"The Real Australian Story": Studying *Kullark* as a Reassessment of Cultural Identities

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Abstract
Postcolonial practices, by their very nature, attempt to reassert the existence of the colonised through different modes and forms. Theatre has come to occupy a central position in this context. Theatre's ability to act out the thought – and thereby making indeterminate the gap between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' – calls forth a space of active engagement rather than passive voyeurism. In this context Jack Davis's theatre claims special mention. Proactive in the second half of the twentieth century, Jack Davis was instrumental in bringing attention to the sweeping generalisation and cultural appropriation that marked aboriginal existence in Australia. His play *Kullark*, first performed in 1979 at the Titan Theatre in Perth, on the occasion of Western Australia's sesquicentennial celebrations, aims at reassessing the post-contact historical construction of the nation. His theatrical production challenges the dominant 'white' framing of Australia's history as a tool of imperial endeavour. Davis uses theatre as a medium to indicate that the aboriginal culture is self-contained and despite white appropriation, cannot be penetrated through so-called civilised modes of understanding. His plays also show how aboriginals have coped with changing times, thus affirming the 'old ways' in face of foreign oppression. This essay, in its scope, looks into the different forms of cultural expression – language, music, dance, rituals – which Davis employs to make a case for the aboriginal people, and show how such forms work organically to come up with a unique expression of resistance before coercive myth-making. The study of the stagecraft, which forms an important aspect of the play, will also aid our understanding. Such an investigation will enable us to trace the erasure which lies at the heart of colonial enterprise in Australia, directing us towards a more 'real' national history.

Keywords: Australian theatre, Aboriginals, Jack Davis.

> It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.
>
> (Rushdie 1991: 17)

It is perhaps to the wounded coexistence of 'our history' and 'their story' that postcolonial literature owes its origin; what better expression than the theatrical to test the limits of such a weirdly interesting amalgamation? In its palpable presence, theatre has always exercised an added advantage over other artistic forms in embodying the contingency of a unified human existence, more so when we are looking at the world in phases like the post-colonial/neo-colonial. However, it must be borne in mind that the term 'postcolonial' is more of an umbrella-term and stands for innumerable units of thought; it elicits different responses in different contexts, thereby rendering the postcolonial experience across the globe unimaginably heterogeneous. Thus, it is important to understand first how postcolonialism has come to work in the case of the Aboriginal experience in Australia, and also how theatre contributes as well as draws its lifeblood from such equations.

Australia as a settler colony has seen the colonial enterprise unfold in unique ways compared to other places, such as India or Africa. There has been a simultaneous two-fold process of negotiation: the claiming of space by power and the cultural imposition on that acquired space (like the act of 'naming' a geographical space and thereby turning it into a 'place'). This very act of naming a place has deeper consequences in the Aboriginal context compared to other colonial endeavours. For the Aboriginals, a place is more than just a signifier; it is rather a space with its own ontological implications. To transform an Aboriginal place into a European one, therefore, is to erase an identity integral to the existence of the colonised. So, the postcolonial practice of reclaiming, or redirecting our attention to such a past is one of reconnecting with a way of life – a life that is complete in itself: as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have argued, "place is thus the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, and yet of the hybrid interpretation of the coloniser and colonised" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1995: 391).

Theatre, in its ability to acquire that liminality between the fictional and the real, is therefore the most effective in taking its audiences to such contested spaces. The possibility of being in an actively dialectical relationship with the audience, the ability to navigate across time rapidly and swiftly, the potentiality of accommodating myriad art forms within one: all these factors make theatre the most effective instrument of intervention between the coloniser and the colonised. This is exactly why Jack Davis's plays can occupy such a significant position in postcolonial studies. *Kullark* (Davis 1982), first performed in 1979 at the Titan Theatre in Perth for Western Australia's sesquicentennial celebrations, points to this strategic erasure of Aboriginal history, and notes how Aboriginal peoples have coped with such changes over the years. Wistfully emotional and politically provocative, it charts the progression of Aboriginal experience through time, starting from the European intervention in the country. The play highlights the contact of the indigene with the foreign powers and the aftermath it wrought. With an interweaving narrative that accelerates the plot, Davis's play articulates the oppression delivered by colonialism, the atrocities perpetrated on Aboriginal tribes, the strategies evoked to decolonise the Aboriginal concept of nationhood and the future of the Aboriginal polity within the Australian nation.

This essay, in its scope, will try to gauge how the play attempts to reinstate indigenous existence in the face of White erasure of Aboriginal culture and identity. In doing so, though Davis subscribes to a white man's form – and not an Aboriginal one – his theatre, in constantly accumulating Aboriginal modes of expression (such as songs, dance or the *corroboree*[1]), shows the cultural exchange that should have occurred in place of the one-sided cultural appropriation. Jack Davis, as a poet and dramatist, has been an influential presence on the Australian cultural scene from the 1970s when his first book of poems, *The First-born* (1970) was published. *Kullark* and *The Dreamers* (first performed in 1972) were published together in 1982, followed by *No Sugar* in 1986 and *Barungin* in 1989. His plays have been and are well received by white audiences and are now part of English literature syllabuses. While he employs an

[1] A *corroboree* is a nocturnal festivity with singing and dancing, in which Aboriginal peoples gather around the fire to celebrate important events.

Aboriginal outlook towards European forms of knowledge, his works also record the myriad ways in which Aboriginals have adapted to the urban lifestyle, as is clearly evident in *Kullark* itself.[2]

Jack Davis's artistic dexterity weaves a plot that concocts three temporal frames within a single narrative. The play starts with a conjugal bickering in the Yorlah household in the present and slowly shifts the temporal frame to the Contact Era, where Yagan and his mates, Mitjitjiroo and Moyarahn, encounter Captain Stirling and Fraser, an encounter that initiates the cultural transactions that later manifest themselves as means of oppression of the indigenous populations by the colonizers. The third strand of the narrative employs as its fulcrum the social exchange between the indigene and the foreigners, Will and Alice. While the plot oscillates between three planes of temporality, Davis's theatre unveils Aboriginal history, which has been relegated to oblivion by the coloniser's super-narrative. While the first act of the play culminates in the murder of Yagan, the second act plunges us into a recapitulation of the sociological problems of half-castes, the lives in settlement camps and the discriminatory attitudes towards the Aboriginal sustained by the irresponsible acts of atrocities and injustice by the colonisers. When Jamie Yorlah is incarcerated Davis traces a history of dissent that is suffused in his genealogy. Jamie's grandfather, Thomas, would escape the settlement camp regularly and eventually succeeded in securing a life for his family outside the settlement estates. Jamie's father, Alec, had served in the Army, but is still discriminated against on racial grounds. Jamie carries the same strain of dissent when he retaliates with a fight against racial discrimination. *Kullark* expresses a subtle strategy of resurrection of aboriginality: a form that cannot continue in its archetypal state, but cannot be made redundant either. It is an articulation of hope for a future of Aboriginal assimilation into Australian society.

In keeping track of both sides of the European/Aboriginal exchange, the play tries to get to the very roots on which the imperial project was founded. It is however true that the play does not record an overturning of white authority, but the very fact that the legal

[2] For a more detailed introduction to Jack Davis's work, see Hodge 1994.

system shows lenience to Jamie at the end for his "training to be a schoolteacher" (II.vi: 65)[3] shows that Aboriginals have equated the strategies of survival, if not equal power. In this constant shifting and re-shifting through the temporal frame, Davis's play carves a niche for the Aboriginal experience in white-dominated Australia, and hence, might be considered to succeed in re-telling history in terms of the *other*, as this essay will address later.

Emerging as the penal convict colony of the British Empire, the history of Australia is neither limited nor confined to the arrival of British presence on Australian soil. It had a rich and vivid history preceding the arrival of Captain Cook, but the Australian story has developed with swift agility in forged metaphors and eulogised ideologies of signification to highlight the White narrative at the cost of an already existing nation of Aboriginal diversity. It might not be presumptuous to state that the Australian space has functioned as the redemptive ground for the enlightened aspirations of the British Empire, serving as a filter for the rectifications of its refractory ambitions. The Australian metaphor has been a pruned one; its ideological signifiers debilitated to replicate the British ambition of a perfect world order. Such a drive is cataclysmically paradoxical for it has served as an impulse to proliferate indigenous extirpation. Davis's theatre taps into this contrived history to rip open the sealed Aboriginal counter-narrative and show how Australian history has served to prioritise the claims of the white settlers. As Paul Carter remarks:

> the primary object is not to understand or to interpret: it is to legitimate. This is why this history is associated with imperialism – for who are more liable to charges of unlawful usurpation and constitutional illegitimacy than the founders of colonies? (Carter 1995: 376)

Kullark challenges the Eurocentric version of history formulated to project the justifiable subjugation of the black population, which was to be effective in forming the hermeneutic hiatus of Aboriginal culture. In doing so, it situates itself at the interstices of history and culture, and records how these have been fraudulently manipulated in the wake of colonialism. Furthermore, the play underlines how the initial exchange and understanding on both sides were made

[3] All quotations from the text are from Davis 1982.

on unequal terms and based on wrong assumptions. The difference between pre-settler, or rather, pre-colonial and post-colonial times are made by constant references to earlier forms of cultural expression. I.ii shows Yagan performing a dance while chanting ceremonially, for example. The very ritualistic presentation and recurrent use of Aboriginal language in Yagan's performance renders the colonial exchange of the next scene all the more poignant. In I.iii, Captain Stirling misjudges the Aboriginals' need and wants to give away European clothes instead of the butterfly-net (which would have proved more suitable to Aboriginal life).

> **Stirling**: Have we got anything we can give them? [...]
> **Fraser**: I beg your pardon, sir?
> **Stirling**: Take your coat and trousers off, Mr Fraser. (I.iii: 14)[4]

Naturally, Yagan and Mitjitjiroo try in vain to make use of these clothes. At this point, the stage direction notes that the Aboriginals' happiness with the new garments is borne out of ignorance, and not based on an evaluative transaction. Such an exchange directs us to the erratic epistemological process that accompanied the colonial regime in Australia, and anticipates the later miscegenation – colonial modernity – about to emerge in the post-contact era, the profound exploration of which appears in Larissa Behrendt's novel, *Home* (Behrendt 2004)[5].

What seems special in Davis's scheme of things is the treatment of history itself. He harnesses the potency of history to foster a cultural fencing, a segregation that will immunise Aboriginal culture from the grotesque generalisations of the colonial imposition, resisting utterances such as, "There was once, and there was only once. Once was all there was..." (Smith 2012: 73)[6]. Moreover, Davis wants

[4] Captain James Stirling is the founder and first Lieutenant-Governor of the Swan River Colony, 1831-38; Charles Fraser is a botanist to the colony.

[5] The novel referred to here is for enthusiastic readers who would like to investigate Aboriginal history in fictional form and who consider this essay a point of departure rather than an end in itself.

[6] The quoted sentences have been re-contextualised within the postcolonial, which is somewhat different from the original context in which Ali Smith used them. Smith's words show how oppressive appropriation works in the linguistic medium to produce a singular historical narrative.

to acclimatise and reconcile the schisms between "the inability of Black Australians to return to the past, despite the retention of tradition and superstition; and the incapacity of even 'good whites' to fully comprehend and appreciate the Aboriginal ethos" (Shoemaker 2004: 239). History, as Davis uses it, means to look at a component with an agency to set things straight, which is a rather recent development.

In the postmodern sense of the term, history derives its validation from the nebulosity of fact and fiction. Jack Davis capitalises on this critical permeability; it is the interlocking narrative of fact and fiction that grants a special place for Davis's theatre. It is fiction that harps on the praxis of postcolonialism and it is fact that foments the abstract sensibility of history; both juxtapose to materialise the decolonisation of history. Davis aims at the uninhibited expression of history, supplemented with freedom of choice, which would help in the articulation of individual free will. It is thus a historical narrative that refuses closure; which questions rather than concludes, and opens up to investigation.

Davis's political stance assumes further significance when we consider the context in which the play was first performed. As mentioned earlier, *Kullark* was first performed on the occasion of Western Australia's sesquicentennial celebrations. The general consensus among the Aboriginal intelligentsia has always been one of disappointment regarding any such celebration of Australian national history, since the national in Australia has mostly tended to leave out Aboriginal experience. Kevin Gilbert, in his poem "Celebrators '88'" writes,

> The legislators move their pen in poise
> like thieves a'crouch above the pilfered purse
> how many thousand million shall they give
> to celebrate the Bicentenary
> and cloak the murders in hilarity
> and sing above the rumble of the hearse.
> (Gilbert 1988: 198)

Such resentment is symptomatic of the greater Aboriginal community's reluctance to take pride in Australia's national history, since it is a history wrought at the expense of their own existence. Similarly,

Davis's play, performed before a predominantly white audience, dares to question such sweeping generalisations. It is through a form inherited from European drama (realistic theatre) that Davis puts forward his ideas, but he stretches the possibilities of the European format by introducing Aboriginal music, painting and dance forms. Even in terms of language, he refuses to help the audience with any supplement, thereby rendering his political stance conspicuous. Just as the Aborigines have been forced to adapt to a foreign way of life – of which the language is probably the most significant component – Davis wants the white audience to adapt to the Aboriginal life on stage. What is more, Davis uses a neo-traditional painting of Warrgul the Rainbow Serpent[7] in the shape of a map of the Swan River, in the attempt to keep both the essence and the concrete manifestation of Aboriginal life in all its purity. As the characters move into the stage, they flip a panel of the large painting that is substituted by portions of a colonial map of Australia, thereby graphically recording the overwriting and displacement that accompanied the colonial enterprise. Furthermore, whenever the narrative switches from a pre-contact Aboriginal content to a (post)colonial one, there is an abrupt change in music patterns; folk tunes, Didgeridoo music, and drum rolls all mingle together to produce an interesting yet disturbing sonority.

For example, I.v begins with a folk ballad with a tin whistle fade-in, evoking a nostalgic melancholia of the old days when the Swan River Colony was in its early operating stages. The ability of theatre to merge the written and the experiential helps the playwright to extend his ideas to the level of praxis. In its retaining of Aboriginal features, *Kullark* makes the decolonising process a very practical one. The blending of the supposed white and black forms of expression within one play also showcases how the white ways of life have become an unavoidable part of the Aboriginal lifestyle, and Davis's theatre, in acknowledging this, makes two things clear: the Aboriginal style of life cannot be retraced in its unadulterated form, and, no matter how much the whites may hate them, the Aboriginals have adapted to the new life, although they have had to compromise. Speaking of Aboriginal literature, J.J. Healy rightly comments: "it was, even in its first moments, a literature of wound, vulnerable in its directness, open

[7] The Rainbow Serpent is an Aboriginal mythological god and a recurring motif in Aboriginal art.

in its uncertainty, and at the same time, reluctant to apply closure to its relations with the surrounding white society" (Healy 1988: 80). This refusal to end the relations with the surrounding white society makes it clear that pre-colonial life cannot be reworked in its pristine form by any postcolonial formulation, thereby making Davis's theatrical project unique and one marked by *multiplicity*.

Adopting a three-pronged narrative, Davis's play moves back and forth in time, showing how the Yorlahs have changed, struggled and adapted with time; cutting through this narrative is the story of Yagan and his relationship with Will and Alice, the new settlers. The colonial presence underscores the whole play, only in different modes and representations of power. Davis condenses these three narratives to show the recuperative evolution that the Aboriginals have undertaken in these two hundred years. The episode of Yagan meeting Captain Stirling portrays the first among many encounters between the Aboriginals and the Empire. Although no acts of deceit are explicit in the first encounter, Stirling, by the end of the scene, deems the natives to be violent and capricious:

> **Stirling**: The natives are fascinated by the colour of our skin, believing it to be painted white, but care must be taken in all dealings with them, for they are vengeful and capricious and will not hesitate to resort to offensive weapons. (I.iii: 15)

The natives are thus already engaged in the binaries of white/black and civilised/uncivilised. With these binaries coming into play, a new history emerges, and a new nation blooms into being, as Captain Stirling announces the different dictates at will. Davis's stage shows how Stirling's utterances into the void have overwritten centuries of Aboriginal shared histories, culture and associations with the land. In the name of protection, the Aboriginals have been strategically erased and uprooted from the land. This is nowhere more prominent than in I.vii, where Yagan is prevented from exchanging food with Alice and Will[8]. Private Jenkins cautions Will: "Are you aware, sir, that the Government has forbidden settlers to

[8] Will O'Flaherty is a white settler and Alice is his wife; Alec Yorlah is an Aboriginal labourer; Yagan is a member of the Swan River (Tjuaht) people and Mitjitjiroo is Yagan's father.

give flour to the natives? If they want handouts they've to go down to the official rationing station" (I.iii: 26).

Davis cleverly signifies here the difference between political stratagem and human relationships. Will and Alice consider the Aboriginals to be good humans, and Will even goes on to write to the Government in favour of Yagan. On the same cordial note, Yagan and his clan also maintain a friendly relationship with the foreign household, but this is against the colonial ethos. It is perfectly clear that Aboriginals and the Europeans could have coexisted peacefully, had there not been equations of power disturbing the exchange. With the British seeking to monopolise the distribution of resources and allocating only measured rations to the Aborigines, conflict became inevitable as both sides fought for the resources of the land. Above all these comes Captain Stirling's announcement:

> I do hereby give notice that any person or persons acting in a fraudulent, cruel or felonious manner towards the Aboriginal race, will be prosecuted and tried for the offence as if the same had been committed against any other of His Majesty's subjects. (I.v: 19)

Just before Stirling is about to make this proclamation, a drum roll announces his presence, and as he finishes, folk music fades in, arresting with seriousness the awkward abruptness of the whole act. Such an utterance renders the fictional colonisation complete, while also making clear the pseudo-protective stance that the coloniser shows towards the colonised. On one hand, the land has been claimed, while on the other, violence has been initiated. Davis makes it very clear that colonisation and decolonisation are products of the same moment in history, and violence is inevitable in the first phase, as is evident in Yagan's response to the killings of people of his clan. In recording this initial violence, Davis is in tune with Sartre's ideas in his Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> in the first phase of the revolt killing is a necessity: killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed: leaving one man dead and the other man free; for the first time the survivor feels a *national* soil under his feet. (Sartre 2004: lv)

Yagan's act of murder is based more on a system of balanced justice than on a partial British penal code that provided perpetual immunity

to the white population. He recurrently refers to the fact that the white man has also killed his comrades, and, in order to set the record straight, he has killed the white man, as is evident in the exchange here:

> **Yagan**: If *Nyoongah* steal from *Nyoongah*, *Nyoongah* peer [*indicating his leg*] *nitjal*. Not kill. *Wetjala boorl boorl* [*indicating his chest*] here, and [*his head*] here. *Wetjala warramut.*
> **Yagan**: [*proudly*] *Yuart! Wetjala boorl boorl Nyoongah*, Yagan peer *Wetjala*.
> **Will**: [*shocked*] What white fella?
> **Yagan**: *Kia kia*, Yagan, Mitjitjiroo, Mundi, peer *Wetjala*, plenty *Wetjala*.
> **Alice**: Oh, Will, the Entwhistle murder, it was Yagan.
> **Will**: Jesus, Mary and Joseph.
> **Yagan**: [laughing] All pinish, *Wetjala boorl boorl Nyongah*. Yagan peer *Wetjala*. All pinish, plenty shake hand.
> [*He offers his hand*. **Will** *rejects it*.]
> **Yagan**: *Wetjala kartwarrah*. ['White man is mad.'] (I.vii: 28)

This is more than a war between two tribes where feuds are mitigated by inflicting equal casualties on both sides. This native sensibility of justice being alien to the imperial motives, a death sentence is pronounced against Yagan and he is killed by guile. Yagan, an epitome of native resistance, is depreciated to the point of being treated as part of a collection of phrenological interest to the Empire. He is an idiom for Aboriginal resistance against colonial expansion, a counter-narrative against Eurocentric history. The circumlocution of the colonialist history of the native being docile and ready to adopt the shackles of colonialism is charged with a deathblow. The death of Yagan marks the symbolic end of Aboriginal resistance, and facilitates the formation of the Nation of Australia.

However, the term *national* is contested in the Australian case, because the white conception of the *national* is not the same as that of the Aboriginal. The very idea of space, as has already been mentioned earlier, is different in the Aboriginal context. The spoken as opposed to the written has always been the prevalent mode of conducting and participating in the Aboriginal shared space. Thus, the postcolonial reclaiming of such identities involves a constant revision of dominant ideologies. With time, in the Australian case, Aboriginals have created and recreated space for

themselves, but what must also be kept in mind here is the cultural appropriation made in the name of multiculturalism. Australia's tag of 'multiculturalism', which has gained currency in recent years, is actually based on sweeping generalisations of a vastly heterogeneous Aboriginal experience. Graham Huggan rightly comments,

> included within this revisionary process is the internal critique of the post-colonial culture (or cultures), a critique which takes into account the transitional nature of post-colonial societies and which challenges the tenets both of an essentialist nationalism which sublimates or overlooks regional differences and of an unconsidered multiculturalism (mis)appropriated for the purposes of enforced assimilation rather than for the promulgation of cultural diversity. (Huggan 1995: 410)

To return to the play's documentation of history, Jack Davis does not limit his work to the portrait of the Aboriginal resistance in the contact era. He extends further to document the colonial oppression that followed, and which reaches its climax in the formation of a nation. The entire volume of Aboriginal culture, preserved through oral traditions, gave special leverage to the British Empire which aimed at total isolation of any indigenous history. "Is there any reason to accept, so unquestioningly, that (for instance) writing is 'power', nonwriting – read 'oral culture' – is 'non-power'?" (Webb 1996: 189). Davis asks the same while trying to produce a written version of Aboriginal history. The absence of written records offered unnecessary importance to Eurocentric history. After the episode of Yagan's death, Davis charts the process of colonisation. We need to question whether the resuscitation of Aboriginal history can, at all, support the cause of postcolonialism; Kateryna Arthur asks, "Is there a way of rewriting the future as well as the past by twisting the thread of the colonial super-narrative?" (Arthur 1990: 23-24)

Kullark satisfies the question in a different way. In the play we see Jamie reading books on black consciousness. The text expresses the subtle strategy of discovering the self/subjectivity in history. The narrative of the play highlights the strategy of recovering Aboriginal history, which has been made superfluous in the cultural memory. When Jamie acquires knowledge on black consciousness, he is able to resonate Aboriginal identity with Aboriginal history. This enables him to reinstate the past as well as formulate the future. He achieves his subjectivity as an Aboriginal, which gives him emotional security,

renewed cultural ties to his land and a bolstered sense of meaning to his life. What is propounded as the 'real' history, from the colonialist gaze, is nothing more than an integration of Aboriginal history, where the indigenous angle has been made silent. The involvement of the self in the narrative of history will lead to the subjective crystallization of an indigenous voice, an alternative narrative that is not so benign on the coloniser's perspective of history. The "colonial Super-narrative" (Webb 1996: 189) can only be mastered if the micro-narratives of history are appropriated in the narrative of authenticity of Aboriginal peoples. Jamie Yorlah's lineage helps him accrue this matrix of appropriation. Jamie's genealogy shows the different stages of the decolonisation of history. His ability to foster his Aboriginal identity challenges the semiotics of the non-aborigines.

The strategy that undercuts the text is the transition from *terra nullius* to Australia, which reveals the changing notions of nationalism among the Aboriginal population. The concept of nationhood has demanded myriad responses from different generations. From fostering the sense of tribal identity to survival in an oppressive regime, the characters in the play ventilate multifarious modes to keep up with the prevalent circumstances. In the settlement camp, Thomas plays the physical game of absconding frequently. He tries to irk the authorities into giving him the independence he craves. As times passes by, and the idea of nationhood grows stronger roots, Alec participates in the Second World War, fighting for the British Empire. This participation highlights the intermittent endeavour to be part of the nation. Although Alec's preoccupation is to achieve the stature of the 'white' population, he never comes close to it. He makes himself visible in the spectrum of the nation, but fails to differentiate between nation and identity.

This fusion is first observed in Jamie's character. He negotiates his existence with the idea of nation and modernity without suppressing his native identity. The Colonel's advice to Alec, "You'll be facing more than physical combat. There is such a thing as combat of the mind, psychological warfare if you like" (II.v: 58-59), is brought to fruition in Jamie's character. Gilbert and Tompkins argue that "most often, the post-colonial subject is figured as a split site defined by the remnants of pre-contact history, the forces of more official colonial record and the contingencies of the current situation"

(Gilbert & Tompkins 1996: 109). The only post-colonial character, Jamie, educated in the Imperial scheme of things, subverts it. In the court of Justice, the mere mention of his becoming a schoolteacher saves him from prosecution. This is the "psychological warfare", the critical term we have come to understand as postcolonialism, where the instincts of the coloniser are played upon to deride colonisation itself. As Ralph J. Crane writes,

> in some respects the historical situation in the settler colonies has meant that the centre, rather than becoming the ex-colonial power, has been absorbed into the periphery, pushing the indigenous peoples, the Aborigines and the Maori, into what is effectively an outer periphery. (Crane 1996: 26)

The scenario remains unaltered in this text as all characters try to articulate their existence in the new conception of nationhood, but all fail to cross the threshold of periphery, with the exception of Jamie. He is the precursor of the alleviated dream of independence for the native population of Australia. He is the voice of that desire which seeks to reclaim the histories of the indigenous people, and educate the non-indigenous about the culture of the native.

In *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, Greg Dening writes, "history is not the past: it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes" (1993: 170). Davis concatenates a polyphonic paradigm of history, which will energise the dream of Aboriginal liberation. Davis's ultimate imperative is to direct us towards a more 'real' national history, as we come to experience in the choric utterance:

> But I think of a people crucified,
> The real Australian story. (I.ix: 39)

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