controversial and revisable for a settler society. After discussing the stage commission, the study closely compares specific moments in the novel, with the script and the stage performance. In what ways do these versions differ? Detailed performance description of chosen scenic moments then explores the depiction of Indigenous characters compared to settler characters. Analysis of disaggregated elements of the production, most extensively costume design, music and sound components, subsequently shows how these elements convey meaning in their own right, as well as how they integrate into the whole experience of the performance. The script for *The Secret River*, as opposed to the novel, strategically uses the local Indigenous Dharug language. To critically engage with the production's postcolonial resonance, the case study considers cultural protocols adopted

in the production process, the staging of the language and its wider reception. The discussion then looks in detail at the performance of postcolonial dramatic authenticity.

The final step in this case study appraises the claim that *The Secret River* is an Australian classic. The importance and scale of the production cannot be overstated, however, the claim of 'instant classic' freights significant cultural value. This classic is not proven over time, nor does classic emerge as its intrinsic quality. The category of instant classic contains distinct aesthetic and affective traits, and is a process of cultural endowment in direct accord with conspicuous postcolonial intention. Who is this classic *for*? What does this classic *do*? In this case, the socially derived status of classic needs to be carefully questioned. One must ask, what are the values that a classic play inevitably implies?

Unsettling history

The Secret River has found life across a number of media forms: as oral history, historical record, historical fiction, playtext, television mini-series and stage performance. Each form has shifted the relationship to the listener/reader/spectator and seems to transform the veracity of the story. The form influences the narrative content, and historical relevance appears to gain sharper contemporary currency with each adaptation. The novel of *The Secret River* (2005) begins with a well-known tale of poverty, convict transport and settlement from London to Australia, and concludes by weighing up the effect of Indigenous dispossession on the settler. When the novel was adapted to a theatre script, the Indigenous 'others' of the novel were embodied and found voice; the staging necessitated the presence of Indigenous actors. The adaptation into drama emphasises a historical past that is indelibly connected to the present. The stage production created postcolonial resonance for the settler and was crowned with the preeminent form of Australian classic.

The Secret River was written by author Kate Grenville as a creative reaction to a casual exchange with an Aboriginal colleague during the landmark Reconciliation Walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, in which 250,000 people took part on 23 May 2000. When recounting a family anecdote about her great-great-great grandfather Solomon Wiseman, Grenville suddenly recognised her awkward assumptions about him "taking up" land on the Hawksbury River. This was an action that may have "taken away" the same land from the ancestors of her colleague (Grenville 2006: 13). The central

protagonist of *The Secret River* is based on her forebear Wiseman, with Grenville drawing on archival reports of interactions with Aboriginal peoples to develop the story. By interrogating her inherited accounts and reading historical archival reports of the region, Grenville rewrote an existing historical record as a fictional tale. Grenville's novel recasts the convict settler figure Solomon Wiseman who has sustained presence in the Hawksbury region and in the wider historical consciousness of Australian convict life.[173] There is a personal sensitivity to her ancestor's past that lends authentic force to her interpretation of historical facts, so that novelist's intention appears to become serious historical investigation.

The critical reception of the novel at its time of publication was divided and fed into a public debate about the social role of history, involving historians, cultural critics and politicians. Partly in answer to this criticism, Grenville then wrote *Searching for the Secret River*, which places historical quotations alongside scenes from the novel. "Together they add up to a truth that neither can reach on its own" (Grenville n.d.). This book describes both the drafting process and the challenges in dealing with the Aboriginal voice of the story, both aspects that were the basis of much of the criticism of the first novel. This subsequent work also accords historical veracity to *The Secret River* and could be considered as an attempt to further legitimise the novel's framing of fiction as history.

At the same time, Grenville's historical fiction garnered intense interest from readers. The book won many accolades, was reprinted ten times in the first two years after publication, sold over 100,000 copies and was translated into twenty languages (Grenville n.d.). The novel swiftly became part of high school and university reading lists, in what could be considered as a literary practice of classic-ing. *The Secret River* also provided rich creative potential for Grenville and the novel subsequently became part of a loose trilogy with *The Lieutenant* (2008) and *Sarah Thornhill* (2011). The public impact of the novel reflects an intense interest in Australian settlement and fictionalised history. The novel was also part of a wider move by Australian writers to take on Australian colonial past.[174] Grenville's novel not only tapped strong interest

[173] Wiseman's Ferry is the name of the settlement township on the Hawkesbury River named after Solomon Wiseman, and is also the oldest ferry crossing still in operation in New South Wales.

[174] These include: Kim Scott: *Benang: From the Heart* 1999, *That Deadman Dance* 2010; Peter Carey: *The True History of the Kelly Gang* 2000; Richard Flanagan*: Gould's Book of Fish* 2001.

from readers, but also penetrated academic and political fields, and can be considered a cogent example of settler postcolonial resonance and example of the force of historical fiction to actively reassess settler colonial history.

Handling history is analogous with postcolonial ideals, particularly for settler colonies. Joanne Tompkins observes: “refiguring history remains one of the predominant tropes for the decolonisation of texts, bodies, minds, and nation, precisely because imperial agents maintained strict control over the interpretation of history, as a key mechanism for exerting authority over a people” (Tompkins 2007: 71). By taking up a story of early settlement and sourcing her protagonist from her own forefather, Grenville’s historical novel consciously generates strong postcolonial resonance. *The Secret River* is an individual portrait of what anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner coined in his watershed 1968 Boyer Lectures as the Great Australian Silence, “a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale” (Stanner:129). Grenville gives human shape to the consequences of settlement violence. The reception of Grenville’s novel and public debate around the role of history in the national story convey the contested sense of the past in Australia. The national story is either built on a remarkable triumph of human values or is a tragedy that the nation must come to grips with. By focusing on settlement, first contact, and frontier violence, the novel garners fiction to refigure the relationship between historical events and the present day.

Using the past to understand the present is inevitably an ideological undertaking. Hilary Mantel suggests: “We remember as a society, with a political agenda – we reach into the past for the foundation myths of our tribe, our nation, and found them on glory, or found them on grievance, but we seldom found them on cold facts” (Mantel 2017). The choice to no longer ignore certain facts was W.E.H. Stanner’s challenge to the Australian historical record. This great silence was subsequently explored by historian Henry Reynolds who uses colonial sources to relate “cold facts” of Indigenous reaction to European arrival and considers an Indigenous perspective of Australian history. (Reynolds 1981, 1999) Such perspectives have been recounted in Australia for many years, however, the viewpoint continues to be contested. History in Australia remains a ‘work-in-progress’ even with the substantial work of Reynolds and many others. As the reception of Grenville’s novel shows, critical retelling of colonial history is an ongoing postcolonial task for the Australian settler society.

The Secret River provoked substantial public controversy on its publication. A reception that should be placed in the context of Australia's History Wars. These 'wars' began as matters within the academic history profession, but were then raised as concerns of national political prominence with the election of the conservative coalition government in 1996. Shrewd use of wedge politics saw the Prime Minister John Howard adopt historian Geoffrey Blainey's term 'Black Armband', for example, as a pejorative term to characterise an overly negative view of history.[175] During the same period, historical revisionists such as Keith Windschuttle challenged evidence developed by Henry Reynolds and others on the numbers of Aboriginals killed in conflict with the settlers (Windschuttle 2002 and Ryan 1996 cited in Johnson 2016: 95). These contests about historical veracity were coupled with Prime Minister Howard's rhetoric of 'the battlers' against 'the politically correct' to make the polemic potential of historical representation abundantly clear. Macintyre and Clarke's acerbic analysis *The History Wars* (2003) shows the influence of conservative views on public institutions during this time and the dual affront of these conservative revisionists who charge the history profession with a refusal to tell the truth about Australian history.

In this context, criticism of *The Secret River* came from many directions. This was not the only historical novel published in Australia during this period, but it was the one that garnered particularly strong reaction, with Grenville's public interviews appearing to spark the most debate. Prominent historians John Hirst, Mark McKenna and Inga Clendinnen all published extensive analyses of Grenville's discussions about the novel, focusing on her methods of historical research (Clendinnen 2006; Dalley 2014: 52). The central issue was Grenville's use of existing research material, and her assumption that present thinking could convey the way people thought back then. The novel's perspective on the forces that propelled the settlers to reach the decisions they did, was disputed as merging history and fiction, as projecting contemporary awareness onto past actions. Her writing was 'presentist'. Grenville brought her own empathy for the characters, and this involved a dangerous elision of the past and present. How can we know how people thought back then? Grenville voices British settlers, convicts, turnkeys and sailors from two hundred years ago, but makes it clear that her access to an Aboriginal perspective was limited, and so sets these characters as nameless and

[175] A later subversive cultural reversal of the term was seen in *Black Arm Band*, A music coalition formed in 2006 by an Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander artist association to promote the future of Indigenous music.

voiceless background action. Grenville was charged as using past occasions for present purpose.

Determining history as separate from the present is a questionable premise. Mary Fullbrook, in *Historical Theory* (2015), points out that the writing of history requires some present angle to develop a reasonable argument that a past event may have happened:

> What most historians seek through their texts to present is not some 'reproduction of a story which is assumed to be found or given in the past' but rather an argument presenting an answer to a puzzle, satisfying some form of curiosity, about selected periods, places, elements, problems in the past as seen from a particular standpoint in the present. (Fullbrook 2015: 154).

This brings present perspective as a necessary aspect to a historical event. Even while playing into longstanding politicisation of Australian historical writing, the reaction to *The Secret River* indicated the uncomfortable pressure historical fiction places on Australia's current view of national history. The contestability of Australian settlement has troubling political force.

The Secret River influenced an Australian historical consciousness. Grenville recognised the gap between writing history and historical fiction in the lack of detailed evidence of her ancestor's life. Her solution to this was to fill this gap imaginatively. She determined to visit "the places where the past had happened" and "*experience"* [history] "as if it were happening here and now" (Grenville 2006: 47). Hilary Mantel eloquently unwraps the enfolding of history, fiction and truth to distinguish the difference between history and historical fiction as "the nature of the contract" with a reader. "To the historian, the reader says, 'Take this document, object, person – tell me what it means.' To the novelist he says, 'Now tell me *what else* it means.'" Despite this expansion, Mantel positions the novel as a form of truth. A novelist's craft begins "at the point where the satisfactions of the official story breaks down" (Mantel 2017). The perception that *The Secret River* offered truth indicates a societal readiness to reconsider the settlement narrative.

The story of *The Secret River* is focalised through the settler. Its restricted portrayal of Indigenous characters attracted significant criticism. However, the protagonist viewpoint often proves to be unreliable. It is the reader who reinterprets the settler's

perspective. Thus, the reader brings their own historical awareness, their "post-Mabo" consciousness to the novel (Rodoreda: 60).[176] Even so, the novel does not speak for the Aboriginal characters, who are represented through the voice of a heterodiegetic narrator. The principal focaliser is the settler, William Thornhill. This story is told through European eyes and Indigenous people are proximate to the settlers, appearing as background figures known by the names given to them by the settlers. In this way, the Indigenous characters are known only through a settler consciousness.

Thornhill's arrival in Australia forms the novel's prologue. In an encounter with a local Aboriginal, he shows himself as the settler who wants Indigenous people to go away. Thornhill wakes at night and goes outside his tent, where an Aboriginal man attempts to intimidate him:

> He took a threatening step forward. Could make out the chips of sharp stone in the end of the spear. It would not go through a man as neat as a needle. It would rip its way in. Pulling it out would rip all over again. The thought fanned his rage. Be off! Empty though it was, he raised his hand against the man.
> The mouth of the black man began to move itself around sounds. As he spoke he gestured with the spear so it came and went in the darkness. They were close enough to touch.
> In the fluid rush of speech Thornhill suddenly heard the words. Be off, the man was shouting. Be off! It was his own tone exactly.
> This was a kind of madness, as if a dog were to bark in English. (Grenville 2005: 5-6).

Thornhill's ineffectual attempt to repel the stranger is reversed through postcolonial mimicry, yet it is the reader who interprets the encounter and recognises the force of mockery. Thornhill perceives his own voice rather than recognising any analogous intention: he views this interaction as "a kind of madness". The opening incident establishes a settler trajectory where Thornhill is continually unable to recognise the other being as fellow man. Thornhill wants to make Indigenous culture invisible, for it

[176] The Mabo judgement in 1992 was the first time Indigenous peoples were recognised as the legal occupants of the continent. This profoundly changed the perception of what it meant to be a settler Australian. The High Court decision fundamentally rejected the notion of *terra nullius*, that no one occupied the land at the time of British settlement and the assumed legal basis for British possession of Australia. This legally contradicted the idea of an empty land peacefully settled by the British and confirmed the dispossession of the original occupants. The highest court in the land recognised in common law 'Native Title': a new form of customary land title for Indigenous Australians (Rodoreda 2018: 2-3). This legal basis for a new moral foundation of the country deepened political and social divisions, as the conservative government of the day introduced legislation to protect pastoralists and reduce the scope of native title (Macintyre and Clark 2009: 288).

to disappear through non-recognition. The mocking threat of mimicry allows the reader to face the dilemma inherent in Thornhill's point of view.

The experience of settlement is the central narrative, and the reader brings their current day awareness to the Indigenous standpoint. The aftermath of the massacre of local Aboriginals is depicted by a single survivor and a group of children who live at the local Aboriginal reserve: "In spite of everything, it seemed that the blacks were not going to disappear." (Grenville 2005: 327). Potentially, the readers bring their contemporary understanding and recognise that Indigenous people do remain. However, the novel's imperative is to render the consequences of the massacre on the consciousness of the settler. Focalised through the European settler characters, the Thornhills suffer a psychological effect of dissociation that is silence and forgetting. The novel does not critique Indigenous dispossession, the focus is on the damage to the settler. The settlers' silence is a subconscious wound which, the novel suggests, carries through to the present day.

Grenville dedicates her novel to the "Aboriginal people of Australia: past, present and future" (Grenville 2005). The novel was promoted as Grenville's way of "saying this is how *I'm* sorry".[177] Pursuing a white settlement story, the writer avoids Aboriginal representation, and uses novelistic technique to allow the reader to bring their consciousness to the story. Grenville appears best equipped to and most interested in writing about the settler, she brings a greater authenticity to this position. Yet, committing the novel to Aboriginal people, a novel that deliberates a massacre of Aboriginal people, may also be considered an apologetic attempt to justify those actions, and a settlement-anxious attempt to exculpate guilt. The perspective of the story carries a moral weight that cannot be simply and ethically resolved. Such tensions also arose around its staging.

This historical novel has a capacity to reach beyond the contract of fiction and to engage in a legitimate and authentic form of postcolonial revision. However, by asserting white settlement as the main story, *The Secret River* diminishes the perspective of Indigenous Australia. Even while acknowledging Indigenous place on the land, this is a story of the settler. The postcolonial resonance of the novel resounds around the ambivalent settler, who is both colonised and colonising, and who made

[177] Warts and all: on writing The Secret River, University of Sydney News 29/8/2006.

choices that have consequences today. The staging explores the settler matrix as negotiating opposing influences, yet also establishes a perspective of the Indigenous Australians. The staging develops a parallel story that conveys a potential for coexistence which deepens the tragedy of the central narrative. Is it possible to encompass Indigenous concerns within a settler narrative? Can this production be considered as having potent postcolonising effect?

The Secret River, Sydney Theatre Company 2013

Stage commission

Shortly after the novel was released, the new artistic directors of STC, Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton, recognised its dramatic potential and committed to a stage adaptation. This was the couple's first artistic commission for the company.[178] A creative team of writer Andrew Bovell, director Neil Armfield and associate director Stephen Page began the adaptation process, which took seven years to the premiere production. The core artistic team have strong reputations as leading theatre makers. The STC considers Armfield and Bovell "two of Australia's most revered artists".[179] Andrew Bovell is an internationally recognised playwright, writer and adaptor for stage and screen.[180] Neil Armfield is the "pre-eminent Australian stage director of his generation" (Mitter and Shevtsova 2005: 241). Stephen Page is the respected founding artistic director of the leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bangarra Dance Theatre. Armfield's work features in these case studies of classics. As artistic director at Belvoir from 1994 to 2010, he directed *The Tempest* in 1995, was closely associated with the return of Patrick White to the stage and directed the first revival production in 1996 of White's *A Night on Bald Mountain*. Armfield also worked with Louis Nowra across a number of projects and was director of the 1986 production of *The Golden Age* at NIDA.

The Secret River premiered at STC on 12 January 2013 and then toured to the Perth Festival and to Canberra. The production was revived in March 2016 in Sydney and toured to the Arts Centre Melbourne. In 2017, *The Secret River* was the centrepiece of the Adelaide International Festival and was performed outdoors in the Anstey Hill

[178] A message from our Artistic Director, *The Secret River* Theatre Program 2013.

[179] STC Season Program 2013.

[180] Earlier theatre works have been produced by all major theatre companies in Australia, in the US and Europe, receiving many national and international awards. His film work includes *A Most Wanted Man* (2014) and *Lantana* (2001).

Quarry, where Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* was performed in 1988. By the second and third season of *The Secret River*, the production was promoted as a "landmark piece of Australian theatre" and "one of the theatre events of the decade".[181] Justification for such claims were based on the reaction of audiences and critics.[182] The play subsequently toured in 2019 to the National Theatre in London and the Edinburgh International Festival. The success and reach of the production undergirded expectations that this theatre piece 'told the truth' of the beginnings of modern Australia.

The Secret River was promoted as a landmark version of a classic novel and was critically received as a classic Australian play. From the first season in 2013, the production attracted critical comments to this effect. The Australian declared "[t]here is no doubt it will become a classic of the Australian theatre",[183] Stage Noise asserted "[t]he novel, by Kate Grenville, is already a modern classic, and this stage adaptation, by Andrew Bovell, is surely headed the same way",[184] and Real Time observed "[a]lready several reviewers have declared its candidacy as an Australian classic".[185] The novel's achievements must have bolstered the production's feasibility, which drew on a level of resources seldom seen in Australian theatre. From the number of actors to the calibre of the leading artists and the extent of touring, the production garnered support that only a major mainstream company could muster. The extended commissioning period promised a carefully conceived production, and this perception swiftly evolved as a rare opportunity to see Australian theatre of considerable significance. The visual expression of these resources predicated its 'instant classic' category.

The initial reaction of leading artists involved in the commission, however, was somewhat sceptical. Armfield talks about his first reaction to the proposal:

> I remember when I first went over [to meet with the STC artistic directors]. I had read the book and loved it, but I was very wary of the idea. I said that if they were

[181] *The Secret River*, *STC, STCSA*, Adelaide Festival Marketing materials.

[182] Neil and Rachael on The Secret River – Adelaide Festival 2017, Youtube 9/1/2019.

[183] Deeply moving evocation of a tragic conflict, Aus 14/01/2013.

[184] The Secret River, SN 25/01/2013.

[185] The Secret River, RT March 2013.

> hoping for a *Cloudstreet,*[186] …well this is a bitter tragedy. *Cloudstreet*, for all it begins and ends with the death of Fish, is a story of mismatched renegades from outside society finding each other in a capacious house, which is in itself a metaphor of the country, and is a kind of a joyous work. The tone of *The Secret River* is altogether different. I was very fearful, we were very fearful through the workshops that we were going to end up with a piece that was any good. Throughout the two workshop periods we were in a sense ready to find the reason to drop it and let it go. But by the time we had accepted that we were going to create a show, and we closed the rehearsal room door, it was a very playful time. The work opened up really beautifully and I think that so much of that is the strength of Andrew's adaptation. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Andrew Bovell defines his adaptation work for this play as a collaborative undertaking with Armfield, Page, Upton and Blanchett (Bovell 2013: xvii). The development of the production is also described by the designer Stephen Curtis as a collaboration between the design team and the director, where traditional functional roles of theatre were redefined to co-devisors or theatre makers (Curtis 2016: 46). Promotional materials emphasised the credentials of the artistic leading team, and ancillary publications and discussions that accompanied the production elucidated the process of development. Indigenous involvement was considered crucial. Stephen Page wrote: "Neil Armfield, Andrew and myself went to the place where this story came from. We spent three days discussing for endless hours the life for Aboriginal people before and during the first settlements. *The Secret River* is a brutal story for Australian Indigenous people and while working with Andrew I found him to be so earnest, respectful and passionate about our history." (Page 2015: 59). Armfield commented: "Stephen Page was an itinerant but very persistent presence in rehearsal" (Armfield interview 9/9/2018), emphasising the importance of Indigenous involvement in the development of the piece.

Bovell brought extensive experience to the commission. His *Holy Day* (2001), produced by the STC in 2003, in many ways mirrors the concerns of *The Secret River*, dealing with an early savage and cruel outback Australian culture, the history of

[186] Written by Tim Winton first published in 1991, *Cloudstreet* is recognised as one of Australian literature's greatest works. Adapted for the stage in 1998 by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo, and directed by Neil Armfield, it toured across Australia and to London and New York. The 2019 revival at Malthouse was directed by Matt Lutton.

occupation and dispossession and the pact of silence that hides this past. Speaking of the STC *Holy Day* production, The Sydney Morning Herald observed: "One of the great strengths of Bovell's writing is the way that it lyrically conveys complex emotions and illuminates aspects of human suffering, denial, sacrifice and loss without being especially didactic or overarching. … Water motifs and rituals run throughout *Holy Day*, as it does in this most heart-rending and Shakespearean of scenes."[187] Like *The Secret River*, *Holy Day* involves the massacre and burning of the bodies of an Indigenous family group. However, the dramatisation of frontier violence, and its verbal and visual confrontation are stark and brutal in *Holy Day*, particularly compared to the staging of the massacre in *The Secret River.* Many plays of Bovell's oeuvre have been concerned with the hidden histories of European settlement. A cultural leader with a strong sense of social justice, much of his writing speaks for those marginalised or disempowered.[188]

However, adapting a novel for the stage is different to writing an original theatre script. Rather than building from individual artistic compulsion, the commission brief stipulated the novel as the starting point, one which carried a set of expectations from an established readership and wider public. Indeed, the production could be claimed as a classic before it had even opened by virtue of the novel's prominence (Bovell 2013: xv).[189] Armfield suggests that "the novel worked as a really strong prelude to the stage adaptation" (Armfield interview 9/9/2018). Although the novel brought its own force, adaptation decisions reveal a mutable fidelity to the novel. Bovell suggests: "My task was simply to allow the story to unfold in a different form" (Bovell 2013: xv), and states that "big decisions" were made early on to take control of the story for the stage (Bovell 2016). Transforming the novel into a play requires attention to the temporal and spatial frameworks that compose the fundamental shift between the form of a book and the stage. Bovell's adaptation constricts time and space, with most of the action taking place in Australia over a seven-month period rather than the lifetime span between London and Australia of the novel. Adaptive decisions were the concern for many critics: "All adaptations are unfaithful in some way. *The Secret River* is no different. Those who know the book will immediately note that Andrew Bovell's entry point is

[187] Holy Day Sydney Theatre Company, SMH 15/8/2003.

[188] For example, Bovell, Wal Cherry Lecture 2018, 1/10/2018.

[189] STC Press Release *The Secret River* 2013.

some 100 pages in".[190] This version brings the pardon of convict William Thornhill in Australia to the beginning of the script, and sidesteps the initial tale of poverty in London and his eventual transportation as thief, which is a widely-known convict chapter of Australian history. The script effectively places the performance where Grenville's prologue begins, on Australian soil. This setting condenses the action and then uses allusion and flashback to inform the characters.

The novel suggests the settler's need for land ownership is an effect of brutal British colonisation. As a freed convict settler Thornhill is presented with an opportunity to own what he sees as empty land, this is an opportunity he cannot pass up. In the novel, the viewpoint of the resident Indigenous group is not narrated, their position develops with the knowledge the reader brings. However, when staged, Indigenous representation becomes crucial and cannot be played as mere background. Staging not only represents the drama but means performing the action. The script calls for a cast of ten white and eight black bodies onstage, and with this, the performance can no longer only be the story of white settlement: the physical presence of Aboriginal actors demands their stake in the drama. Accordingly, these characters need motivation and language. This decision brought the challenges and responsibilities of consultation and negotiation particularly within the extended production process.

The performance involved Indigenous and white actors, whereas the artistic team and commissioning body personified white mainstream theatre. Indigenous creative leadership is credited as associate and consultative. Cultural protocols for such a work need to respond to a complex overlay of representation and on-stage action, and need to be established in development processes. When discussing this challenge, the costume designer, Tess Schofield commented:

> I have worked on projects where the approach to cultural sensitivity was incredibly sophisticated and had been developed over the decades. When I came to the Sydney Theatre Company there was like a pack of all-white men who were trying to grapple with it all. (Tess Schofield interview 2/8/2018).

The approach to Indigenous representation will be examined in some detail in the following section by considering creations unique to the script, the dramaturgical structure of the play and the staging of key scenic moments. Each of these aspects

[190] Moving portrayal of troubled past, SMH 14/01/2013.

explores the fundamental dilemma of enacting historical settlement-invasion when staging Indigenous representation.

Adaptation decisions

One of the most significant adaptative additions in the script is the personification of a narrator. The adaptation transforms the narration of the novel into a character named Dhirrumbin, which is the original name of the Hawksbury River. This narrator is able to speak for both black and white groups, can comprehend the past and the present, and is almost always present on stage. Narration is in past tense and contains selected sections from the novel, as well as playwright additions. Dhirrumbin the river as the stage narrator extends and exceeds the heterodiegetic narrator of the novel. Personification of the river connects the narration to the landscape. Country is also watching the story unfold. The presence of the land weaves through many levels of the production, both through the river as narrator and more broadly as a recurring visual motif. The narrator Dhirrumbin is performed by an Aboriginal actor and is the only role for an Aboriginal actor that has extended English dialogue.

There is performative flexibility in the staging of the narration. This occurs in a number of ways. Dhirrumbin doubles as the settler Thomas Blackwood's wife Dulla Dyin. This enables her to directly participate in scenes, not only to be observant narrator of the action. For example, in the middle of the play, Dulla Dyin cares for the gravely ill settler Sal Thornhill. This scene is an adaptive creation that intermixes narrative function and scenic action, fusing two roles to allow the omniscient, all-knowing observer to enter into the action as a character and make demands of the settler. As it becomes clear that Dulla Dyin has cured Sal, saving her life, William Thornhill approaches Dulla Dyin with gratitude:

> THORNHILL: There must be something I can do for you?
> DULLA DYIN: You can go, William Thornhill … out of our place. Wurrawa.
> THORNHILL: I can't. (Act 2 Scene 9).

Performative narrative flexibility is also established early in the performance with the arrival of the Thornhills on the Hawksbury/Dhirrumbin River. On the first morning of the settlers' arrival, the narration moves from Dhirrumbin's chronicle of Sal's initial homemaking actions to William Thornhill's reaction to the place. At this point William Thornhill takes up the narration to describe himself climbing up the rocks and overlooking the camp, narrating his actions in the third person. In this moment, the

actor gives account of his character’s action. The dialogue is concerned with Thornhill’s sense of ownership:

> THORNHILL: […] with each tree he touched he said this is my tree and with each rock he climbed he said this is my rock. […] This is mine, he said. And he laughed at the thought of just how easy it was to own a piece of land. All a man had to do was stand on it. (Act 1 Scene 2).

This depiction, a scenic moment of purposeful male settler ownership, removes the narrative function from Dhirrumbin. This mindset is not for the narrator to tell. Thornhill’s actions are placed in the past as the actor enacts the role in the present stage time, separating the character’s actions from the perception of the actor as the character. This moment is theatrically extended by other actors who come on stage with handfuls of branches to hold in front of Thornhill, “as he bashed his way through the bush” (Act 1 Scene 2), in turn bashing Thornhill with the branches as he passes through. A moment that draws laughter from the audience. This is heightened theatricalised staging of the central problem of the story – the notion that ownership makes the man – which flips the world of the stage into the world of ideas. The audience laughter acting as a release, a recognition of the shared perception between them and Thornhill. This moment does not simply depict ownership, but with the interaction of story telling and enactment, serves to frame and heighten the consciousness of the settler. Such scenic moments of narrative flexibility theatrically foreground the differences between the settler and the Indigenous peoples’ relation to the land.[191]

The script adaptation needs to invent the original inhabitants of Australia as characters who have their own motivations, desires and drives. In doing so, fundamental and ethical obligations arise. The extent to which the Indigenous characters find dramatic agency is one of these. Such agency will be firstly discussed by looking closely at the central dramatic problem: the heart of the narrative which lies in a fatal decision made by William Thornhill. The factors that influence this decision are unfolded by juxtaposing interests of the black and white family groups, where the performance enacts moments of settlement and invasion in correspondence. With this structure, first contact is suggested to be a commonly felt experience, an accumulating misunderstanding that is both similar and different for each group. These interactions

[191] Performance analysis is based on live viewing of performances on 6 February 2013, at the Sydney Theatre, and on 21 March 2016, at the Playhouse, Arts Centre Melbourne, and subsequent multiple viewing of one-camera video documentation of a 2016 performance at the Roslyn Packer Theatre.

forming the spine of the play. The contact scenes thus form the dramaturgical backbone of the performance.

Unlike the novel, the script establishes a pre-contact moment on Australian soil, with the first dialogue of the play in the Dharug language. As an Aboriginal family prepare the fire for their meal, the boys fight with each other, the women scold them. They all argue and cajole each other. On the page, in the script, there is an English translation of the spoken Dharug, the ways the boys tease each other and the reactions to this from family members. Yet understanding through reading translation brings no particular insight into the scene performed. On stage there is a relaxed familiarity that can be easily recognised. The language is different, but the interaction similar to what many families know. Meaning is made explicit through the tone and gesture of the familial relationships between the characters. The spoken 'foreign' language evokes a moment of pre-contact, but rather than distanced observation, the ways the family interact engenders audience recognition and connection.

By contrast, the novel's prologue suggests a settler trajectory for the Indigenous to *Be off!* (Grenville 2005: 5-6). An expression that captures Veracini's notion of the settler as anxious for Indigenous disappearance. Further into the novel, Aboriginal presence is described as the "black natives" being "two sorts": visible and invisible (Grenville 2005: 90). Anxiety about this presence is signalled in the names the settlers give those around the town, such as "Scabby Bill" a reference to smallpox, and in the stories of spearing and fires in the distance (Grenville 2005: 93). Brutality is evident as a black body hangs in a tree outside Smasher Sullivan's settlement. (Grenville 2005: 103). The Thornhills arrive on the Hawksbury River with a gun (Grenville 2005: 130). These perspectives become oblique references in the play, where the emphasis is on parallels between the two groups who occupy the same land. Thornhill's decision to buy a gun occurs later in the play, at the end of the first act, and is a signal of rising tension between the groups (see Fig 6.1). This escalation is flatly countered by Thornhill's wife Sal, who when she sees the gun asks him: "Do you even know how to use one?" (Act 1 Scene 12).

Fig. 6.1 Nathaniel Dean in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River*, 2013. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

The moment of first contact between the two groups is subtly reset by rewriting the novel's dialogue and compressing its action. This moment occurs as the settlers dig the earth to plant their first crop. There is a palpable shift in the power dynamic that occurs in the staging. In the novel, as a group of Aboriginal men appear, Thornhill says:

> At last he felt that there was nothing to be done but walk towards the men, speaking as to a couple of wary dogs. *Don't spear me, there's a good lad*, he said, addressing the younger one. *I'd give you a drink of tea only we ain't got none*." (Grenville 2005: 143).

The script describes this moment as:

> Unable to bear it any longer Thornhill approaches, speaking as he would to a pack of wary dogs.
>
> THORNHILL: Don't spear me, there's a good man. I'd offer you a cup of tea only we ain't got none. (Act 1 Scene 3).

Here are subtle rewrites: *man* instead of *lad*, *offer* instead of *give*, small changes that bring a sense of respect to the interaction and that signal a sense of deference from Thornhill. The group are a *pack* of dogs, not a *couple*, suggesting a greater possible threat. A *cup*, rather than a *drink* of tea effects contemporaneous dialogue, rather than linguistically positioning in the past.

This moment is staged in this way: Three Aboriginal men walk on. As Thornhill says, "Don't spear me, there's a good man", he looks to the ground, takes of his hat and then slowly lays down his shovel as though giving up a weapon. His sons stand behind him and do the same with their shovels. Although the Aboriginal men do not have their spears raised, their entrance disarms the settlers, shovels like weapons are lain aside. The leader, Yalamundi walks towards Thornhill, his seniority emphasised by the two younger men flanking him and the crouching Thornhills in front of him. As Thornhill rises, he doesn't look Yalamundi in the eye until after his line, "we ain't got none", and then only to quickly look away.

This encounter is performed over the entire playing space. Thornhill facing slightly upstage, taking the point of view of the audience, his vulnerable bare head showing. Although like Thornhill the audience cannot understand Dharug, as the two figures attempt to communicate, incomprehension from both Thornhill and Yalamundi can be clearly read. The shovel on the ground draws a line between the settlers and the Aboriginal group. This is a physical marker onstage and the two men talk across this boundary. Dhirrumbin stands upstage at this central line as an observant reflection point to the action. Thornhill steps over the shovel to offer a package of salt pork. On taking and smelling the package Yalamundi throws it away in disgust, a reaction that causes amused laughter from the audience. Those in the audience would probably do the same

if presented with such food. This comic action releases the audience from the sense of tension building between the groups. The tension, however, continues to rise.

The scene is played with mounting pressure and swift turns of escalating interaction: Will slowly putting down the shovel, Sal running in with the salt pork, the eldest son Willie trying to wrest the shovel from Yalamundi, three hard slaps on the Yalamundi's shoulder from Thornhill. Yalamundi walking away in disgust, Ngalamalum running fast at Thornhill with his spear raised, coming close to then retaliate, slapping Thornhill hard on the shoulder three times and to gesture – "Warrawarra" – Go away. The threat is real, through mimicry reversed. There is no violence. Each action and reaction carefully set in correspondent equivalence.

The next encounter as Thornhill goes to talk to the Aboriginal group about his land claim (Act 1 Scene 7), accumulates the misunderstanding through a misinterpreted 'shared' joke. The Aboriginal family laugh at Will, not with him, even as Will attempts to laugh along with them. Thornhill's effort to demonstrate and enforce his land claim is firstly met with confusion and then parodied and replicated in Yalamundi's gesture, a light wave of his hand indicates it is they, the settlers that should "Warrawarra", go away, be off. It is an interaction that solicits laughter from the audience in recognition of the ironic reversal this mimicry achieves. These contact scenes carefully portray perspectives from both sides. At the same time, they show Thornhill's understanding of the Indigenous group is different to what the audience knows, that Indigenous people belong to this place.

The protagonist William Thornhill is construed as an 'everyman', which suggests that the play acts as archetype for the settlement of Australia. As emancipated convict and victim of the English class system, Thornhill is recognisably a 'good' man, driven by the desire to build a better life for himself and his family. The audience can connect to Thornhill through existing traditions and national myth. Familiarity with Australian convict hardship is readily understood and has place in the national story. This perception shifts however, as the audience see Thornhill choose to take calamitous action. The massacre of the Aboriginal group is an emotional weapon that reveals the genuine mark of the national hero. The allegorical lens of the play sharpens the effect of this recognition.

Allegory dictates that each character surrounding Thornhill represent aspects of this decisive moral choice. Critics of the novel have suggested Grenville narrows the story to extreme opposite versions of settlement: the good and the bad, the collaborative and the murderous, through the stark differentiation of the settler characters Thomas Blackwood and Smasher Sullivan. The novel is then bound to "a moral negotiation between good and bad forms of colonisation rather than a genuine critique of dispossession" (Gall 2008: 101). Does the stage adaptation change this bind? Andrew Bovell states he exaggerated the difference between these two types of characters to make very clear for the audience that Thornhill choses to follow a particular path (Bovell 2016). The dialogue pushes settler characters to further extremes. Smasher Sullivan, for example, yells, "Fuck off" (Act 1 Scene 9), rather than "Be off" (Grenville 2005: 5-6) and is caricatured as macabre and sadistic, exaggerated visually with his face streaked with white and red earth like a horror mask. The three main male characters are representative archetypes. However, the script and the performance bring nuance to these stark archetypes by emphasising the contingency of the encounters between the two groups.

Burgeoning understanding between the settler and Aboriginal families is shown through children's games played by the young boys from each family. The performance includes genuine water play, where the kids slide and skid together down the stage almost over the edge and into the audience. An act which leaves the audience gasping and laughing at their daring. This moment is underscored by upbeat music played live onstage by the actors. There are other playful occasions that occur outside the main onstage action, such as the boys playing a game of creepings-up during the interval between the first and second act, a moment that implies the story continues even as the performance takes a break. The water play scene ends with the mothers each side of the stage calling their children for dinner (Act 1 Scene 8). These scenic moments show the children and the women beginning to create a shared place on the land.

Even though the audience may foresee the terrible ending, these early scenes portray possibilities of a different outcome. This is evident in the relationship between the women, which is an expanded invention of the script. In the novel, the Aboriginal women are conveyed through men's eyes, who "could be blinded by the little breasts and the long thighs" (Grenville 2005: 201). The women in the performance have more agency. In a scene moved to later in the plot than that in the novel, the Aboriginal

women Buryia and Gilyagan instigate trade with Sal Thornhill. In the novel Sal asks, *Oy, Meg, what you got there?* (Grenville 2005: 199). In the performance the interaction is,

> SAL: It looks very pretty on you, Meg. You don't mind if I call you that, do you? And how about Polly, for you? Got a friend back home called Polly on Swan Lane. (Act 2 Scene 7).

This is a delicate shift in naming, not as ownership, but as an attempt at friendship. In this scenic moment, the women each gain what they perceive as an "oddity": a carved carrying dish is traded for a woman's skirt that is then worn on Buryia's shoulders. Both parties are clearly satisfied with the exchange.

As the play proceeds, Thornhill progressively firms his resolve to stay silent about the interactions with the Aboriginal people and the rising tensions between the groups. His wife Sal's questioning stance emphasises Thornhill's resolve. Sal makes her position clear early on: "SAL: You wouldn't do anything like that, would you?" (Act 1 Scene 5). She is the one who suggests Thornhill should "politely explain that we're here now and we wouldn't mind if they just buggered off somewhere else" (Act 2 Scene 6), whereas in the novel, it is Thornhill that instigates his visit to the Dharug camp to explain they are here to stay (Grenville 2005: 193). As Thornhill's decisions increasingly diverge from his wife's entreaties, his choice between two forms of settlement represented by Smasher Sullivan and Thomas Blackwood is shadowed by the potential shown in the encounters between the women and children.

In an inexorably grim unfolding of the story over the second act, Thornhill says nothing about the poisoning of an Aboriginal family he encounters at Darkey Creek or the poisoned child that then dies in his arms (Act 2 Scene 14). Following this, the settlers' corn patch is raided by the Aboriginal women and children. While in the novel Thornhill shouts *Get out of it, you thieving black whores!* (Grenville 2005: 279), the enacted scenic moment exaggerates the violence by the white men on the Aboriginal women. The attack is clearly a stage fight but at the same time is also brutal. A child is captured, his arm broken and Dan wants to "Tie him up like bait". Sal Thornhill pleads to let the child go and William Thornhill decides to follow her advice. In the novel, Will's experience in Darkey Creek is recalled as he looks at the captured child. On stage, it is the interaction between Thornhill's son Dick and the captured child Garraway that is reiterated and extended. The script adds:

DICK: Please Garraway… Wurrawa. Warrawa.

Garraway takes a few more steps until the bush absorbs him. He looks back at his friend…both boys knowing that it will ever be the same between them. (Act 2 Scene 18).

As the story heads towards its climax and Thornhill's need for land ownership overwhelms his moral compass, Sal pressures to leave and go back to Sydney. She recognises that the Dharug have their home there, urges Thornhill to leave, threatens to go with their boys. At this, Thornhill grabs her by the throat and makes to hit her, a moment emphasised by a sudden absence of sound. Unlike most of the performance, this scenic moment is not underscored by music. The silence surrounds and cuts through their dialogue to accent their bitter argument. Tragically, Sal's determination to leave is twisted to affirm Thornhill's final decision.

Hostilities rise with the retribution spearing of another settler. In a drunken scene in town the men plan a final deed, one that requires Thornhill's cooperation. Smasher's pledge that, "Nobody won't ever know, I swear. Not even our wives" (Act 2 Scene 18), seals Thornhill's decision. In the novel, Thornhill says, "Word gets out we done it, I come and slice the tongue that blabbed" (Grenville 2005: 299), a stark allusion to the silence required. In the play, Dhirrumbin alludes to the pain of refusal inherent in Thornhill's decision:

DHIRRUMBIN: "It's like a knot in an old rope. Hard as a fist. No point trying to tease it out. Just a matter of getting hold of a good sharp knife and cutting it. (Act 2 Scene 18).

Lucid silence reiterates loss near the end of the play as Thornhill's son realises what has been done,

DICK: Is Garraway alright? Da … and Narabi?

Thornhill is silent. And in that terrible silence the truth is seen.

Dick leaves the hut.

In the end it is Sal that knows the effect of this decision on them,

SAL: Is that it, Will? What we have now. Me and you? Silence? (Act 2 Scene 19).

As in the novel, not speaking of the massacre has profound effect on the white settlers. In the performance this is physically portrayed, as Thornhill maniacally paints marks on the landscape backdrop, painting a high fence to repel his memories and contain his control. His is delirious action, a physical execution of psychological effect. The enactment is the corporeal expression of settler damage. And even though the staging gives active voice to the Indigenous characters in a way that the novel does not, the

drama of *The Secret River* remains tied to the moral choices and consequences of the settler.

The depiction of the massacre of the Aboriginal group theatrically portrays various perspectives. The action is played out twice, first as depiction of the massacre perpetrated and then replayed as the massacre observed. Firstly, Dhirrumbin leaves the stage. Five men are in a line across the stage and walk slowly from upstage to the front apron. They are seen in a black stage void, lit starkly by footlights. Each man has his arms raised as though holding a gun. However, they simply hold a handful of white powder or dust, which when blown across their fists creates a puff of gunfire. William Thornhill is at the centre. As the men walk towards the front of the stage firing, blasting white powder at the shot of their gun, they sing "London Bridge is Falling Down" softly then louder and louder to a bellowing crescendo where they stand at the front apron of the stage, their arms by their side, as they yell "build it up with iron and steel, my fair lady". Staring out at the audience as vicious men made mad with murder.

The second time the massacre is performed is following the scene where Thornhill explains to his family, "There won't be no more trouble." (Act 2 Scene 19). The repeat version is written as an epilogue in the script. On the stage, Thornhill exits leaving his wife and son. Then as three Aboriginal women walk on slowly upstage right, Sal and her son leave stage left, in a scene-change that swipes across the stage from left to right. This time the depiction of the massacre is related by Dhirrumbin in direct address to the audience from the back of the stage, across the action centre stage. The Aboriginal group walk across from stage right to left. The group are shot by unseen bullets, one by one. As they fall, they throw white powder over their shoulder and collapse to the ground. First the women, then the children, then the men. Finally, Yalamundi faces Thornhill, who enters the stage pointing a gun at the man. Thornhill shoots him point blank and Yalamundi spits red blood as he falls to his knees and then to the ground, in a final realistic picture of a weapon and its bloody effect. Dhirrumbin relates the murders and also places herself as witness of murders in her story of Dulla Dyin and her child watching the massacre, hidden. This scenic moment is paced slowly, accompanied by cello, side-lit creating long shadows across the stage, lighting the stage frame of leaves and branches.

The massacre is depicted as brutal from the point of view of the perpetrators, but then played in tragic sadness when narrated. The audience observes through the frame of the

stage. The divided reiteration shifts perspectives from the settlers to the Dharug, which is emphasised by the narrator figure and her doubling as Dulla Dyin. When staged, the massacre is choreographically represented, and the visual indications of gunshots provoke wider symbolic meaning. The powder is used as a resonant theatrical material. It is the poisoned flour in Darkey Creek, the lime at Smasher Sullivan's place. This natural element represents destruction and murder. The white waft of dust that expresses the stamp and dance of Aboriginal feet on the earth early in the performance, also conveys the destruction of the land and of these people at the end. Like the rope noose that Smasher uses to imprison an Aboriginal woman, simple visual materials carry greater symbolic meaning than their direct sign: the noose representing Aboriginal deaths in custody, the white flour evoking methods of 'dispersal' of the Aboriginal people during settlement. The production utilises plain, carefully chosen materials to signify larger ideas. As with the replayed depiction of the massacre, the production employs lucid means to build complex and multilayered meaning. At the same time, the scenic moment is a choreographic and theatricalised version of the massacre, which for all its tragic impact avoids the stark reality of the action. Simple, affecting choreography is used to represent a brutal act of violence. This scenic depiction of the truth of settlement may be softened by the poetic resonance of its theatricalised realisation. Is the grim truth of massacre too absolute for this theatrical form? Does an urge to practice classic take the critical edge off postcolonial critique?

Visual effects of costume and make-up

The visual language of the staging brings defining textural layers to the encounters between the two groups. The costume design amplifies elements that the characters wear and the ways their bodies are represented. Designer Tess Schofield says: "We'd already signed off on nudity. We'd already said that's not a deal breaker. People don't have to come out in a G-string to make this work" (Schofield interview 2/8/2018). On stage, Aboriginal characters wear skin-coloured clothes and the men are bare chested. While suggesting nakedness, this also carefully presents the bodies of the Aboriginal group as not nude. They are protected by theatrical interpretation. In the novel, sexual objectification drives the settler men's perception of the Indigenous women, although this attraction contains the underlying fear of the other and conveys both desire and repulsion. The performance, however, largely avoids this objectification. Rather, desire is conveyed in the passionate sexual attraction between Sal and Will Thornhill.

There are, however, two scenes that employ nakedness to evoke specific dominance. The depictions are carefully staged to both protect the actors and to convey Indigenous control. Early in the first act, as Thornhill first visits the Aboriginal camp, an older woman in the group throws off her shawl to stand topless in front of him, slightly turned away from the audience. “DHURRUMBIN: “facing this old girl he feels like he’s the one wearing no clothes” (Act 1 Scene 7). Thornhill’s embarrassment is the focus, and the old woman’s nakedness is screened by her position on stage. In the second act, another scenic moment of dominance involves an enslaved Aboriginal woman being dragged onto the stage by Smasher Sullivan. This woman is naked with a rope around her neck. Her costume is a latex torso laced at the back, like a mask. Schofield suggests:

> It was kind of a bit of a bondage thing or a big piece of peeled off skin. … I think that to have her come out and look naked and not to be naked, and it not to be a sophisticated prosthetic where we’re all pretending that it is nakedness, we work with nakedness as more of an idea than a reality. This is a way to protect the actor and still have the visual impact of the moment. (Tess Schofield interview 2/8/2018).

In this scene, Thornhill does not help this woman held captive by Smasher Sullivan, it is Dhirrumbin who comes forward and takes the noose from the woman’s neck. As the woman turns and walks offstage, the lacing of her torso costume is visible. This is a clear move out of role, a theatrical device that separates the telling of the story from its enactment. Her subjugation becomes illustration. The device protects the actor and at the same time is used to represent this narrative point, yet both positions fill equal theatrical space. This scene is a crucial plot point, a clear moment when Thornhill decides to be silent about what he sees. This is punctuated by Dhirrumbin who says, observing Thornhill, “DHIRRUMBIN: if a man decides that he did not see a thing … whether he could make it true.” (Act 2 Scene 11).

In the second act, as tensions between the two groups rise, there is a gathering of the local Aboriginals who dance and sing and are observed by Thornhill and his family. The scenic moment (Act 2 Scene 10) begins with the sound of singing, and as Dhirrumbin narrates, the Aboriginal group enter in a line upstage. The Thornhill family enter downstage facing front on to the audience. They are lit by the footlights, their dialogue relates their escalating fear at the sound coming from the mob across the point.

The Indigenous group at stage centre, behind the settler group, are lit from above, and their bodies are painted in white with various patterns. Christopher Balme has found that: "In post-colonial theatre in general, there can be observed a tendency to experiment with a culturally appropriate contextualization of body-decoration and to view the body in general as an important performative text." (Balme 1999: 158). Individual cultural details here in the body paint and the movement gives the singing and dancing a sense of cultural authority. The visual details of the painted body reflect individual actor's needs.

Tess Schofield discusses the working process with individual Indigenous actors to develop their costume through exchange, as part of a broader process to incorporate individual's different stages of transition into initiation or law. Some colours or patterns were more important than others to each actor, and the costuming was responsive to this. "Each Indigenous actor was able to impact on cultural details". The costuming did not attempt to anthropologically replicate the Dharug and also reflected the actors' position as Aboriginal people, so that, "they're not offending their mob and they are representing properly" (Schofield interview 2/8/2018). This approach is conveyed in the performed dance, which has a looseness to the movements that emphasises individuality. The dance establishes a strong sense of cultural authenticity.

The dancers use branches that are covered in white dust or powder, so that with a sweeping movements dust rises, as though caused by stomping feet. The risk with this scene, and with the depiction of the Aboriginal characters in general, is the association with folkloric performances that depict the Aboriginal body as a kind of *corps sauvage* or as the painted savage of Hollywood (Balme 1999: 168). The characters who observe the dancing and singing hold the perspective of the group as 'savage'. The settlers look fearfully out towards the audience, viewing from a distance. The audience watch the Aboriginal group dancing behind the settlers. A separated viewpoint that moves through the settlers, to the dance and singing at centre stage. The Aboriginal performers reveal a potent sense of connection, and their painted bodies become the predominant sign in the scene. Counterposed by the settlers' fear, re their performance presents a threat to the settler, yet is a sign of cultural authenticity for the audience.

The notion of difference is a central visual concept, pronounced through the accentuation of characteristics associated with race. The face and body make-up distinguishes characters in relationship to their supposed opposite, by painting faces the

colour of their skin. So that, for example, in the first meeting of the two groups (Act 1 Scene 3), the Thornhills' faces are daubed clay pipe white, and Yalamundi, Ngalamalum and Wangarra charcoal black. The paint both amplifies and abstracts facial characteristics, emphasising difference using the colour of skin.

Tess Schofield relates:

> When I was doing my research there were lots of visual references from white people at the time but what I was interested in is not only looking at how white people portrayed black people, but also how black people portrayed white people. I really had to mine to find some Aboriginal artists who were interested in depicting or who were able to depict white colonials. That was all about this idea of difference and how shocking it would've been for both sides to see each other for the first time and how kind of frightening and confronting that would've been. I did want to amplify the whiteness and the blackness. I know that the blackness is very unfashionable because then you're making black people look blacker. It's okay to make white people look whiter. There's a whole history of black face in the theatre and that sort of thing. It was really dangerous territory. That was one big design idea, but I thought it was so scary. Neil kept saying, no keep exploring, and I would think – I'm going to get drawn and quartered for this! But I got to this point where I was thinking about it in terms of charcoal and ash, and I looked at these drawings of each side and that I want it to be equally weighted. (Tess Schofield interview 2/8/2018).

The amplified skin colour works on a number of levels: As a representational mechanism, where the characters almost appear to be wearing masks, such as the red and white painted face of Smasher Sullivan as the 'bad' settler. As the visual interpretation of difference, an experience of 'other', the shared experience of contact for both groups. As portrayal of the land, where clay and charcoal are physically worn as costume elements by the characters, the clay eventually cracking and falling off, the charcoal more softly melding into the skin. As a symbol of Aboriginal rite, where the painting of the body represents stories of their position in society and within the landscape. Spreading elements of the land onto the bodies of the characters, makes the relationship to Country a central visual and experiential element. At the same time, the concept opens up the idea of difference, intensifying this experience based on skin

colour. Used as a marker of race and of racial hierarchy, the colour of the skin of each group is exaggerated to suggest the artificiality of such construction.

The land is the principal visual integrative element in the production and brings both an abstracted and representational quality to the characters. Elemental features are used on actors' bodies to establish scenes and convey dramatic events. Natural materials evoke many scenic moments: the first steps of the settlers onto land from the Hawksbury River is by stepping into a bucket of mud and onto the shore, the Thornhills leaving their footprints on the clean white stage. Will Thornhill marks out his land by drawing on the stage with a blackened stick from the fire. Sal marks off her days on the river with white chalk on the black proscenium arch. A fire burns in the firepit to the left of the stage and is hearth for both family groups. Dhirrumbin draws the shapes of rock carvings over the whole stage using the charcoal end of a burnt stick. Elements of the landscape are integral mechanisms of theatrical story telling.

The stage set represents the land. The trunk of an enormous eucalypt dominates the space forming a vast undulating backdrop. The humans are dwarfed by its enormity and the vast stage is open into the wings and the flies, and is framed by real eucalyptus branches that hang in the air. Metal lighting trees and stage lights are visible. In an open landscape and open stage, the space is established as the place where families gather around a fire. The setting is evocative and suggestive, and not strictly set in the past. Stage elements are made visible and emphasise the story telling function of theatre.

There are many elements that bind the production visually to the contemporaneous. Some costumes have hints of modern-day dress, such as a pair of surfer's board shorts with a stripe worn by one of the Aboriginal characters, or the black laced school shoes worn by the colonial characters. Small details such as bindings on clothing hint at current fashion. The costume designer, Schofield says, "Kind of mucking it all up so it felt like rehearsal costumes, with a bit of looseness." (Schofield interview 2/8/2018). The emphasis on natural elements, on revealing the theatrical mechanism, and the lack of authentic replica allow the production to straddle time, the performance plays in re-enactment of the past done for present needs.

> Many nights in the theatre I'd see people in tears. People in the audience who looked like the characters. Because for the final scene of the play I decided to make William Thornhill look kind of like a grazier, a timeless one. He could be in

> any time from the nineteenth century up till now. And there were people in the audience in those tweed coats and moleskins and chambray shirts, who were well-heeled landed gentry. Basically, whose ancestors were probably at the forefront of the massacres across the country. Lots of very privileged people. They were they were dealing with that information in a very visceral way for the first time, I think. (Tess Schofield interview 2/8/2018).

Music and sound as emotional underscore

The Secret River performance critically rewrites history by engaging the emotions of the audience, rather than separating empathetic encounter from intellectual or political comprehension. The *experience* of this theatre production is regarded as the key to unlock a complicit here and now for a particular audience (Bovell 2016). Music and sound are used to underscore, compress or elongate time and thus activate emotional responses. An emotive experience of the play is central; the story has to be *felt* to be able to do its work. This theatre is a place that triggers feelings, where emotional reaction from the audience is deemed necessary for the production to have its effect. Emotional knowledge leads to recognition and to realisation.

Schofield suggests the purpose of the play is to gain identification from certain audience members and points to a white middle-class audience, the mainstream audience. The purpose of the production is to speak to this particular audience group. When asked about the responsibility of being an Aboriginal actor in *The Secret River*, Ursula Yovich, who played Dhirrumbin in the first season, understood her responsibility as this:

> In order for things to change, I think that people have to feel it. Not the guilt, because that's a useless emotion, but the thing of, the hope of people finding compassion and empathy for why some communities struggle now, or why a lot of blackfellas struggle. So, I've always felt quite proud to be part of that. But I also feel like we're so far behind in regard to our story telling. Like I was over in Europe two years ago visiting my Serbian family and you can sit in a taxi cab and they will tell you history, they are so proud, no matter how bad it is, they will know it. We don't do that here, history is, has been white-washed, but also no one really talks about it, history has no place in our social life and I find that quite disturbing. (Ursula Yovich interview 14/2/2018).

Yovich seeks an integrated historical perspective that can then make sense of the past in its present realities.

What are the attributes of emotional engagement that are roused by the production? Is the emotional involvement merely an arousal of sympathy, which can be a hollow sentiment and do no more than release a person from a sense of guilt? Sympathy is a sentiment empty of moral imperative. The production aspires to elicit recognition of the current burden of history. Eliciting sympathy for a particular group requires an additional compelling force to secure recognition of complicity. The emotional experience of this production needs to gain its purchase in the individual and subsequent actions of the audience. This refocus of historical past has present day intentions. Simply feeling sorry for people can mitigate any sense of responsibility, whereas the emotional engagement of this theatre needs to draw on moral resources that engender a sense of culpability and change in perspective.

The production engages direct emotional affect through its music. The music accompanies the narration and punctuates scenes, underscores the performance in an ebb and flow which builds scenic episodes with a mounting tension that then halts, to be built again. Each scene visually and aurally smoothly shifts into the next. Thornhill will remain onstage as others from the scene exit and those in the next scene enter. Short episodes work together towards key dramatic turning points. This scenic flow compresses the time of scenic action and creates a breathless pace, particularly in the final part of the performance where Thornhill remains on stage and scenes set up and flow out around him. At times he continues in the state of the previous scene, to be pulled into the next action by the entrance of another character. The piano or cello that accompanies the dialogue triggers an immediate effect, and this arouses the emotional tone for a scene and drives the dramatic momentum. In the second act, the dramatic escalation causes increasing apprehension as the play moves towards its climax. While the first act releases tension through humour such as child's play, the second removes these release valves and the mood darkens in an escalating emotional state. Key interactions between William and Sal Thornhill are entirely unaccompanied by sound. Such absence elongates the scenic sense of time to punctuate the decision Will makes and the compromise Sal undertakes. Compounding emotional states that are impelled by musical accompaniment quicken the emotional effect as the performance moves toward its climax.

The emotional life of the production is bound within its aural layer. The use of music and sound throughout the performance brings an immediacy which is physically intensified by the live underscore created onstage by the musician and the cast. As the episodic plot unfolds, the performance accentuates the vital physical presence of the actors, who both enact their role and tell the story. Very few of the roles are doubled, although a small group of male actors play dogs, the bush and kangaroos at various points. Even though the character is largely fixed to the actor, they move in and out of making sound and music onstage with the musician. Creating onstage music expands the narrative beyond the enactment of the story, to where a group of actors are telling the story. For example, there are moments where sound effects become signs of the act of theatre making. As the settlers 'break their backs' digging their square field, effectively destroying the Aboriginal crops they refuse to see (Act 1 Scene 3), white and black adult and child actors sit nearby making the sounds of shovels and earth using stones and metal. With focused intent like foley artists, this group accompany and lay the sound onto the action.

At the centre of the sound design is musical director Iain Grandage, who is visible during the entire performance. Armfield suggests that Grandage, "creates a community amongst the performers from which the sound and the music of the show evolves. Everyone according to their abilities contributes to that music" (Armfield interview 9/9/2018). His place on the stage establishes an interpretive space between the audience and the action. The sound in the performance is created on the outside edge of a large white floorcloth, which demarcates the space between where the story exists and where the story is told. Off the floorcloth is a space where the action can leave a scene but still be seen. The musician always sits in this stage space. Thus, viewing the play is also watching the creation of its aural underscoring. Moreover, creation of sound reveals another story to that which is narrated. The sound and the music parallel the historical narrative with a contemporaneous reality. While the narrative action depicts the choices the settler makes to enforce ownership of the land, the theatrical rendering of the performance illustrates cohabitation.

The performance begins with an Aboriginal woman, her face streaked with a white stripe across her forehead, and a white man dressed in theatre blacks, both barefoot, stepping onto stage from either side and walking slowly towards each other. The stage is lit with blue ripples of water that dance across the floor and the back wall. The two

whistle exactly like birds, in a call and response pattern, slowly. The sound evokes long distances, vast open space. When they face each other centre stage, they then turn and walk downstage, as the light dims. The woman moves downstage left to sit on the ground next to a metal tub filled with water, to lift and pour water, the sounds of a river. The man goes to a piano and instruments set downstage right and takes a cello. The bird calls continue and in fading light, a flame burns in the fireplace as an Aboriginal man with a bare painted chest walks in from upstage right. The musician plays the cello with short strokes, as the man moves downstage through dappled light. As he reaches the front of the stage, a young woman and old woman, two men and two boys file on upstage in line, and then separate to take up places at the fire as the first scene begins. This opening smoothly arranges the place that is the land, open, vast, the place that is the stage, musician and narrator/water, and the space where the story is told around a fire. This opening scenic moment creates the landscape, theatrical presentation and the telling of a story.

Music is a dramaturgical device that enhances the story's emotional weight. As a language, song is central to the performance. Yalamundi's singing in the first scene conveys a sadness that no dialogue could contain. The meaning of the lyrics is unimportant against the aching call of his voice, the Dharug words communicate a keening for Country. Following this song, Dhirrumbin introduces the settler family in Sydney Cove, where Sal Thornhill sings 'London Bridge is Falling Down' as a lullaby to her two children. This tune refrains through the play to the end as the settlers' undersong when massacring the aboriginal group. The opening Dharug song is also sung in mournful return in the final moments of the play. Song is woven through the play. Written into the script, its emotional power can only be felt in performance. At the end of the first act, the two types of song, settler and Indigenous, are used in the one scene, where "there is this blending of the Western with the Indigenous where the two musics elide and blend and then the Indigenous takes over and overwhelms. It becomes a beautiful metaphor of the sense of possibility in the show." (Armfield interview 9/9/2018). *The Conversation* observed of the Adelaide outdoor performance: "The end of the first act, when the singing of these bottom-rung British rejects mixes with the

chanting of the Dharug is indescribable. It is as if two sets of souls stand revealed simultaneously, in perfect symmetry."[192]

When asked to comment on the effect of the production on the audiences, Ursula Yovich discussed the experience of performing on Australia Day, a national day that is increasingly conflicted as one of celebration and one of mourning:

> I remember doing *Secret River* on Australia Day and I think the impact was incredibly strong in that particular performance, because the cast were feeling something, the black cast, the white cast, the audience, we were all in it together, so I think that for me that was the time that I thought – this is important for them to see this story through the convicts' eyes, so it's not just the coloniser, it's the convict, and to empathise with their own, I guess, their own white history, but also, yeah, the black. I felt like it was, the energy in the room in those two particular performances on that particular day was phenomenal, and it really did hit home for a lot of people, and that was really nice to think that these mob will probably go into the next Australia Day actually having some real understanding of why this particular day isn't celebrated by a lot of First Nations. I'd like to think that we can… I mean it's gradual, it's slow, and it's obviously incredibly complex. You are also at the same time deconstructing a nation's idea of their identity. So people are thinking, hey, hang on a second, there are more things happening, there are other ways to look at this story. (Ursula Yovich interview 14/2/2018).

Yovich reiterates the production as aspiring to effect social change. The production aims to contribute to a process of postcolonising for Indigenous Australia by deepening and awakening the settler's view. Recognising the effects of Indigenous dispossession is crucial to recasting the settler complex.

The adaptation of the novel to the stage brings with it the phenomenological encounter of Aboriginal actors. While the narrative relies on assumptions of the *corps savage*, where the settlers dispense with these bodies for their own profit, a sense of shared humanity is central to the effect of the performance. From the beginning, the unfolding of the plot establishes the home of the settler and Indigenous groups in the same place, both around the same fireplace. There is genuinely joyous and hopeful exchange

[192] The Secret River exquisitely illuminates the unspeakable under the stars, The Conversation 3/3/2017.

between the groups which models the possibility of coexistence. This is achieved in part through the personality and individuality of the Aboriginal characters, despite the foreign language they speak. The creation of music on the stage demonstrates this potential with its active underscoring. The narrative encounter between the groups is framed by a shared experience of wanting the other to move on. Before the time in the performance when the plot moves towards the final murderous action, there is a shared sense of history that is developed. The visual language, such as make-up and costume, emphasise a strangeness that is in common and has historical and contemporary interconnection. What begins as difference in binary terms as black vs white, is recast as an intersubjective relationship of two different peoples. The act of the massacre provokes a cathartic experience for many audience members, to suggest a realisation of the past that has as a contemporary reality. The final keening refrain of Indigenous song prompts an emotional reaction that may indicate more than a recognition of guilt and shame. There is a sense of crisis for those non-Indigenous audience members who need to grapple with their own complicity in this history. Could this experience lead to wider social change or does recognition remain enough?

Even as the production achieves effective emotional impact, it also arouses a sense of closure. This sensation occurs across two dimensions. On an aesthetic level, the theatrical story telling, with its refined style and visual panache, appears unable to fully achieve its postcolonial political aim. Even with complex visual and aural integration, the aesthetic appears unable to rise above its narrative restrictions. This theatricality does as much as it can, with as many resources as it can, yet seems to reach its end point when becoming a signal of classic. The aesthetic reveals itself as a defining feature of this Australian classic. On the level of the production's political effect, settler postcolonial resonance anchors its meaning using Indigenous postcolonising ambition. This seemed to be restrained by and at odds with its claim as classic. The overlay of postcolonial resonance and classic is a paradox here. The more the status of classic goes up, the more the barbative postcolonial edge goes down. As it gains classic status, the postcolonial resonance of the performance softens. The classic-ing of a historical moment of settlement/invasion presents as a dilemma.

To take another view of this problematic, the next section considers a range of perspectives around notions of authenticity and authority. The production sparked debate and discussion centred on the question of who has the right to tell these

settlement-invasion stories. Various positions of this wider debate will be focused through the lens of the use of language in the playtext. The choice of language will offer useful theoretical reflection to considering the post-colonial strategies staged in *The Secret River*.

Language and postcolonial authenticity

A direct emotional effect cannot be assumed as a prevailing experience of the production. While achieving almost universal critical acclaim and sell-out shows across three return seasons, the production did attract criticism. Like the novel, the production provoked debate centred on the moral responsibilities of dealing with the past and the representation of Aboriginal characters. A leading Indigenous director Rachael Maza was public in her criticism of the production, making clear her concerns both at the time of the premiere and during the first revival season (Maza 2015, 2016). Her concerns are here taken as both an individual's experience of the production, as well as prompt for broader questions around notions of postcolonial authenticity.

In a keynote speech for the 2015 Australian Theatre Forum, Maza presented her perspective of the production as exemplary contrast to black theatre in Australia. Through a personal history of the role of Maza's father, Bob, as a key player in the 1970s black theatre movement, her public lecture examined contemporary Aboriginal theatre and its inseparable politics. In this context, Maza defined *The Secret River* as "not-Aboriginal" theatre. While at pains to point out the integrity of the artists, her definition was based on the fact that the leading artists were white, and her claim that this coloured the perspective as such. Maza stated that as authors and ultimate owners of the work, the leading artists were in control of the narrative yet were only able to bring their own perspective to the story. The artists lacked both the authority and the authenticity to make theatre other than from the point of view of the white settler. Moreover, their perspective perpetuated the myth and stereotype of the savage, claimed Maza. Australian culture is white and is consequently structured in opposition to the savage, inventing itself in relation to an "anxious negating symbol" (Williams 2012 cited by Maza 2015). Analysing the play from this perspective, Maza drew attention to how the production perpetuated a particular type of Aboriginal representation.

Theatricalising the novel brought Aboriginal actors onstage and recast the novel's position towards the original inhabitants of the land. By enacting first contact, the play claimed to give a voice to the Aboriginal people in the story. Yet Maza sensed that the

foreign language spoken by Aboriginal actors, the Dharug language, shut access to their voice. For her, only a shallow understanding could be gained through gestures and tone, particularly compared to the complex understanding brought to the moral dilemmas of the young settler family. Spoken language is here perceived to be fundamental to the play's meaning. The difference in the language spoken, and what the audience can understand only widened the gap between 'us and them', claimed Maza. The Dharug language became the sign of the savage, and the fact the audience could not understand this language only reinforced already ingrained perspectives. According to Maza, these characters appeared more distant, foreign and other, because of their incomprehensible dialogue.

In *The Secret River,* there are two languages used. English, spoken with variation to indicate the class and background of the characters, and the Dharug language used by the Aboriginal groups. Dharug was the main Aboriginal dialect spoken in the Hawksbury River area at the time of settlement. The use of Indigenous language onstage could be interpreted as a post-colonial strategy of defiance against the authority of English, which is an imposed colonising language. Equally, Indigenous language use can work to retrieve a level of cultural autonomy (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 169). It must be noted, however, that Indigenous language in Australia is not a single language. Unlike in New Zealand for example, where Māori is recognised as an official language, the exact number of Indigenous languages and dialects in Australia is unknown but estimated to be 500 to 600 when European settlers arrived, and nowadays in daily use, around sixty plus a number of new forms of Aboriginal Englishes (Casey 2015: 79). The Dharug language used in the production was a living language that was lost with the arrival of the British. Over the development phase of the production, a language consultant worked with Andrew Bovell to give the Aboriginal people an authentic language present at the first encounters. What initially appeared to be an "insurmountable problem" for the production (Bovell 2013: xviii) was solved by the inclusion of Richard Green, a respected linguist who also works in a wider social context to strengthen the Dharug language (Nathan 2015).

Bovell remarked that for the adaptation process, the introduction of Green as the language consultant was a "pivotal moment" (Bovell 2016). It was clear then that the language spoken on the Hawksbury River at the time of settlement had not been lost, it had been recovered and was a living language in song. This dynamic example of

cultural reclamation crucially determined the development of the project.[193] As an aspect of cultural protocol, the involvement of Richard Green was one of the necessary steps to ensure that the work could gain recognition as representing Indigenous interests. There are formally recognised sets of cultural conventions that ensure an appropriate working dynamic between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, including formal consultation protocols and informal participation (Australia Council for the Arts 2019). Initially, the commission and development process may have overlooked these protocols as crucial beginning points. This can embed a sense of distrust in the purpose and intent of the work.

Schofield, who marked her concern when joining the process at STC, considers the second season of the production improved the process for the Indigenous cast members:

> The STC really just didn't have a process to working with Indigenous people and now there's an Aunty, Aunty Glenda, who has Dharug connections, and she always comes and helps. She'll talk to the children and plays games with people at the beginning, she's like part of the team. She's like having a creative or another actor on board. She's a chaperone for the children and if people have got issues or something is upsetting them, she's a great conduit for their voice. (Tess Schofield interview 2/8/2018).

Such Indigenous involvement was central to the ongoing life of the production. However, the production's early life appears to be characterised as a standard mainstage production approach which could neglect the cultural sensitivity required to ensure effective and equal involvement. This may be why the involvement of Richard Green was so pivotal to the development of the production.

Incorporation of other languages into playtexts is a strategy shared by settler societies. This has been used as a recuperative method by Indigenous playwrights when talking to white audiences. As a post-colonial strategy, use of Indigenous language in drama indicates the composition of the audience. Jack Davis' plays, for example, illustrate strategic language choice by incorporating the Nyoongah language into dialogue, both empowering speakers of the language as well as engendering a divide, where the language separates the non-indigenous audience from those who speak Nyoongah

[193] An adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was performed in the Aboriginal Noongar language at the 2020 Perth Festival. Noongar language reborn in Hecate, an Aboriginal translation of Shakespeare's Macbeth at the Perth Festival, ABC 24/1/2020.

(Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 172). This may empower the language speakers and disturb those who do not understand.

Where lies the purpose and effect of staging the Dharug language? As dramatic dialogue, the language is spoken and understood by the Indigenous families onstage. Most likely, the words were incomprehensible to the audience, almost no one understands Dharug. Moreover, no surtitles were provided on the stage, nor were translations available in the program to assist audience comprehension. Post-colonial reversal or strategic separation of language speakers was not possible here. The audience was not made up of two groups; English is the principal language. However, there is a wider potential to convey ontologies and histories without didacticism by using Aboriginal language onstage (Casey 2015: 79-81). At the level of cultural protocol, the use of Dharug appears to be an act of recuperation. Richard Green passed on the language to increase the awareness of a language considered dormant or extinct. For the artistic team, the embodiment of Aboriginal characters required language to bring crucial authenticity to the production. Speaking and singing Dharug was central to achieving authentic performance of a historical moment. Does the use of Dharug diminish the experience and comprehension of the Aboriginal group for the audience? Does this dialogue simply create the unknowable 'other', another version of *corps savage*? In this staged moment of first encounter, what is the postcolonial effect of the use of language?

Andrew Bovell considered the approach to language as a critical dramaturgical question. He wrote about extensive rehearsal experiments with onstage surtitles:

> It seemed that the point was too heavily made …The politics of the work became obvious, the thinking behind the work was made too explicit and the spell of the story telling was somehow broken. The effect of the device was to distance the audience from the emotional content of the drama. … We made the decision, informed by Richard Green and the Indigenous members of the company to allow the Dharug language to speak for itself rather than have it explained by the use of sur-titles or theatrical conceits designed for the benefit of the predominantly white audience.[194]

[194] STC's The Secret River – runs deep, JW 27/1/2013.

Armfield also echoes this position:

> We also tried surtitling the Dharug on the stage in 2015, but it was merely distracting. The Indigenous performers felt that the audience's eyes were on text of the surtitle, and that it wasn't telling them anything that wasn't evident in the scenes anyway. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Dharug is a key marker of authenticity and is advanced as indication of cultural convention and consultation. However, this does not mean the language is the key access point of meaning. The production's theatrical sophistication brings various dimensions of meaning through different elements. For example, and as already discussed, music, sound and visual signs develop a parallel narrative of shared history and attempt to counterbalance the tragedy of the central settler narrative. In the contact scenes, the predominantly white audience comprehend the common misunderstanding between the two groups. This is witnessed, for example, in the audience's reaction and recognition of Yalamundi's gesture for Thornhill to also "Warrawarra". The audience can read the interaction between the groups without understanding the words, and at the same time, the lack of access to the language can also deepen their experience of strangeness, fear and the possibilities of those first encounters. However, stage signs move in different hierarchies according to the spectator. This may not be the experience for every audience member.

Staging a language gap conveys the reality of misunderstandings that confronted both parties during these times of first contact. Experiencing this may prompt an appreciation for the changes that are needed. For the audience, the frustration of listening to a local foreign language may precipitate a need to bridge this understanding. Although there are many Aboriginal languages spoken in Australia, there are few opportunities to observe these as living communication. Speaking an Aboriginal language on a mainstage declares cultural survival and presents a challenge to English as the mainstream language. For the audience, the experience of listening to an Indigenous language may offer more than an experience of otherness. As Bovell points out, "it's a mistake, isn't it, to assume just because you don't understand the language, that what is being said doesn't have meaning or intent or purpose or

structure?”.[195] The experience of hearing Dhurag spoken is a complex encounter for the predominantly white audience.

Concerns about the use of Indigenous language, despite its compelling use as theatricalised communication, may indicate how the production is interpreted variously by different spectators. This mainstream production assumes a particular audience will read the signs of the play in a certain way. The cathartic emotional experience of the production is for a non-Indigenous audience and may be different for those culturally connected to the massacred people. The impacts of dispossession and attempted genocide are still felt by many people living in Australia and are critical aspects the responsibilities of dealing with this history. As Yovich said when interviewed, *The Secret River,* “isn’t for black people that play, it’s for another audience” (Yovich interview 14/2/2018). Even so, the theatrical rendering of this production attempts to enact a respectful version of exchange and to build solidarity across difference.

The production is targeted towards a mainstream English-speaking audience, the character development and the weight of empathy tips strongly towards the settlers’ experience, but the postcolonial resonance of the performance gains its force through Indigenous involvement. On a narrative level, the central moral problem centres on Thornhill, his ownership and inability to let go of the land, the greed that overcomes him and that leads him to murder. The inevitability of the narrative lends a greater degree of development to the settler family compared to the Aboriginal group. Neil Armfield sees it this way:

> I think aboriginality is still representational in the play, to some extent every character in the play is representational, and that’s very true of the Thornhills as well, but there is a depth of texture and personality explored through Kate’s imagination in the British characters which provides a spectrum which is wider than in the Dharug family, although I think there is real sense of personality within the Dharug as well. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

The production genuinely attempts to integrate a wider view of settlement history; however, this aspiration appears to be constrained by the narrative. The staging of the story seems unable to achieve a level of cultural authority, despite the embodiment of Aboriginal characters. The aspirations of the production also seem to be outweighed by

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[195] STC’s The Secret River – runs deep, JW 27/1/2013.

the expectations of its intended audience. The critical retelling of the historical moment is for non-Indigenous purpose. This classic-ing creates a tension between its purpose and aim, between what it wants to do and who it is for.

Nevertheless, the intricate theatricality of the production resolutely relates the story of settlement. Mediating this tension by narratively drawing the consequences of settlement into the current day. The epilogue of the play moves to a future time, in a short scene between the now prosperous settler and one old surviving Aboriginal man. Moving forward in time is conveyed by the clothes the Thornhills wear. They are now landed gentry, dressed in moleskins and chambray shirt, William Thornhill looks like many of the men in the audience. The script indicates this scene takes place ten years later, even so there is a currency in the language that secures current day relevance. Thornhill addresses the man:

> THORNHILL: You lot got to learn to help yourselves now. Can't just be sitting around in the dirt all day, like bludgers.

The word "bludger" is a derogatory term now used to describe as lazy those most disadvantaged in Australian society.

> THORNHILL *reaches to lift him by the arm. At his touch NGALAMALUM comes to life.*
>
> NGALAMALUM: NO!
>
> *He slaps the flat of his hand hard on the ground, raising the dust.*
>
> This me … my place. (Epilogue).

(See Fig. 6.2) This final scenic moment was interpreted and debated antithetically. Seen as a final tragic representation of the myth that Aboriginal people had died out, or as the demonstration of their firm survival. Armfield commented on these concerns,

> Andrew's original script had a different conclusion, and we revived that in rehearsal in 2015. It was the absolute conviction of the performers, particularly the Indigenous performers, that the ending as performed in 2013 was correct, satisfying and strong. (Neil Armfield interview 9/9/2018).

Fig. 6.2 Nathaniel Dean and Trevor Jamieson in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Secret River*, 2013. Photo: Heidrun Löhr ©

A fundamental dilemma of the production is staged Indigenous representation enacting historical settlement-invasion as a process of historical revision. This case study has considered this in depth across a range of dimensions including the status of historical fiction, artistic processes of stage adaptation and cultural consultation, dramaturgical structures of the drama, and careful consideration of key production elements and scenic moments in performance. Each of these dimensions have demonstrated a persuasive shift in the dynamic of the narrative, where Indigenous characters are given active voice and achieve correspondent equivalence. However, authenticity is a necessary hinge point for the cultural meaning of the production, and this is contingent on the involvement of Indigenous actors. In the framework of the narrative, the Indigenous actors are crucial to the critical retelling of the historical moment and to achieving its emotional effect. Although the performance is intended for non-Indigenous people, for the settler, it must have the wider commitment of Indigenous people to gain its authentic authority.

The instant classic category

In the opening line of one of the first reviews of the premiere performance, *Aussie Theatre* declared, *"The Secret River* is a play that will settle into the Australian theatrical canon and remain there for a very long time". [196] The play was firmly headed for the dramatic canon from its beginning. This is a settlement of the canon that may equally be an invasion. Such effusion is not typical of critical response to an Australian play. What was it that provoked such acclamatory reaction? The term Australian canon may signify the greatest aspiration for theatre, but how does a brand new play immediately establish itself as canonical drama? This critical response was not exceptional. There was broad and affective reaction to the production when it opened. This reviewer's opinion typifies a more widely felt response where rave reviews reiterated the authority of classic. In the theatre, the audiences' reaction was rapturous. *The Secret River* gained standing ovations and awakened deeply felt emotional feeling in audiences. Yet this production was not simply an excellent piece of theatre and a skilled revision of history. This was a classic.

What defines this understanding of the classic category? *The Secret River* demonstrated a high level of theatrical excellence. The production was grand, visually stylistic and theatrically sophisticated. These emerge as features of its status as an instant classic. Yet this understanding goes further and appends postcolonial resonances to the category. With accomplished artistic complexity, the production leveraged settler postcolonial concerns and gained a level of Indigenous authenticity. For the intended audience, a feeling of timely postcolonial aspiration was carried by the emotional experience of the performance to produce a *sensation* of classic. The early settlement story could freight a cumulative durational sensation of classic. The fact that the mainstream was finally prepared to reconsider the country's colonial history was considered a cultural landmark. A moment that could only be embedded by the action of critical classic-ing.

Staging this story as a landmark and a classic satisfied the aspirations of social effect. The Currency Press publication of the script of *The Secret River* states:

> Without a doubt a classic of Australian theatre, *The Secret River* brings to life the birth of a new nation. By revealing the stark reality of colonisation, it moves

[196] The Secret River – Sydney Theatre Company, Aussie Theatre 20/1/2013.

> towards healing the deep and terrible scars left by white settlement of this ancient land and the displacement of its Aboriginal peoples. (Bovell 2013).

This instant classic has acute cultural imperative. But the category also seems to reduce the potential of achieving its purpose. The practice of Australian classic in this production is a mindset conveyed through identifiable aesthetic features. This ultimately lends the production a prescriptive charge. In this case, the designation of dramatic canon may be regulated by the tastes of a mainstream audience. The play's status as classic aligns the taste of the STC subscribers with the codification of Australian drama. The constructed classic category and authority of canonical Australian drama is consequently secured by the resources of the mainstream. The significant degree of success of the production therefore becomes both argument for and proof of the leading position of the company and its ability to determine classic Australian drama.

The critical reception of the production was as classic. This critical nomination relies on a sense of the play's future life. The Australian saw that, "This great tragedy is told with such heartbreaking eloquence and humanity that there is no doubt it will become a classic of the Australian theatre".[197] This reiteration of the play as classic anticipates its prospects. What is this critical educative role? Perhaps what the critics are saying is that they *hope* it will be a classic in fifty years. Yet, it is the critic that can recognise the quality and potential of a future classic. It is the critic that here deploys the Australian theatrical canon.

When the reviewers said it was a classic, does that mean that it is? When the company called it a classic, does that mean that it is? Do these nominations disregard an audience's ability to gauge classic? In the practice of classic, what is the role of the audience and of the wider reception of the production? An audience recognises the salient features of a classic, with the felt sensation of classic conveying heightened cultural value. The Australian visceral need for doing classic led the production as both culmination and apogee: promoted by the company, felt by its audience, and crowned by the critics. The rich connotations of classic shone golden light on the production. Yet the designation is legitimate in relation to a specific kind of intended audience. In its wider reception, the play generated divided critical attention in its claim of Indigenous

[197] Deeply moving evocation of a tragic conflict, Aus 12/1/2013.

authenticity. The production appeared unable to fully co-opt Indigenous artists on equal terms.

When influential individuals and institutions nominate the status of drama, the label classic requires careful consideration. Who has the right to call a piece of theatre a classic in Australia? Classic is an actively constructed category that reflects sets of cultural values; as a practice it is multifaceted and authoritative. When classic is a self-identifying label, it is obvious that mainstream companies have, if not a monopoly, but probably a tight grip on classic. It is clearly difficult for companies with a lower level of resources to make that kind of claim. Holding the capacities to present classic, these companies may fetter mainstream audience reception as representative of a wider Australian consciousness. To realise the postcolonial aspirations of the production, there must be active recognition of the cultural impact of co-constitutive Indigenous-settler relations. To achieve the change actively pursued by theatre artists, such as those involved in this production, both Indigenous and white, the stories on stage need to be expanded beyond white narratives. Even as self-determination becomes a reality for Indigenous artists, these institutional structures continue to be a reality and may be the very thing that need to change.

Conclusion: The Practice of Classic-ing

Drama in Australia shows that classic is constructed in ways other than the widely accepted definition of the term. This research has demonstrated that classic is an action, a verb not a noun. Classic functions as an embedded theatre practice and an assigned term. It is a status attributed to a playtext as well as an approach to staging it. When Sydney Theatre Company (STC) programmed a play as a self-nominated Australian drama classic, an active mindset looked for indications of the category existing in advance of concrete production. The case study of *The Golden Age* shows the 2016 STC production associated known classic features, such as the auricular dimension of the text, a director's ambition, or the maturity of a 'name actor', to fundamentally shift the status of a play. This category of 'affinity classic' flows through the production process from casting and marketing into the staging of a work. The modified category operates at all levels of production.

Classic is also a term that actively fashions a sense of the past. The classic mindset draws on European cultural heritage and shores up post-settlement Australia's thin sense of cultural history. It borrows cultural aura and authority. At the same time, programming a classic also stimulates a sense of innovation. The pre-determined modern classic productions at Melbourne's Malthouse Theatre Company effectively repositioned the company's program. The claim of classic carried with it an existing aura, yet this needed to be tested through appropriate staging. The productions created an impression of innovation while simultaneously reinstating an apparently rejected artistic lineage. The actor, Julie Forsyth, endowed this cultural status in performance in a tacit socially determined process, a transaction between audience and actor. This classic-ing was felt by audiences and critics alike. Director and company reputations are affected by the status of classic, yet its proof remains contingent on the work of the actor.

Classic-ing practice is not only a mindset; it is also a sensation. Calling a play 'classic' conjures up a feeling of historical depth and a sense of temporal purpose. The classic-ing practice involves creating the sensation of classic. For a tributary culture that recognises the feeling of classic without necessarily experiencing the reality, this impression can be conveyed in various ways. A specific scenic moment in the 2010 Malthouse production of Beckett's *Happy Days* shows how ghosted performance develops a sense of depth for the audience. Through the repetition of register, modulation and tone of voice, the actor echoed a previous role and previous performances. This haunting recycled an earlier experience,

sharpened its cultural memory, and created a sensation of theatrical history. The actor's endowment is a multidimensional activity. This and her later role at Malthouse fully exploited characterisation, abutted colloquial and poetic language in the dialogue, and situated quotidian ordinariness within spatial enormity in the staging. These cogent visual and emotional dimensions of the actor strengthened audience reception of classic.

Just as the social processes generated by an actor can create a sensation of classic, so too can the potential meanings of a play. In contemporary Australian society, the historical thread of classic is not straightforward. There is growing recognition of the privilege of Australian settler culture that points to 'an excluded Other' in the production of a classic play. The productions explore non-Indigenous forms of culture; they spring from the Australian settler imagination. Each case study considers the interaction of classic and postcolonial resonance, revealing its intricate interplay. Resonant with postcolonial associations, the classic texts act as a reflection of the settler condition, a reactive and interactive condition that negotiates opposing influences and increasingly confronts the responsibilities of Indigenous belonging. Examples of Shakespeare, the classic category's most obvious representative, demonstrated a postcolonial shift in focus, from imperial legacy to the impact on Indigenous peoples and cultures. Yet even with this shift, Shakespeare's cultural effect remained tied to settler cultural needs. Each case study asks what happens to the political edge of postcolonial aspiration within the status of classic?

The self-nominated Australian classics examine the settler condition in various ways. In its staging, the 2016 STC production of *The Golden Age* used the affinity classic status to intricately overlay postcolonial resonance and classic. Rather than pursuing a strategy of postcolonial mimicry, a key scenic moment connects classical past with ancient local tradition, indigenising a Greek classic and newly interpreting the postcolonial relation to canon. This strengthens the play's local relevance and uses this to signal classic. Is the postcolonial political edge diluted by such co-option? More broadly, using race as theatrical reversal, the production does not propose or represent an ideal postcolonial identity, rather it critiques the formation of cultural identity itself. This approach contrasts with the central role of settler identity in the 2014 Malthouse modern classic production. A scene played in drunken exchange embodies a liminal version of Anglo-Celtic and European identity tropes. This moment also generated the sensation of classic. The overlay of a play's postcolonial resonance and the status of classic is multifaceted. Yet, the interaction appears to elide

identity discourse and critical authority, so that the concerns of the settler remain solely dominant.

To date, post-colonial dramatic strategies are the fundamental precepts of postcolonial drama. The reuse of canonical works, inclusion of foreign language, integration of Indigenous elements and the ways bodies are represented are key features of postcolonial dramatic effect. The case studies reconsidered these strategies by closely examining specific scenic moments onstage, and by taking a comparative approach to the secondary literature. The analysis shows that the postcolonial resonance of the canon has shifted. Canonical works gain purpose as material to explore relations to history. However, the classic status also indicates an urge for settler legitimacy that may obscure the barbative edge of postcolonial political effect.

The incorporation of another language in the Australian dramas helps secure their self-nomination as classic. The STC's *The Golden Age* production co-opts the resonance of the forest people's language as a sign of classic. Their language becomes a rich and expressive component of the play's classic status but does not necessarily resonate as postcolonially authentic. The 2013 STC's production of *The Secret River* underpins the staging of the Dharug language with a sense of postcolonial authenticity. This, however, presents a dilemma. The language anchors the production in a historical past, gives genuine voice to the Aboriginal characters and engages Indigenous involvement in script development. Yet, the Dharug dialogue is incomprehensible to those watching the performance and risks perpetuating a stereotype of the savage. There appears to be little opportunity for postcolonial strategies of reversal or defiance with this incorporation. Even so, both the settler characters and the audience cannot comprehend Dharug; this experience potentially conveys the reality of early encounters. In addition, the theatricalised performance style heightens visual and aural dimensions to emphasise other ways of making meaning on stage. The integration of further Indigenous elements, such as dance and song, also establish a strong sense of cultural authenticity. The experience of hearing Dhurag onstage is a complex encounter for the predominantly white audience.

The use of Dhurag gives active voice to the Indigenous characters whereas the historical novel source does not. Indigenous physical presence resets the postcolonial ambitions of the narrative. These ambitions move the reflective dimensions of settler classic towards an acknowledgment of the colonising status of Australia. The production aspires to rouse recognition of settler complicity in the ongoing disadvantage of Indigenous Australians. However, these aspirations may not have been met by the audience. Instead, the refined

theatrical style freighted a sensation of classic, which appears to dampen postcolonial political intent. The tension between what a classic does and who it is for creates a paradox in this production that seems difficult to resolve. In this case, the term Australian classic gains a prescriptive charge, where the designation is regulated by the tastes of a mainstream audience. The overlay of classic authority onto the play's postcolonial resonance bolsters the settler position. This form of classic-ing may secure its cultural significance by surrendering its cultural purpose.

Classic-ing has deep relevance to the diverse cultural meanings involved in making theatre in Australia. These case studies have explored a range of these meanings. The peripatetic approach uncovered discrete features of the classic-ing practice. The movement through various facets of performance demonstrated the interactive constitution, overlaying or blending in various ways and to different degrees. These case studies show how classic-ing creates cultural meaning though this interaction. The case studies focused on the period between 1995 and 2016, ending shortly before an unexpected turn that reconfigured so much of what we know. The global pandemic affected all levels of the cultural domain in Australia. Theatre was brought to a halt and still continues to undergo a harsh stress test. Mainstream theatre, like all parts of the theatre ecology, is under severe pressure. This situation may have brought a historical breach or fissure to the findings of this research. Perhaps classic-ing could therefore be considered a discrete phenomenon that occurred over a specific time. The sense of an ending that the production of *The Secret River* brought about could also represent a natural end to the practice of classic-ing.

However, the practice of classic-ing continues. Despite the disruption of the pandemic, Australian mainstream theatre continues to pursue classic productions. The active verb 'to classic' still animates the entire production chain, from program choice, casting, and staging to audience reception and critical response. This key observation offers several avenues for future research. Firstly, there is further potential for case study investigation into the 'classic' category. For example, the 2023 STC season included *Do Not Go Gentle* written by Australian Patricia Cornelius in 2010. The first mainstream programming of this play frames it as a modern Australian classic. Did the company again pursue an 'affinity classic' production strategy as it did with Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age*? What were the effects of the staging of the work as classic drama?

Classic-ing is a firmly embedded practice in Australian mainstream theatre. Could this practice encourage a more confident approach to the production of Australian drama? What

does conscious awareness of classic-ing bring to Australian theatre more generally? Furthermore, this research may offer insights into other related contexts. Are there other nations where classic operates as an active verb? In postcolonial countries like Canada and New Zealand for example? Does classic-ing operate in other institutional domains, such as alternative or independent theatre or across festival networks? If not, what are the essential cultural conditions that enable the practice? Certain facets of the mechanism could also be explored in more detail. For example, a close study of specific artists may give deeper insight into a classic-ing approach to staging. This in turn may enable wider consideration of network of artists and spheres of influence within an international performance culture. The potential for future research into classic-ing is diverse in scope and exciting.

This series of case studies has explored processes and dynamics that amplify the status of classic, illuminating the embedded practice of classic-ing from different perspectives. Each study can be considered both a unique artistic event and a culturally representative phenomenon. At the heart of this work is an encounter with classic dramatic theatrical practice. An encounter which enlivens potential meanings by combining the circumstances of production and what is latent in the writing. Classic is therefore a dimension of theatrical and not only of dramatic reception. It is this encounter with theatre that elucidates the complex axis of classic-ing on the Australian mainstage.

Afterword: Performing Classic in Australia from 1788 to 1994

Recent archaeological analysis of shell middens in Warrnambool, on the south-west coast of Victoria, appear to provide evidence of human occupation more than 100,000 years ago. In a public discussion on the value of the arts, writer and historian Bruce Pascoe ponders these early Australians and their philosophical grappling with the nature of humankind as both violent and caring, as fiercely individual and inherently communal, as people who exhibit both selfish and selfless traits. How to ameliorate the negative tendencies and ensure the survival of the group? Pascoe suggests that the answer was found by those early people. They made sure that everyone was housed, that everyone was fed, and that everyone was involved in culture. This, he suggests, is a powerful lesson from the oldest surviving culture on earth.[198]

On 13 May 1787, a fleet of eleven ships sailed from Portsmouth with over 1,400 convicts, sailors, soldiers and officials to set up a penal colony on Botany Bay, on the east coast of Australia.

This section gives a condensed overview of the classic in Australia from the establishment of the country as a penal colony up to the period of my research. For the purpose of chronology, the comparative lens of Shakespeare leads the discussion of the cultural mores when performing the classic in Australia. Shakespeare's texts were performed early on in Australian settlement and are still performed today, and thus lend the account a time-tested perspective. Even so, the dominance of Shakespeare in the repertoire may be only one way of attending to the classic. Moreover, Shakespeare may not necessarily represent the Australian classic phenomenon. Shakespeare production offers this account a spine, yet limbs of different sizes and shapes attach to this vertebra and assemble various anatomies of classic drama in Australian culture over time.

Taking Shakespeare as a prime example of the classic focuses the comparative lens for the exploration of classic mechanisms. Performance of a classic can signal a certain cultural consciousness and even give insight into the level of self-confidence of a nation. For Australian theatre, the notion of provenance seems to be decisive when grasping the classic. The effort to create a 'home-grown' theatre and the search for 'Australian-ness' are prevalent scholarly concerns in Australian theatre historiography. In addition, 'local' classics are often

[198] Diversity in Arts, Culture and the Creative Sector, ABC RN Big Ideas 2/9/2019.

compared with those from ‘overseas’ to determine cultural outputs or assess cultural maturity. As a theatrical practice that changes over time where repetition influences reputation and reception, the classic may not only epitomise a mature and intellectual culture, but through identitarian traits reflected in theatre can define the culture’s independence. The changing demographics of Australia in just over two hundred years have transformed theatre practice within an increasingly complex culture. A historical account must then necessarily move between the conditions of the times, the plays themselves, and the people involved.

This chronology considers conditions specific to Australian theatre over four periods: colonial settlement, Federation, post-war and the New Wave. Each of these time periods offers differing perceptions of theatre and classic. Historiographic perspectives of Shakespeare’s works during the time the colony was established indicate that audiences would have been familiar with the stories and characters of Shakespeare. The experience of going to the theatre in the colony, however, involved far more than watching what was happening onstage. Attending the theatre was a common experience for early settlers as it possibly was in their previous lives in England, but this penal colony cannot be considered a microcosm of British society. The theatre exerted its own cultural pressures on the formation of this society. The period from Federation in 1901 onwards sees Shakespeare on the spectacular staging of international networks of drama production, and the emergence of national dramatic themes. The post-war period emphasises the classic through visiting theatre stars, government interest for a representative national theatre and the success of a single Australian play. The final period, characterised by the New Wave of Australian theatre writing, explores a variety of meanings of classic drama in Australia. This period is a significant forerunner to my dissertation research.

This condensed history of classic drama in Australia contains the limitations and hazards that occur with abbreviation. There has been no diachronic effort to characterise the classic in Australia, even so, this short account is only a light gesture over the acuity of the theatrical past. This section marks repertoire, observes production conditions, and in doing so may leap over historical fissures and lightly skim across existing erudite insights. I have referred to the existing works on Australian theatre and social history to form a perspective of classic in Australia across the time since European settlement. The aim is to give the reader some insight into an Australian theatrical past and some historiographical context to my concern with the classic in mainstream Australian theatre over twenty years from the mid-1990s to mid-2010s.

Classic in colonial Australia

As the first licenced purpose-built theatre opened in 1832 in the colony of New South Wales there was no clear division between the 'popular', such as music hall and farce, and the 'legitimate', such as Shakespearean drama or opera – no division of 'high' and 'low' culture. Similarly, clear division of social class in the penal colony appears to be more fluid within the public sphere of theatre. On the stage at that time, productions credited as Shakespeare were adaptations, appropriations, rewrites or edited versions, snippets, parodies, musicals and burlesques. Playbill evidence indicates the first Shakespeare production in the new colony was *Henry IV* on 8 April 1800, performed in Sidaway's Theatre in Sydney Town (Goldner and Madelaine: 14).[199] The first licenced theatre, the Theatre Royal in Sydney, was built by an Anglo-Jewish free settler, low comedian and theatrical entrepreneur, Barnett Levey, who pursued a long and public battle to gain licence to open (Leahy 2009: 2). On 26 December 1833, his company of local actors presented *Richard III* at the Theatre Royal, a popular version by Colley Cibber from the early 1700s.[200] For the professional Australian premiere, a local publican who was also an experienced actor, John Meredith, played the title role. Meredith received tough criticism from the Sydney Monitor, who called the production "a complete failure" and Meredith's attempt as "the height of presumption". Even so, this was not necessarily an indication that the audience did not enjoy the performance (Waterhouse 2002: 22).

The Australian premiere of Shakespeare's *Othello* was in the following year, on 27 July 1834. This performance is considered an early form of blackface minstrelsy, occurring long before Australia's first structured minstrel show in 1850 (Waterhouse 1990: 23). At the time, an indignant critic from the Sydney Gazette expressed his disappointment with the late start of this *Othello*, as the farce performed directly afterwards was, "necessarily curtailed, and therefore completely spoiled".[201] This comment may indicate that the Shakespeare tragedy was valued as equal to the 'lighter' theatrical entertainment on offer.[202] This first *Othello*

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[199] Sidaway's Theatre was the first operating theatre in Australia which opened shortly after settlement in 1796 in Sydney and was established by first fleet convict, Robert Sidaway (Parsons 1995: 529).

[200] Such versions of Shakespeare dominated the English-speaking stages until the late nineteenth century. Cibber's version of *Richard III* was better known and more widely played than Shakespeare's, perhaps due to the cuts that ensured the dominance of Richard which made the version a star vehicle for actors in the nineteenth and twentieth century, such as David Garrick in 1743 and Charles Kean at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane in 1838 (Wilkinson 2013: 48-51).

[201] Theatricals, Sydney Gazette 29/7/1834.

[202] This double billing was a regular practice at the time and was seen in the 1886 Charles and Ellen Keen tour of *Henry VIII* performed with the pantomime *Harlequin Graceful.* (AusStage).

drew similar criticism to *Richard III*. It was "a miserable failure" according to the Sydney Gazette. The critic had hoped for, "something like intellectual entertainment", and apart from disapproving of the casting and acting talent, he considered the costuming as, "the very extreme of ridiculous – to see British emblems on the Moor's garb was bad enough".[203] This costuming of Othello in British uniform could suggest the production attempted contemporary interpretation, connecting the world of the play with that of the audience. Or perhaps rehearsal time was so short, there was little time to attend to the production details.

As theatre historians and the AusStage database record, most early Australian productions of Shakespeare were the tragedies. This popular appeal appears to be influenced by a form other than tragedy.

> From its beginnings, melodrama proved particularly popular on the Australian stage and Shakespeare's plays lent themselves to the melodramatic style because they contained exciting plots and exaggerated characters, easily identified as heroes and villains. Indeed, the fact that his comedies were so rarely performed is perhaps explained by the fact that they were less readily accommodated to the conventions of melodrama (Waterhouse 2002: 22).

What is nowadays considered to be the serious form of tragedy, could then be tailored as fitting material for the theatrical form celebrated at the time.

The audiences of the day brought their own social needs to these early, not necessarily reverential productions and there is strong evidence that these audiences came from all levels of society. For example, the critic of the *Othello* production noted the "marked difference in number and quality of audience" where "the lower circle of boxes was filled with the families of a portion of the most respectable inhabitants of the colony, and the other parts of the house were proportionally well attended".[204] Different classes of audience are accommodated in the Georgian-style theatre with gallery and boxes and its hierarchy of ticket prices. At this time the new colony had a small population. Manning Clark records that in 1828, four years before the Theatre Royal opened, the total population in New South Wales was 36,598, and nearly half of these were convicts, 16,442 males and 1,544 females (Clark 1963: 78). A population divided into prisoners and a colonial ruling class indicates a social structure of cultured elite and unsophisticated criminals. The Sydney penal colony would be obvious place for clear

[203] Theatricals, Sydney Gazette 29/7/1834.

[204] Theatricals, Sydney Gazette 29/7/1834.

cultural separation, yet all parts of the colony took part in leisure activities such as the theatre. There was a "strong taste for theatre among […] those who made up the bulk of transportees to New South Wales" (Jordan: 21), with evidence of convicts and emancipists as part of the audience and convicts taking part in acting roles before being banned as Barnett Levey applied for the Theatre Royal's second licence (Jordan: 179). Even though this was a society sharply divided by wealth, class and religion, with convicts and emancipists on the bottom rungs, free settlers and government officials at the top, pursued by an aspiring lot of merchants, civil servants and squatters, it appears that at least early on in the life of this first continuous professional theatre, the audiences were drawn all parts of society. In the young colony, theatre-going brought social and class boundaries together in a shared public sphere. The culture appears to develop somewhat free from the restrictions of a colonial elite.

In a similar way, Shakespeare crossed all boundaries of theatrical genre. Shakespeare and his characters were frequently the subject for burlesque, musical extravaganza and parody. This includes *Shaksperi*, first performed at the Sydney Royal Victoria on 1 July 1844, with a subsequent run of twenty performances, far more than other productions of the time. The Shakespearean parody included a comic exposé of the financial effects of the 1843 depression in New South Wales (Webby 2001: 51). This was a performance that allowed topical reflection on issues of the day. Frequently appropriated for parody, such versions of Shakespeare must have assumed the audience's familiarity with the stories and characters from Shakespearean plays. It appears that audience were generally acquainted with the Bard and were not afraid to lampoon current issues using his work.

Shakespeare was of course not the only dramatist performed in the colony. Often referred to as the first performance of a western play in Australia, George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* was performed by convicts for the Kings birthday celebrations on 4 June 1798. This moment is seen as the opportunity for "political resistance", as the convicts transposed life in the colony onto the play's burlesque trial and military theme and wrote a new epilogue (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 8). The performance dramatised the abject position of the convicts and is thus considered as an early postcolonial moment in Australian theatre history.[205] The degree to which the early parodies of Shakespeare in the newly established Sydney theatres resisted a colonial impulse is unclear. Yet the assumption that Shakespeare was perceived as the legitimate theatre or that popular forms were not political is far from

[205] This early performance inspired Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker* (1987), and its dramatic version Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (1988).

correct. Shakespeare was one of many theatrical forms on the colonial stage and was appropriate material for social comment. Even with harsh reaction from critics and attempts to separate the upper classes from rowdier elements, the theatre flourished along with the colonies. By 1840, the city of Melbourne was established and continued to expand in a similar way to Sydney.

In the 1850s, gold was found in Australia, and at its peak, the Victorian town of Ballarat was one of the richest alluvial goldfields in the world. Settlement in the districts around Sydney and Melbourne had followed the expansion of pastoral leases for free settlers, but the advent of the gold rushes brought thousands of people into the countryside especially around the Ballarat. While this research is primarily concerned with the capital cities of Melbourne and Sydney, at this time there was rapid population growth outside the city centres, in the countryside and on the diggings. Claire Wright (2013) discusses women's participation in the goldfields of Ballarat and their role in the Eureka stockade, Australia's most celebrated rebellion against the colonial British forces. The theatre offered financial independence for women and unlike their British or American counterparts, professional actresses in Australia were not considered to be as loose with their morals (Fotheringham 2006: xxxiii). Wright's portrait of the theatre manager and actor Sarah Hanmer is an example of the social fluidity, upward mobility and political influence of women working in theatre during these times. Hanmer's Adelphi Theatre was a fixed-up tent on the diggings (Wright 2013: 243), which became the venue for the Ballarat Reform League, the principal driving organisation for the Eureka rebellion. The League's meetings coincided with Sarah Hanmer cultivating the patronage of Ballarat's highest official and the honorary consul of the most influential immigrant group in the country (Wright 2013: 403). Wright recasts the masculinist Australian Eureka myth and also demonstrates the intricate connections between theatre production and imaginative formations of the times. This highlights the theatre's political influence and centrality in the establishing society (Wright 2013: 242-248).

The early rapid expansion of the settlement through the discovery of gold and wool production drove the growth and spread of the population. By the end of the nineteenth century, the population had grown to over three million. The industrial conditions of Australian theatre responded by expanding touring circuits to small and scattered population centres across the vast geographical expanse.[206] The culture of the regions both reflected and

[206] For description of Shakespeare in the other Australian capital cities Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide, see Goldner and Madelaine 2001.

diverged from the main centres. Large theatres were built in the cities and commercial theatre became an active participant in the world tours that built upon the buoyant colonial economies benefitting from the discovery of gold. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Melbourne was the largest city in Australia and reputedly the richest city in the world. The next two decades saw a "golden age" of Shakespeare production in Australia where an "impressive number of renowned British and American actors toured the antipodes and the companies with which they performed included a number of Shakespeare plays in their repertoire" (Waterhouse 2001: 24). These actors included Edwin Booth in 1854, and Charles and Ellen Keen between 1863 and 1864, who not only played in Sydney and Melbourne, but also on the goldfields. Shakespeare was a sure box office success and their repertoire included *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, as well as *Henry VIII*, *King John* and *King Lear* (Waterhouse 2001: 25). Shakespeare's broad appeal continued.

Harold Love lists the ten most popular Shakespeares in Melbourne in the 1860s as *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *As You Like It* and *King John*, and notes an expanded tragedian repertoire with Kotzebue's *Pizarro* and *The Stranger* and Schiller's *The Robbers* (Love 2001: 57). *Hamlet* was popular during the period in an interpretation that appear to justify imperial colonisation (Love 2001: 68). Imported Shakespeare productions of the period are connected to the social mobility of Charles Coppin who, like Barnett Levey before him, was a low comedian and theatrical entrepreneur. Coppin gained social authority, moving in and out of politics over his career as theatre manager through his promotion of Irish actor, G. V. Brooke, the British actor Charles Kean, and a Shakespearean repertoire. Brooke was a provincial leading man rather than a metropolitan star, and Kean was "well past his prime" (Leahy 2009: 44). The story of Coppin complicates the idea of a strict bifurcation of popular and legitimate theatres. Venues and repertoire were developed to pander to different tastes in theatrical form, with Coppin opening large populist venues for circus and at the same time charging exorbitant admission prices to Brooke's season in his theatre. Coppin was keenly aware of an increasingly powerful middle-class culture at odds with a colonial minority who were publicly enforcing standards in theatrical taste that rejected popular forms (Leahy 2009: 46-47). By using Shakespeare as part of his cultural capital, Coppin successfully battled the establishment with a hybrid persona of "professional buffoon and public man" (Leahy 2009: 51). Shakespeare

had capital, particularly for a rising middle-class, but one not necessarily connected to notions of 'high' or legitimate culture.

What is today considered as classic Shakespeare was then material for local and popular adaptation. The public sphere of theatre connected with imaginative political and social formations and was a driver for social mobility apparently without the imperative of the colonial elite. This therefore avoids sanctioning Shakespeare as a 'legitimate' form of theatre.

Classic at the turn of the century

It seems that the separation of 'legitimate' theatre from 'popular' forms was not as pronounced in Australia as it was in Britain or the US. There was a social fluidity that coexisted within sharp class division, even as the minority illiberal colonial establishment pronounced the culture as fledgling, unformed and uninformed. This was a persistent insistence that could equally indicate the ineffectual cultural clout of the elite. Concerns about codes of conduct, both on the stage and in the audience rose from the shared sphere of public theatre, but the disgruntled rhetoric did not bring about investment to public benefit or high art institutions. During a period when major commitment to building significant cultural institutions was made by governments in Europe or by American philanthropists, there was a pointed lack of infrastructure development in Australia. It was the large-scale commercial ventures who built the theatres and came to command the Australian theatrical landscape. Their influence meant that some forms of theatre maintained their popularity in Australia well after their British stage counterparts had faded. The large-scale melodramas that dominated the Australian stage well into the twentieth century not only demonstrate the prominence of the form, but they also signal the firm grasp of commercial concerns within Australian theatrical production.

In 1901, Australia became a federation of states formed from the six colonies. The population was mainly Caucasian due to the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act (later known as the White Australia Policy) that was designed to limit non-British migration. Aboriginal people were excluded from the census until after constitutional reform in 1967. At the time of Federation, there were 3.7 million people in Australia, 1.3 million in New South Wales and 1.2 in Victoria, a high literacy rate of eighty-seven percent and a median age of twenty-two years. Ten years later, with the outbreak of World War 1 in 1911, there was a registered population of around 4.5 million people, with a median age of twenty-four (ABS n.d.). This is a period where the tastes of Australian audiences were reflected in the grand-scale pictorial staging of

Oscar Asche who toured to Australia three times from 1909 to his last tour in 1922-24.[207] The final tour shifted pictorial Shakespeare to an oriental musical stage: from *Othello, The Merchant of Venice, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Taming of the Shrew* to *Kismet* and the long-running *Chu Chin Chow*. Asche's first two tours, in 1909 to 1910 and in 1912 to 1913, are seen as the continuation of popularised Shakespeare as they "demonstrate that Australian middle-class audiences still wanted large-scale spectacular Shakespeare, even if contemporary scholars and critics were anxious about the mutilation of the text" (Madelaine 2001: 119). During the high colonial period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Australian Shakespeare was equivocally textually reverent and had ambivalent standing as an example of institutionalised high culture.

These Asche productions negotiated the apparently opposing notions of commercial interests in entertainment and the idea that Shakespeare equalled high culture. Theatrical expectations of spectacle meant that the text would be cut to compensate for the movement of scenery. In Asche's productions, however, "for all the curtain climaxes and pleasing tableaux, Asche's pictures were seldom a *substitute* for the text" (Madelaine 2001: 105). Asche modernised the productions through staging techniques rather than through radical textual changes. With their earnest pursuit of detailed verisimilitude and historical accuracy, Veronica Kelly characterises the Asche productions as costume dramas, part of a broader theatrical fascination of the times. These costume dramas produced,

> vital historical emblems validating or interpreting political and social values familiar from education, visual art, literary, historical or light romance reading, popular religious tracts or newspaper editorials […] In a culture itself haunted by history, the actors of costume drama generated vital historical 'hauntings', as past and present fused in the costumed actorly image to form an eerie hybrid revenant, neither quite of the present nor totally of the past. (Kelly 2010: 12).

The cultural appeal of these spectacular productions is a phenomenon of the country's history. This perspective lies outside lines of British inheritance, colonial aspirations or national individuality, the costume drama is conceived as a cultural phenomenon, a haunting historical effect created by the founding experiences of the young nation.

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[207] A prominent importer of Shakespeare, Oscar Asche was an Australian-born, London-based actor-manager who worked for Beerbohm Tree and was married to English star Lily Brayton. Brayton toured with him to Australia for the first two tours where Asche was celebrated as the country's first international theatrical success. The partners Asche and Brayton taught their tour producers, J. C. Williamson's, that Shakespeare could be a commercial success. (Madelaine 2001: 103-104).

Madelaine emphasises the connection to Britain in the Asche productions, which were promoted to offer the imperial quality of the London stage. The Herald critic at the time commented on the staging as, "adequate and worthy, though in no wise more so than Sydney audiences are accustomed to expect as a right" (cited Madelaine 2001: 107). The productions were highly successful and were part of the "Shakespeare boom" (Madelaine 2001: 110). The historical traces of theatrical production indicate the interpretive gap for Australian theatre historians. For Kelly, the "hybrid revenant" that materialised on the spectacular stage is the audience's felt experience and a displacement effect of colonial settlement. For Madelaine, this stage is proof of a cultural confidence daring to challenge an imperial metropolis, the periphery challenging the imperial centre, the rejection of British influence and the beginnings of national identity. These narrative frames point to the diverse interpretive possibilities of the Australian settler cultural context for theatre historiography.

The first Australian stage classics are icons for theatrical national identity according to Richard Fotheringham, who nominates two long-running productions distinguished by local themes. *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *The Kelly Gang* were performed over more than thirty years from 1886, and were frequently revived (Fotheringham 2006: 458, 551-570). *For the Term of His Natural Life* was an adaptation for the stage of a Marcus Clarke novel about the Australian penal colony which appeared on the Australian, New Zealand, British and American stages (Fotheringham 2006: 457). *The Kelly Gang* was one of a number of stage stories about bushrangers. Both plays pattern crime and punishment as founding principles of the Australian nation and explore the idea of innocence made to suffer the brutality of servitude and the circumstances that lead a person to commit a crime. The ubiquitous theme of convict ancestry marks national identity and the productions' long popularity becomes the barometer for their classic status.

European classics made available through the extensive touring networks of the times are also worth noting. The first English-language production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* took a two-year tour through Australia and New Zealand during 1889 to 1891, six months after opening in London. Janet Adchurch produced and starred in the production, and the tour included interviews and benefit performances on the theme of women's emancipation. Although the production was both controversial and acclaimed, dividing critics as it had in London and in Europe, the idea of the New Woman promoted vigorous discussion at a time just prior to New Zealand and South Australia giving women the vote in 1894 (Fotheringham 2002; Hoare 2006). While clearly not a direct cause for this decision, it could be argued that

the production allowed issues about the emancipation of women to be discussed and imagined in the public sphere.

This production of *A Doll's* House toured under the auspices of the theatrical partnership of Williamson, Garner and Musgrove. After this theatrical partnership split, the J. C. Williamson's company formed, this company epitomises the predominance of commercial theatre in Australia. The Firm as the company was known, operated for over one hundred years up to its financial collapse in 1976 and had a dominant influence on theatrical production across Australia. The import approach of the company created a systemic monopoly of product that came from somewhere else. It was the American couple first brought to Australia by George Coppin as actors who returned two years later to establish this largest theatre circuit in the world, with interests in London, New York, New Zealand and South Africa. The Firm's productions included drama, pantomime, dance, music and opera, each Australianised through local references, yet functioning as direct link to the London stages. Their plays in Australia were mostly British which copied London staging techniques and were performed in replicas of London theatres.

Against such a monopoly of imports, John McCallum's salient study of Australian drama focuses on local, popular cultural phenomena as the classic. Here Australian plays are representative of an enduring cultural search for a sense of belonging to the country. The indelible effect of this experience and the deep history of the land are prompt for cultural prototypes. McCallum observes, for example, the frequent cultural repetition of Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection*. These dry and comic observations about the struggles of rural life are a set of twenty-six stories. The stage version places the narrative incidents into a stock melodramatic plot. Performances of *On Our Selection* ran in Sydney between 1912 and 1917 to an audience of more than one million people (McCallum 2009: 8; AusStage). The popularity of *On Our Selection*, the imitative films, the later long-running radio serial or the 1972 television serial mark out a narrative that is, "the basic family set-up – a tyrannical Dad, a long-suffering Mum and a collection of more or less dissatisfied children", a narrative device characteristic of Australian drama through to the early 1960s. "The remarkable longevity of the stories in different forms is a classic example of how nineteenth century theatre conventions were taken up by the new media" (McCallum 2009: 7-8). This is an example of theatrical codes devised by popular theatre that, according to McCallum, continue to shape the country's artistic imaginary.

According to Madelaine, the spectacular stage falters during Asche's third 1922 to 1924 Australian tour, in part because audiences could then compare the large-scale spectacular form of Shakespeare to a pragmatic, bare stage form by actor-manager Alan Wilkie. Considered an ideal-type colonial, the English actor and manager Allan Wilkie led a Shakespearean touring company between 1920 and 1930, producing most of Shakespeare's plays in repertoire and touring extensively across Australia and New Zealand. He gained the support of many powerful people, from politicians to journalists and the judiciary, enlisting Shakespeare in a cultural missionary campaign to popularise and "educate the upper crust to revere Shakespeare" (Leahy 2009: 78). An excerpt from an interview with Wilkie articulates a notion of Shakespeare as an imperial instrument; "I think that Shakespeare is the greatest Empire-builder of the race […] I believe that the British race has become the greatest in the world… simply by force of character. It is our great writers […] particularly Shakespeare, who have largely built up that character." (Wilkie cited in Leahy 2009: 79). This rhetoric aligns Britain and Shakespeare as one civilising force, appropriating Shakespeare's language in order to bind the English-speaking colony with an English motherland, and simultaneously placing emphasis on the force of English character as the crucial aspect to colonial success.

Kathy Leahy's extensive analysis of Wilkie's Shakespeare suggests Wilkie trod a fine line between legitimate representation and popular appeal. "His concern was with spreading the word of Shakespeare in the name of the Empire and not with refining Australian tastes" (Leahy 2009: 78). By adopting playing styles more suited to melodrama or music hall, Wilkie perhaps unwittingly played a role in the evolution of a culture that would "confront its parent" (Leahy 2009: 79). Like Oscar Ashe, Wilkie fashioned Shakespeare as a symbol of high culture and simultaneously exploited popular playing styles to ensure his productions' commercial success. Unlike Asche, Wilkie's response to the demands of extensive touring was a minimal and suggestive scenic approach, with the use of bare stage, props and simple set to locate the performances. This appropriated Shakespeare according to local conditions, even as Wilkie promoted the work by aligning himself with the London stage and the renowned Herbert Beerbohm Tree.[208] While strictly conservative in intent, his performances

[208] A brief example of this positioning is that, like Beerbohm Tree, Wilkie played Caliban in a production of *The Tempest*, as well many as other roles that the London actor-manager portrayed. In the case of Wilkie's Caliban, there are indications that rather than direct imitation, he borrowed from other traditions to adapt the play into local contexts. A review of Wilkie's 1923 *The Tempest* in The Mercury describes Wilkie's Caliban as a "grotesque red haired, uncouth, and ugly monster". This suggests an interpretation that leans on an English notion of the Irish as uncivil, unruly and drunkards, playing on the social division of Australia at the time with its protestant British-leaning upper and middle class and a radical Catholic Irish working class. Wilkie's Caliban figures Prospero's slave as the 'other' Irish of the British Isles, whereas in London, Tree's

indicate that local conditions give rise to a particular form of cultural expression. Colonial rhetoric asserted a particular social position for the stage, although the performances were fashioned by the mutual determinations of the agency of the plays and the prevailing social and cultural circumstances. Kathy Leahy's close observation of the productions leads to the suggestion that despite the colonial rhetorical framework, Wilkie's alliance with Shakespeare was not subservient.

The classic over this period of Australia's Federation focuses the interplay and interpretation of the conditions of imperial rule. The relationship with Britain appears to indicate a nuanced yet emerging national cultural confidence within a theatrical landscape commanded by commercial rather than governmental or philanthropic concerns.

Classic post World Wars

While these nineteenth and early twentieth century examples explore the division of high and low culture and the social role of theatre within shifting social conditions, the ensuing period appraises British cultural influence through moments where the classic becomes a polestar for serious theatre. The period after the Second World War and up to the 1970s aligns cultural aspiration with the establishment of institutional structures. Visiting London theatrical luminaries, the founding of government cultural subsidy, and the first professional Australian play touring out of the country are salient events cited as signposts for the beginning of non-commercial professional theatre in Australia. The development of a professional sector that could best present 'serious theatre'.

In 1949, the government of the time invited celebrated British director of the Old Vic, Tyrone Guthrie, to consult on the formation of an Australian national theatre. Guthrie took a whirlwind two-week tour of the country and produced a four-page report that recommended local actors be trained in Australia and then sent to England for two years to play "the English classics". Guthrie considered it essential that the training be done overseas as,

> [t]he glamour (necessary for star status) will only […] be acquired for an Australian National Company if it makes its debut away from home, and only plays on the Home Ground after having won prestige abroad. I am satisfied that local talent, after a spell

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figured Caliban as the Darwinian missing link. Wilkie's interpretation borrows from an English stage and appropriates to an Australian context.

> of ‘finishing school’, is good enough to command such prestige.” (Guthrie cited in Leahy 2009: 137).

While Australian actors were being ‘brought up to standard’ for a national theatre, Australian audiences would be ‘trained up’ by being exposed to tours from the best British companies (Milne 2004: 10). This report to government had been prompted by the 1948 tour of the Old Vic with the stars Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh and a company of forty actors. In a demonstration of British cultural cachet, the company played a repertoire that included Shakespeare’s *Richard III* in all major capital cities.[209] During the tour, there was concern about appropriate theatre behaviour, evidence of the “imperative to establish Australia’s worthiness to play host to a bona fide, British high-cultural event” (Leahy 2009: 121). Olivier and Leigh’s offstage commitments were given more coverage than their onstage performances, and the Old Vic tour had considerable and wide public effect. The later Guthrie report on an Australian National Theatre, however, commanded less success. There was broad criticism of Guthrie’s recommendations and with a change of federal government, they were subsequently shelved.[210]

These are cultural incidents that suggest a British valence that was both welcomed and repelled in Australia. Over the next decade, the government began to take more decisive steps to establish structural support for the development of non-commercial professional theatre. This was approached as a simple task of refashioning the British repertory theatre structure to meet Australian local conditions. A transplanted repertory system providing ‘legitimate’ theatre configured an industry that was “almost a parody of British theatre with its neat stratification between amateur, professional and commercial sectors” (Meyrick 2003: 46-48).[211] The first step taken by government to develop non-commercial professional theatre was in 1955, with the establishment of the AETT to meet subvention needs of a professional theatre and to intervene on the “problem of serious theatre” (Hunt cited in Kramer 1987: 73).

Localising an imported repertory model posed immediate challenges. The Executive Director of the AETT was Englishman Hugh Hunt who led by example with a hugely expensive state

[209] Olivier and Leigh were treated like royalty, inspected troops and made speeches in a tour that “was designed to ameliorate the strong anti-British feeling after the war (particularly in Melbourne, which had experienced heavy casualties)”. (Meyrick 2003: 44).

210 Guthrie’s effect on Australia’s cultural direction is in contrast to his in Canada (see discussion in Chapter 3).

[211] Meyrick observes that, “There were four aspects to establishing repertory companies and these crop up repeatedly in the literature surrounding Australian theatre of the period: the need for appropriate buildings, for ensembles of non-star actors, for a national playwright base, and for an ‘educated’ (i.e. non-commercial theatre-loving) audience.” (Meyrick 2003: 46).

capital tour of expatriate Judith Anderson in the title role of *Medea*. It was a tour that, "did not have the hoped-for galvanic effect on audiences" (Meyrick 2003: 46-47). The practical challenges of a repertory approach became apparent when touring across the vast continent of Australia. As time went on, the priorities of the AETT turned to capitalising buildings and establishing ongoing state-based repertory companies to various success. The debate over the need for a national theatre continued to divide its proponents with their range of aspirations and sets of unclear priorities. State government funding injection was very slow, and consequently the entire system of intermittent subsidy over the 1960s created division between those interested in professional theatre.

The AETT aimed to raise the standards of Australian theatre by establishing a subsidised 'serious theatre'. Early on, Hunt took Australian audiences to task in a series of lectures *The Making of Australian Theatre* (Hunt 1981). Leonie Kramer critiques these lectures and Hunt's belief that a diet of commercial and amateur theatre had developed a snobbish middle-aged audience in Australia who were only interested in light comedy and thrillers. To edify these tendencies, Hunt suggested that serious theatre producers be allowed to follow their own tastes without the pressures of commercial success. According to Kramer, Hugh Hunt, "concludes that a theatre which tries to accommodate itself to the tastes of the public will lose its hold on the public!" (Kramer 1981: 19). This appraisal of the relationship between an audience and a company as based on popular appeal becomes a future rallying cry for the New Wave of Australian theatre.

The AETT gradually lost its national relevance and increasingly became involved as a commercial theatre entrepreneur at a time when its main rival, J. C. Williamson's, was going to the wall (Milne 2004: 159). In 1968, the Australia Council of the Arts was established and replaced the role of the AETT as the major subvention and policy-setting agency for the Commonwealth government. Geoffrey Milne draws attention to the effects of financial support, stating: "the story of post-war theatre is largely the story of subsidy" (Milne 2004: 10). His extensive evaluation of Australian theatre between the 1950s and 1990s registers theatrical activity across the states and territories. By charting the growth and decline of theatre companies, Milne defines three waves of change in Australian theatre to tell a story of rejection of a British model within the push and pull of Australian drama's presence onstage.

The fourth event pertinent to a historical account of classic during this period is the Union Theatre Repertory Company 1955 production of the now widely accepted Australian classic,

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler.[212] This was the company's first Australian play and was supported with a small grant from the AETT. The extraordinary success of this production is the cultural event that marks this period. The production was picked up by the AETT and toured across Australia, was part of the cultural offering for visitors to the Melbourne 1956 Olympics, and ran in London for Laurence Olivier Productions in 1957. "This play went on to become the Great Australian Play […] Its action, plot and characterisation brought the bush legend kicking and screaming into the city, almost literally." (McCallum 2009: 78). McCallum also notes that *The Doll* was "the first professionally-produced Australian play outside the commercial theatre to receive any serious professional support and backing. Much of *The Doll*'s success was in the timing" (McCallum 2009: 78). The play has subsequently received a substantial amount of Australian critical and production attention and is considered as a watershed in the history of Australian theatre.

Over this period the classic is typified by imported production that aimed to edify Australian audience tastes and local production that epitomised the aspiration of local cultural value.

Classic and the New Wave

The next period is a significant precursor to the period of my research. The New Wave movement of Australian theatre writing that arose in the 1970s is widely understood in nationalist terms, as reflecting a new national identity. This movement was a striking emergence of new theatre works that contained written, visual and physical dimensions (Meyrick 2002). Assessment of the vernacular New Wave program has suggested their drama effected identitarian meaning (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 167-168; Radic 1991; Brisbane 2005). This perspective overlooks antecedent theatre movements and historical context, as well as mythologises the work as an authentic reference point for Australian drama (Meyrick 2018: 23-37; Casey 2009). In self-defining rhetoric by New Wave artists and critics local cultural output was demarcated against imported product, even while the repertoire included Shakespeare. Key New Wave companies, the Australian Performing Group in Melbourne and the Nimrod in Sydney declared their opposition to mainstream professional companies nurtured by the AETT, and the commercial theatre diet produced by The Firm. This was an oppositional movement fostered by the rapid political and social changes of the times.

[212] The Union Theatre Repertory Company is now known as the Melbourne Theatre Company and is Australia's longest-running professional theatre company. Based in Melbourne, the company began its life in 1953 initially running along British repertory lines with a new play every two weeks. Its early repertoire comprised of the "stalwarts of the amateur and Little Theatre repertoires, identified with the most conservative end of the mainstream spectrum." (Milne 2004: 84).

The social revolution of the 1960s came late to Australian society. For example, the 'white Australia' immigration policy was only scrapped in 1965. Over this decade, the country fought alongside the US in Vietnam, a collusion that exerted political and cultural impacts which cannot be underestimated. At the time, the entrenched conservative coalition government's anti-communist stance had led to an alliance with the US, and selective conscription of young Australian men to fight in Vietnam was introduced in 1964. Public political support for the war remained strong, with the coalition decidedly returned in the 1966 and the 1969 elections. In the beginning of the 1970s, the Australian involvement in Vietnam sparked enormous protest that was led by the 'baby-boomers', the forty percent of the population under twenty. These moratoria were the largest protests ever seen in Australia; a movement led by university students that eventually engaged middle-class Australians (NMA n.d.). In 1972, the election of a reformist and progressive Labor government under prime minister Gough Whitlam heralded a range of powerful economic, social and cultural changes in Australia. By 1975, the main financial support for alternative theatre came from government cultural subsidy (Meyrick 2018: 37). Theatre artists harnessed oppositional politics in these times of rapid and accelerated social and political change, with the New Wave theatre leading and reflecting this transformation.

Geoffrey Milne identifies the progenitor of the New Wave as university theatre, a theatre that came from a young movement with "a strong mood of opposition to established patterns" (Milne 2004: 123-125). This wave of writing was a revolutionary production of Australian works compared to what already existed, a creative energy that freighted the "sensory experience of 'being Australian'", an affective experience which actually meant being *not* British (Meyrick 2003: 51). Milne notes parallel cultural movements of the times, such as mandatory local content quotas for mainstream television and music, and calls this period "the Australian imperative", as carving a "viable alternative to the established Eurocentric mainstream" (Milne 2004: 130). This established oppositional poles of theatre practice and valorised the New Wave as representative of national cultural consciousness, thus animating notions of the classic by provenance, as being either Australian or from overseas, as representing 'Australian' characteristics or not.

One of the leading lights of the New Wave movement, Nimrod Theatre Company in Sydney, performed a particular version of Australian-ness through production of Shakespeare (Parsons 1995; Meyrick 2002; Brisbane 2005). In this time of vigorous development of Australian plays, Shakespeare was Nimrod's most produced single playwright (Milne 2004:

135). Nimrod's main director and actor John Bell had trained in London, working with the Royal Shakespeare Company and is a renowned classical actor. The work of Nimrod drove a larrikin, low culture approach to high culture Shakespeare, using the works in a discourse of counter-identity.[213] Nimrod's classic Shakespeare productions forged a then unconventional interpretation of the playwright as 'fun', adopting setting and accent as markers of local ownership (Brisbane 2005). Milne incisively observes that "the new wave approaches to Shakespeare also owed little to tradition […] influenced more by the European explorations of Grotowski and Kott than the Old Vic" (Milne 2004: 150). In this time and outside the key New Wave companies, Shakespeare was also a site for non-naturalistic theatre practice. The 1972 production of *The Tempest* by the Performance Syndicate, led by Rex Cramphorn, had a deconstructive approach to text and a focus on ensemble practices and performer-centred script development with which the company "stripped away all vestiges of naturalism" (Milne 2004: 138). Such examples emphasise Shakespeare's continuing cultural place in a period defined by nationalist sentiment and local playwrights.

The demise of the New Wave movement is also characterised by the Nimrod company. In 1985, Nimrod jettisoned their original 300-seat performance space in favour of the cavernous Seymour Centre and programmed big classics in a British repertory experiment lead by English director Richard Cottrell (Meyrick 2002: 202). This was the dying gasp of a company alive in name alone, nevertheless the direction attracted a Sydney Critics Circle Award, which noted that Cottrell's "choice of plays has certainly been vindicated by the critics who gave almost all of them good reviews".[214] The company's return to traditional classics was applauded. However, this was not followed by government support or funding approval at the time. Pressure was building to establish a state company in Sydney, a role that Nimrod had tried to fill under various guises. While their early Shakespeares had been moments of paradigmatic cultural self-definition, their return to performing traditional classics revealed a collapse of artistic purpose. This illustrates two characteristic yet opposing meanings to the idea of performing 'classic' drama in Australia: either as an active flourish of postcolonial writing/acting back to the colonial centre, or as a repertoire replication with crypto-colonial critical approval. These opposite positions broadly frame the postcolonial perception of the

[213] Penny Gay defines larrikinism as "a streetwise relation with the world and especially with authority, mateship (a culture of male bonding based on the pioneer bush man's ethos), egalitarianism, hedonism, and an emphasis on physicality (Gay cited in Flaherty 2011: 68). Katherine Brisbane characterises Bell's Nimrod Shakespeare productions as blending "[e]nergy, colour and a certain felicitous vulgarity" (Brisbane in Parsons 1995: 84).

[214] Lost hope at the Nimrod, WAus. 10/10/1987.

classic play in Australia: a marginal colonial outpost uses the British canon as a tool to shape a locally responsive culture rather than suffering cultural colonisation through the repetitive revival of traditional works. The period under study in this thesis, however, illustrates a more nuanced understanding of classic status than these two extremes.

As Geoffrey Milne (2004) has shown in detail, the Australian theatre from the mid-1980s to the late-1990s, the "middle ground" of theatre companies significantly reduced in scope and activity. Yet 'classics' were integral to the creative output of these companies fighting to maintain funding support and audience commitment, even as they defined other, mainstream ones who sought to secure the cultural position.[215] ANT, Playbox and Belvoir Theatre Companies all programmed European classic plays as radical Australian works during this time. In Melbourne at Playbox Theatre, the director Rex Cramphorn was experimenting with Shakespeare production in his Actors Development Stream, attracting substantial critical notice, while ANT was building its reputation on Molière and Chekhov and a profoundly radical restaging of the recognised Australian classic, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. In Sydney as Nimrod's "big classics" season ended with the company suffering complete financial collapse, Belvoir Street Theatre Company B launched 1988 with a subscription package for a program of "radical classics". For these companies, the use of the term classic meant broadened production opportunities and enhanced critical attention. Producing classic plays gave the impression of continuity with traditional values while actually generating significant changes in artistic practice.

And it is around this point in time where my dissertation project begins.

[215] Milne notes that during the 1990s Shakespeare remains "Australia's leading playwright" with at least 163 professional or semi-professional productions in the period from 1990 to 1998, a number that excludes adaptations, appropriations, allusions, reworks or rewrites (Milne 2004: 395).

Appendix: Production Histories

ANT Molières

1983	*Tartuffe*	Anthill Theatre and Universal Theatre, Melbourne
1984	*Don Juan*	St Vincent de Paul's Girls Orphanage, South Melbourne
1985	*The Misanthrope*	Anthill Theatre, Melbourne
1989	*The Imaginary Invalid*	Perth and Adelaide Arts Festivals
1992	*School for Wives*	Gasworks Theatre, South Melbourne

This production information has been drawn from the AusStage database.

Beckett in Australia

1980 ANT: *Embers, Breath, Not I, Krapp's Last Tape.* Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Regional Centres

1984 San Quentin Drama Workshop: *Beckett directs Beckett: Krapp's Last Tape, Endgame, Waiting for Godot*. Adelaide Arts Festival; Universal Theatre, Melbourne

1986 Riverside Studios: *Enough, Footfalls and Rockaby* featuring Billie Whitelaw. Adelaide Arts Festival, Universal Theatre, Melbourne; Playbox: *Happy Days*

1989 ANT: *Happy Days*

1990 ANT: *Waiting for Godot*

1991 ANT: *Endgame*; STC, STCSA: *Happy Days*

1997 Gate Theatre, Dublin: *Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape.* Melbourne International Arts Festival

2003 Belvoir: *Waiting for Godot*; STC: *Endgame*

2006 STCSA: *Waiting for Godot*

2007 Gate Theatre Dublin: *Eh Joe, First Love, I'll Go On*. Sydney Festival

2009 Malthouse: *Happy Days*

2010 Theatre Royal, Haymarket: *Waiting for Godot* featuring Ian McKellen. Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide

2013 STC: *Waiting for Godot*

2015 STCSA and Adelaide Festival: *Footfalls, Eh Joe, Krapp's Last Tape*; Queensland Theatre Company (QTC): *Happy Days*; MTC: *Endgame*; STC: *Endgame*

This production information has been drawn from the AusStage database.

Patrick White Revivals

A Season at Sarsaparilla (Premiere 1962)

1976 Old Tote, dir. Jim Sharman. Robyn Nevin as Girlie Pogson

1984 STCSA, dir. Neil Armfield. Jaqui Phillips as Girlie Pogson

2007 STC & MTC, dir. Benedict Andrews. Peter Caroll as Girlie Pogson

The Ham Funeral (Premiere 1961)

1989 STC, dir. Neil Armfield. Kerry Walker as Mrs Lusty

2000 Belvoir, dir. Michael Kantor. Julie Forsyth as Mrs Lusty

2005 Malthouse, dir. Michael Kantor. Julie Forsyth as Mrs Lusty

2012: STCSA/Adel. Festival, dir. Adam Cook. Amanda Muggleton as Mrs Lusty

A Cheery Soul (Premiere 1963)

1979 Paris Theatre, STC, dir. Jim Sharman. Robin Nevin as Miss Docker

1992 QTC, dir. Neil Armfield. Carole Skinner as Miss Docker

1994 QTC, Adelaide Fringe Festival, dir. Neil Armfield. Carole Skinner as Miss Docker

1996 MTC, dir. Neil Armfield. Robin Nevin as Miss Docker

2000 STC, Belvoir, Sydney Festival, dir. Neil Armfield. Robin Nevin as Miss Docker

2018 STC, dir. Kip Williams. Sarah Pierce as Miss Docker

Night on Bald Mountain (Premiere 1964)

1996 STCSA Belvoir, dir. Neil Armfield. Carole Skinner as Miss Quodling

2014 Malthouse, dir. Matt Lutton. Julie Forsyth as Miss Quodling

This production information has been drawn from the AusStage database.

Some productions could be considered remounts, particularly the two Armfield productions of *A Cheery Soul*, one featuring Carole Skinner in both 1992 and 1994, and the other Robyn Nevin in 1996 and 2000. Similarly, Michael Kantor chose to direct *The Ham Funeral* at Belvoir in 2000 and to repeat this choice with the same lead actor, Julie Forsyth, with the launch of the new Malthouse in 2005.

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