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De-Essentialising Indigeneity: Locating Hybridity in Various Indigenous Performative Texts

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Abstract

Australian Indigenous literature in general and theatre in particular has been found to chart a trajectory of self-reflexivity. What I mean to show in this paper is this sense of inherent scepticism which indigenous theatre unfolds in course of its identity formations. The politics of inclusivity and 'othering' that regulate the domain of identity formations seem to stereotype essentialised identity around specific fantasies of exclusivity, cultural alterity, marginality, physicality and morality. The articulation and representations of full blooded Aborigines, half-castes and other successive generations of culturally diluted Aborigines problematise the notion of indigeneity resulting in a complex interplay of inter-racial, socio-political, economic and cultural dialog. Thus Aboriginal theatre often grapples with these crosscurrents of diversity of identity formations along essentialised and hybrid representations of Aborigines. By decoupling indigeneity from certain fixed phenotypical traits I seek to uncover the hybridity of indigeneity as articulated through variously indigenous performative texts.

Key Words: stereotype, cultural alterity, Aboriginal theatre, hybridity, de-essentialising indigeneity, performative texts

"The continual questioning of who we really are is the essence of Australian nationalism."
(Lattas 1990: 54)¹

"It seems to me, then, that generalizations about Aboriginal literary discourse must be grounded in a reading of individual Aboriginal (inter)texts which will reveal their destination, their less or greater openness, in terms either of an interethnic or of an intraethnic dialogue."
(Riemenschneider 1997: 177)²

Australian history writes itself into performance by utilising the double narrative threads of inclusion and exclusion, attraction and repulsion, idealisation and marginalisation. To contextualise its relevance to the notion of the Derridean 'difference' we need to scrutinise the essential ambiguities that accompanies the nation-building endeavour. The dominant trope of politically, culturally, economically marginalising the Aborigines by

¹ Quoted in Brian Dibble and Margaret Macintyre 1992. 'Hybridity in Jack Davis's *No Sugar*' *Westerly* 37(4): 93.

² See Dieter Riemenschneider. 1997 'Aboriginal Literary Discourses and Australian Literature', *Aratjara: Aboriginal Culture and Literature in Australia* (Cross cultures 28; Amsterdam: Rodopi). 177.

imposing on them a supposed tag of inferiority and inconformity is counter balanced by a corresponding ideology of identifying them as timeless and spiritually dominant or sacred. Hence, “white Australians displace Aboriginal cultures and bestow on themselves an antiquity and historical past which their recent arrival and colonial status precludes” (Dibble and Macintyre 1992: 93). This essentialist strategy of demeaning the Aborigines on one hand and simultaneously qualifying them for homogenous sacred affiliations on the other opens up spaces for critical attention and subsequently loads the discourse with an indulgence of looking for crosscurrents that might somehow tilt the balance towards ‘hybridity’. What I mean to show in my paper is this subtle interplay of discursive strategies which while making way for one kind of ideology engages itself in a performative gesture of articulating another range of essentialist interpretation.

Negotiating Indigeneity and Postcoloniality

Vitally connected to this issue of double narrative is the presence and application of rituals which directly or tangentially make theatre presentational, representational or manifestational. (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 55-60) The reception of Aboriginal theatre cuts across such diverse anticipations of actor-audience relationship expanding or contracting the gap to adapt itself to the desired mode of dramaturgy. But before going into all those details let us look at the term ‘indigenous’ to locate its significance in the discourse of Aboriginal performativity. The adjective ‘indigenous’ has the noun form, ‘indigines’ taken from the Latin ‘indigenus’ denoting “‘born in’, ‘native to’” (Hodge and Mishra 1990: 25). Hodge and Mishra go on to mention that “[m]any Aborigines prefer one of the names from their own languages, Koori, Murri, Nyoongar, names which signify the plurality of nations of the Aboriginal people. In Australia the coloniser’s name concedes the whole case: the white ‘bastards’³ do not after all try to deny the priority of Aboriginal rights” (1990: 25). Kevin Gilbert grappling with this task of defining Aboriginality notes:

But what is Aboriginality? Is it being tribal? Who is an Aboriginal? Is he or she someone who feels that other Aborigines were somewhat dirty, lazy, drunken, bludging? Is an Aboriginal anyone who has some degree of Aboriginal blood in his or her veins and who has demonstrably been disadvantaged by that? Or is an Aboriginal someone who has had the reserve experience? Is Aboriginality institutionalised gutlessness, an acceptance of the label ‘the most powerless people on earth’? Or is Aboriginality, when all the definitions have been exhausted a yearning for a different way of being, a wholeness that was presumed to have existed [before 1788]? (1978: 184)⁴

³ See Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra 1990 ‘The Bastard Complex’ in *Dark Side of the Dream*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, pp. 23-49. Hodge and Mishra notes that: “The complexities of what is at issue here can be seen in the curious of the word ‘bastard’ in Australian male colloquial speech. ...but it can also express high solidarity between male ‘mates’ ... It is the solidary meaning which is most worthy of note, because it is this usage that is definitionally Australian: only a true mate can call his ‘mate’ a ‘bastard’” (23).

⁴ See Adam Shoemaker 2004 ‘Aboriginality and Black Australian Drama’ in *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*, ANU E Press, doi: <http://epress.anu.edu.au/bw/wp/pdf_instructions.html>

Indigenous identity in the twenty-first century might be strategically divided into 'Indigenous One' and 'Indigenous Two'. Richard Borshay Lee makes critical elucidation while he notes:

Indigenous One describes the Americas after 1492, Australia after 1788 and probably Siberia after 1600 in the period of Russian eastward expansion; small peoples facing Eurocolonial invasion and conquest. Native Americans, from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego, are the classic cases.

Indigenous Two deals with the parts of the world where those claiming to be indigenous are encapsulated, not by European settler states, but by agrarian polities in which the dominant ethnicity situates itself in one or another of the Great Traditions from which the indigenes are excluded. Thus we have India and its scheduled tribes, Malaysia with its Orang Asli, and Indo-China and its Montagnards (cf. Mittal and Sharma, 1998; Winzeler, 1997). (2006: 459)

The Australian Aboriginals then belonging to the first group represent a minority of indigenous people whose tie with the land dates back to thousands of years. Their sense of belonging to a place is an ontological disposition, a feeling of rootedness that contrasts so significantly with the highly ambulatory, mobile nature of the settlers. Postcolonialism tends to become a site of contestations where ambivalent and contradictory currents of revelation and concealment are played out. In other words the colonisers who happen to be settlers in the Australian context engage themselves in the discourse of postcoloniality by reiterating their anxieties regarding the colonised but changed in manner and degree owing to the neo-colonial appropriation of the anxiety ridden consciousness that more often than not eludes a homogenous white idiosyncrasy. With the diversifications in approaches to postcoloniality owing to the absence of a unitary foundational methodology, the construction of a nationalist Australian discourse is fraught with literary, cultural, emotional, historical and ideological displacements. Thus Hodge and Mishra distinguish between 'oppositional' and 'complicit' models of postcolonialisms. (1993:39)⁵ while looking at Australian culture in general and its literary productions more specifically as

⁵ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra notes in 'What is post (-) colonialism?': "What emerges, especially past Chapter 4 of EWB, [*Empire Writes Back*] is the fact that we are really talking about not one 'post-colonialism' but namely postcolonialisms. When we drop the hyphen, and effectively use 'postcolonialism' as an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power, we can begin to see those aspects of the argument of EWB which could be profitably extended. This form of 'postcolonialism' is not 'post-' something or other but it is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves. We would then want to distinguish sharply between two kinds of postcolonialism, viewed as ideological operations rather than as a historical stage. The first, and more readily recognizable, is what we call oppositional postcolonialism, which is found in its most overt form in post-independent colonies at the historical phase of 'post-colonialism' (with a hyphen). This usage corresponds to the *OED's* definition of the 'post-colonial'. The second form, equally a product of the processes that constituted colonialism but with a different inflection, is a 'complicit postcolonialism', which has much in common with Lyotard's unhyphenated 'postmodernism': an always present 'underside' within colonisation itself" (38-9). See Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra 1993 'What is post (-) colonialism?' in *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. (Eds.) John Frow and Meaghan Morris. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. pp. 38-9.

“still [being] determined massively by [their] complicity with an imperialist enterprise” (1990: x). Graham Huggan while significantly looking at this “schizoid consciousness of a settler society” notes that “the much-vaunted radicalism of Australian literature is thus largely confined to those oppositional writers from strongly disadvantaged communities who pit themselves against a monolingual Australian history...” (2007: 30-1). Hodge and Mishra think of the white Australian literature as:

[A] cultural fragment of the metropolitan centre, ossified at the moment of contact with the land under the weight of its own colonial mission, and largely reactionary as a consequence. It is precisely this paradoxical relationship with the centre, an urge towards radicalism grafted upon an inescapable conservatism (the paradox of all fragment societies) which makes theories of postcolonialisms such an awkward hermeneutic for the study of Australian literature. (1990: 196)

Postcolonial approaches to Australian literature thus seem to appropriate the twin strategies/objectives of challenging without aiming towards “simplifying the continuing histories of colonialism; and to celebrate without fetishizing, contemporary cultural diversity both within the parameters of the nation and across the wider world” (Huggan 2007: 34). Literary or historical revisionism then while attempting to undermine the myth of unitary consciousness correspondingly qualifies the white Australian literature to multiple distortions of self-identity or relocating unknown, multiple strands of histories/ “historical trajectories that often belie official records or accepted historical facts” (Huggan 2007: 34). In other words literary/historical revisionism while de-essentialising Australian literature on the one hand subjects Indigenous literature to pluralistic discourses on the other. This “deferring for ever an imperialist move to unity, whether the unity of Aboriginality or the unity of Australia” (Hodge and Mishra 1990: 115) is the focal point of this paper as it purports to de-essentialise indigeneity along different layers of performativity.

The tension and conflicts that surround the connotative domain of the term ‘indigenous’ more often than not situates itself in binary opposition to markers of indigeneity. In policing surveillance across the indigenous/non-indigenous border, the discourse gets essentialised and culturally homogenous. This forced simplification of cultural alterity is detrimental to the agency of diversity and restricts the trope of identification to exclusivity. Moreover “[h]istorically, non-indigenous approaches to defining and understanding indigeneity have focused on the need to surveil and control the socialization, mobility and biological reproduction of those with some descent from pre-colonial peoples of Australia” (Dodson 1994: 2-13 ; Paradies 2006: 355). I shall try to look at different performative texts from different indigenous communities to figure out the heterogeneity of indigeneity as espoused in their very pluralistic discourse as against the monolithic discourse of pan-Aboriginality.

Appropriating Deessentialisation of Indigeneity in Jack Davis' *No Sugar*

Theatrical syncretism⁶ has evolved as an extremely productive means of resisting against imperialism in a performative discourse. In other words “‘decolonization’ of the stage can be examined through a number of formal strategies which involve the combination and amalgamation of indigenous performance forms within the framework of the Western notion of theatre” (Balme 1999: 1). Again the German religious historian Carsten Colpe holds that:

A tolerant attitude to all that is of value in the world is thus a basic condition for the rise of any syncretism, as well as a basic virtue of the human being who is shaped by syncretism and in turn supports it. In addition, however, an enormous intellectual power is required in order to cement all the elements together into a new type of tradition and, further, to maintain the combination of the erudite and the popular. (1987, 226)⁷

Jack Davis's *No Sugar*, the second play of *The First Born* trilogy is a significant case in point and it “depicts post-tribal/pre-urban aboriginal people, and anticipated the 1988 Australian Bicentenary by concluding with the Australia Day celebration of 1934 where the protesting Jimmy Munday collapses and dies with his arms around the flagpole” (Dibble and Macintyre 1992: 97). Theatrical syncretism is achieved in *No Sugar* with considerable amount of precision and effectiveness chiefly owing to the “setting which is not designed for proscenium theatre but with predilections towards open stage, open air representation” (Carroll 1997: 106). The Aboriginal theatre's experimentations with the ‘corroboree’, a ritualised theatrical kinaesthetic is a subject which needs to be understood with reference to both its secular and mythical connotations. A ‘corroboree’ was usually organized in a consecrated, circular outdoor space, associated with the mythical significance, which the particular ‘corroboree’ embodied, with a shiftable centre bounded by the horizon. James. G. Cowan notes:

Every individual in a tribe is born into a totem. As a result, he or she belongs to a group of people all of whom bear the name of a natural object. The object is usually an animal or plant, but it can also be a natural phenomenon such as water, the sun, cloud, or the wind. No aspect of material existence escapes the scope of the totem. All creatures are drawn into its domain, there to link up with a man or woman in order to complete their persona. To deny its existence would lead to a loss of personal identity which would make life intolerable. (1992: 39)

⁶ See Christopher Balme 1999 ‘Syncretic Theatre: The Semiotics of Post Colonial Drama and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*’ in *New Theatre in Francophone and Anglophone Africa*. (Ed.) Anne Fuchs. Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 209-226. Again Christopher Balme goes on to define ‘syncretic theatre’ as “the mixing of the Western theatrical model of dialogic drama with the traditional performance forms ...” in ‘The Aboriginal Theatre of Jack Davis: Prolegomena to a Theory of Syncretic Theatre’ in *Crisis and Creativity in New literatures in English*, (Ed.) Geoffrey Davis and Hena Maes Jelinek(Cross/Cultures 1; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) pp. 404-417.

⁷ Quoted in Christopher Balme, B 1999 ‘Introduction’ in *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial drama*. Clarendon Press: Oxford. pp. 7-8.

The functional role of ‘corroboree’ in enacting the primary beliefs of Aboriginal culture and identity were celebrated because “it entails men changing their personas into those of respective Dreaming heroes (painting the body with designs of totemic identity ensures that a man has transcended himself)” (Cowan 1992: 26; Carroll 1997: 110).

The theatricalisation of body as an important site of performative text can be conceptualised by foregrounding the role and function of ‘corroboree’ in Aboriginal plays. The semiotic readings of body painting transcend its overtly decorative function and opens up options for totemistic representations. For example, in *No Sugar*, the ‘corroboree’ witnessed by the spectators in act two, scene six, is “secular in nature”⁸ (Balme 1997: 159). This scene projects a veritable example of true cultural exchanges between different Aboriginal groups. The ceremony itself acts as a melting pot through the totemistic initiation of respective Aboriginal groups. The cultural significances of their different songs, dances and body painting are represented as follows:

SAM: [*pointing to Billy’s body paint*] Eh! Eh! Old man, what’s that one?

BILLY: this one *bungarra*, an’ he lookin’ for berry bush. But he knows that fella

Eagle watchin’ him and he know that fella is cunnin’ fella. He atchin’ and

Lookin’ for that eagle, that way, this way, that way, this way.

[he rolls over a log, disappearing almost magically. BLUEY plays the didgeridoo and BILLY appears some distance away by turning quickly so the firelight reveals his painted body. He dances around, then seems to disappear suddenly. He rolls back over the log and drops down, seated by the fire.] (1986, 66)

Billy’s explanation with reference to the “cartography of the body through painting” (Balme 1997: 159) contextualises the totemic significance of ‘bungarra’ and an eagle. The painting generally applied to breast and stomach serves as the iconographic signifier amidst a “performative complex” (Balme 1997: 159). This kinaesthetic building up of an Aboriginal cultural predicament goes beyond the ethnographic theorisation as Billy enacts his role as the torch bearer of a ‘cultural text’.⁹ This steady aesthetic escalation of a character to a level of cultural authorisation is a paradigm possible through the semiotic reading of the ‘corroboree’. Although I do not wholly subscribe to Balme’s notion that Jack Davis in this scene of *No Sugar*, unlike that of *The Dreamers* or *Barungin* makes no attempt to “mythologize the figures” (Balme 1997: 159). This is simply because any enactment of cultural initiation involves an extension of the cultural lineage transgressing the elasticity of the performance code which binds the actor to reality. In other words Billy stands at par with Worru as they drift into non-localizable past, bridging up the gap between the hopeless present and a yearning for a “lost way of life” (Balme 1997: 160). What significantly lends hybridity in *No Sugar* is the successive appropriation of

⁸ The secular ‘corroboree’ is a form of entertainment in which both past and present concerns are represented. See Gillian Oxford. 1977 ‘The Purple Everlasting: An Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Australia’ in *Theatre Quarterly* 8(26): 88-97.

⁹ Cultural text may be defined as the carrier of textual meaning incorporating ceremonies, works of art and genres such as novel, law, prayer etc. See Irene Portis Winner and Thomas Winner 1976 ‘The Semiotics of Cultural Texts’ in *Semiotica* 18(2): 101-56.

subjectivities on the part of Billy Kimberley from being a ‘politjman’ or “black crow” to that of defining a new identity within the constraints of colonization by transcending absolute dispossession through genocide and ethnocide. (Dibble and Macintyre 1992: 95) If pan-Aboriginality is considered to be a pluralistic discourse with consequent spaces for accommodating and celebrating variously indigenous discourse, then Billy Kimberley’s complex performativity can be said to have gone on to de-essentialise indigeneity by associating himself “with those who are different but similarly Othered” (Dibble and Macintyre 1992: 95).

Kevin Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers*

Kevin Gilbert’s *The Cherry Pickers* (1968), being the first written Aboriginal play explores the trajectory of dispossession, helplessness, subservience and basic human degradation. The play was written in 1968 and turned out to be the first Aboriginal dramatic production of modern theatre, promoting a three act dramatisation acted out publicly by a Black cast. *The Cherry Pickers* was first workshopped by the Mews Theatre Workshop in Sydney in 1971 during the Captain Cook Bicentenary celebrations and shortly after, was performed by the Nindenthana Theatre in Fitzroy, Victoria, again with an Aboriginal cast. The history of the first production of the play is imbued with a sense of subtle irony no less relieved by the acknowledgement of the fact that “took nearly eighteen years for *The Cherry Pickers* to be published in the Australian bicentennial year of 1988” (Shoemaker 2004: 236).¹⁰ The play projects a documentation of the spectrum of hope, aspiration, bereavement, deprivation and death of the Aboriginal ways of living, not unrelieved by occasional wit and humour. The itinerant cherry pickers who work under their European boss look forward to this season of cherry picking as the most sought after time of the year. The cherry season metaphorically stands for happiness and enjoyment pertaining to productivity in both the vegetative and human worlds. With the abatement of the cold August wind and the slow emergence of the springtime people got out from the cold and often dilapidated, leaky shanties (which served the purpose of their home) to gather together their few scanty possessions to get themselves ready for travelling to the churchyards, often many hundreds of miles away. The play opens in Bubba’s campfire where Emma, Subina and others are gossiping among themselves only to occasionally fall back on the theme of passing away of the old days and happiness somewhat left aglow with the prospective appearance of Johnollo, a real hero to the children and a standing symbol for health, energy, celebration and fertility. The representation of senile, sagging, enervated lack lustre womanhood hark the Aboriginal audience back to an age of fullness of meaning and perception robbed by the unfeeling treatment meted out to them by the white settlers. What *The Cherry Pickers* goes on to achieve can be possibly summed up in the following line. It is a play that simultaneously celebrates the traditional ways of

¹⁰ *The Cherry Pickers* was published by an independent Canberra press, Burrumbinga Books, in May, 1988. This was planned to coincide with the Aboriginal protests during the opening of the new Australian Parliament House by Queen Elizabeth II.

Aboriginal living and foregrounds the difficulties of maintaining a traditional lifestyle in the contemporary society. Thus in act three scene two Zeena cries out:

Oh, I'm not complaining. I am merely trying to tell you that we can't live, nor find a new life, by embracing a stone-age identity in this nuclear age. We should be rightfully proud of our old culture for it was the expression, the cry, the search for beauty by man. *This truth* we should hold and advance by, not revert to that cultural age. We must advance, must mature and must never, never revert back, for life is a constant process of growth. (1988, 61)

Zeena's vehement protest against Tommo's thesis of the preservation of Aboriginal culture by reverting back to the traditional ways of living significantly draws our attention to a change in the attitude of young rational Aborigines who had already started envisaging this kind of illogical back-tracking might not be prospective enough, for a fruitful relationship between the Aboriginals and the white can only bring about an improvement of their strained relationship by mutually celebrating and respecting each other's individuality and identity without prioritising one at the cost of the other. Zeena again poignantly holds that: "Our culture, the age of our culture has passed for we have outgrown it! Man must go forward, must advance with the times, the age!" (61). *The Cherry Pickers* therefore problematises the theme of Aboriginality commenting on the ambivalences of realising the undiluted essence of one's own Aboriginal past in the contemporary society. As Tommo puts it: "It's not going back to the 'Stone Age', it's flowing our soul back to the Beginning, the Dreaming, being one with the Presence of the undying Spirit" (1988, 65). *The Cherry Pickers* lashes out at the inhuman deaths of children brought upon the Aboriginal families by the settler's negligence as is evident from Ettie's experience related passionately in act three scene one. The dead rosella that Phonso holds from the beginning of the play symbolises the death of the inner spirit that characterised the Aboriginal way of existence. Again the death of Johnollo in a car accident and that of King Eagle, the old cherry tree that stand for "money-and food" (1988, 60) thrust the Aborigines into bottomless despair which is not left unredeemed towards the very end of the play where Phonso "withdraws Aboriginal flag from parcel and flaps it aloft" (1988, 80) as a promise to Aboriginal existence and sustenance. *The Cherry Pickers* being the first written Aboriginal play plays the role of introducing these crucial themes of troubled Aboriginality, their dissatisfaction and sufferings at the hand of the settlers, the gross negligence of Aboriginal children leading to their deaths, the gloom that pervades the mind of the elders and their reliance on alcohol to psychologically live their loss down and the responsibilities that lie on the shoulders of young Aborigines, represented through Phonso to take their charge of the drooping Aboriginal spirit by laying down an understanding of Aboriginality based on compassion, acknowledgement of the spiritual past and installation of a solid core of optimism by negotiating a fruitful dialogue with the settler as can be traced through the message Johnollo sends to Phonso "... Let your rosella fly free like me" (1988, 80). Zeena's "deviant compliance" (Dibble and Macintyre 1992: 95) enables the new generation of Aboriginals to construct their own subjectivity not based on the essentialised appropriation of

indigeneity but in line with the divergent needs and proliferations of social, cultural historical and intellectual interests.

Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*

Merritt's *The Cake Man* written in between 1973-74, while he was held in Bathurst jail metaphorically contextualises incarceration with the notion of Aboriginality albeit in a negative sense. The play was first performed by the Black Theatre in Redfern, Sydney, in 1975. In 1977 it had a season in the Bondi Pavilion Theatre, Sydney and was eventually broadcasted on ABC Television the same year. The central character of the play, ironically named Sweet William is robbed of his masculine vigour and is subjected to intermittent onslaught of silent parsimony both from within and outside the family. The family consisting of Ruby, Sweet William and their eleven year old son Pumpkinhead struggle under severe negligence and poverty in the mission. Ruby, the matriarch of the family takes recourse to her Bible to ward off the conglomerated evil as evident through his husband, Sweet William's drunkenness, lack of spirit, ceaseless poverty and demoralisation. Pumpkinhead often pinches coal for his mum and hopes to find the Cake Man one day. So Ruby's belief in her own fantastical notion of Christianity might have tilted the power equation of the family on her side notwithstanding the fact that she is instrumental in keeping the family afloat in times of poverty and desperation. Although Newfong holds that: "Sweet Williams at least believes in his own potential", and Ruby by dint of her "Christian beliefs, undermines his beliefs in himself because she doesn't dare believe in herself" (Shoemaker 2004: 242).

Conclusion

Down the line somewhere, this business of essentialising indigenous discourse with poverty, drunkenness, incarceration, marginalisation and displacement ought to open up new spaces of orientations leaving aside the formulated trajectories of stereotyping alterity. Instead of looking at indigenous identities as "mutually impermeable and incommensurable" (Gilroy 1993, 65), or keeping the border patrol busy erasing or denying whatever does not or will not fit" (Ferguson 1993: 165) and paralysing a community with contradictions regarding the authenticity of the indigenous performances, one should aim at defamiliarising the tropes of indigeneity to recast it in variously renewed moulds retaining the rich variety and pluralities of such discourses. Australian Aboriginal theatre thus incorporating the syncretic mode hybridises performativity, resituates indigeneity by accommodating the 'stolen generation' and other successive generations of culturally diluted Aborigines in the variously indigenous performative texts of Kevin Gilbert, Robert Merritt, Jack Davis, Richard Walley, and other Aboriginal dramatists of considerable repute. By de-essentialising the powerful tropes of indigeneity (Pardies 2006: 357) Aboriginal theatre seems to resituate indigeneity as variously performed and enacted subverting the construction and circulation of stereotypes.

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