GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE nine plays edited in this volume (one of them in two versions) were written by Australian-resident authors in the period prior to Federation in 1901. Four are previously unpublished; one appeared in a colonial magazine and the rest were printed as booklets sold in conjunction with their first performances. Seven were commercially staged; one was presented by amateurs under professional direction at a public festival and one was banned before it could be performed. Together they represent something of the diversity in authorship, subject matter and styles of colonial Australian play writing and, as works for the public stage, show some of the uses which Europeans in the colonies made of drama as recreation and as articulation of official, popular or minority values. This general introduction attempts to outline the theatre industry that produced them, to give some account of what people saw and heard when they attended a performance and to consider what kinds of stories were told. More detailed information about each play can be found in the specific introduction that precedes it.

Theatre in Australia 1832–1930

For just under one hundred years – from 1832 until 1930 – live theatre flourished as a commercial industry in Australia. Although there was an attempt at establishing such a theatre as early as 1793,[1] the licence granted by the new Governor Richard Bourke to the Sydney merchant, hotelier and amateur singer of comic songs,

[1] Robert Jordan, *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788–1840* (Sydney: Currency House, 2002), pp. 32–4.

Barnett Levey, in April 1832, the consequent first performance
of the nautical melodrama *Black Eyed Susan* in the saloon of his
Royal Hotel on 26 December and the opening of his purpose–
built Theatre Royal on 5 October 1833, are generally regarded as
marking the beginning of continuous professional theatre in
Australia.[2] Two months later, theatre began independently in
Hobart, and the next year Henry Melville's *The Bushrangers; or,
Norwood Vale* was published and performed there, marking the
first significant attempt by this industry to represent Australian
scenery, societies and events. From that time onwards, would-be
entertainment entrepreneurs began to build or lease theatres and
employ stage artists, designers, technicians and musicians to
present narrative plays, some of them 'Australian' in one sense or
another, throughout the colonies and in New Zealand. Theatre
circuits, based first on sea and horse-drawn-coach routes and later
on the spreading railway networks, emerged, divided and tripled,
so that by the 1900s there were dozens of separate professional
companies, large numbers of travelling artists and tonnes of
scenery, costumes and equipment, working major cities, large
regional towns and 'the smalls'.

At the end of that period a series of unforeseen events wiped out
the bulk of this activity. The financial depression which began in
October 1929 and lasted throughout much of the next decade, and
the decisions by some state governments to tax live entertainment
on top of an existing federal tax, contributed to the collapse. But
the overwhelming cause, at least as artists saw it, was the widespread
introduction in 1929–30 of sound-on-film, particularly in Holly-
wood feature-length movies.[3] Whereas earlier challenges from other
entertainment forms had affected only parts of the live theatre
industry (and 'silent' film had been a major plus for musicians),
'the talkies' eliminated equally the need for local actors, variety
artists, musicians and some categories of technicians, closed those
theatres unsuitable for conversion to film screening and bankrupted
entrepreneurs unable to secure cinema exhibition rights. Some stage

[2] Eric Irvin, *Theatre Comes to Australia* (St Lucia: University of Queensland
Press, 1971), *passim.*
[3] *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, ed. Harold Love (Kensington:
New South Wales University Press, 1984), pp. 183–6.

companies and some activity struggled on with revivals and reduced resources, and newer industries such as radio and, later, television took over some of the functions of the stage and were colonised by stage artists. Fifty years later it was clear that a kind of professional and even commercial live theatre had survived, but it was a radically different industry in organisation, repertoire and cultural location. It was no longer a major industry, and assertions of the significance of its interactions with society were muted by other, more powerful and culturally central mass-entertainment forms.

For nearly all the 1832–1930 period, however, live theatre was *the* major public entertainment industry in Australia. By the 1860s the largest cities could expect perhaps a hundred different professional productions of many kinds every year: grand opera, comic opera, Shakespeare, society comedy, 'problem' play, melo-drama, pantomime, vaudeville and variety. Within such broad genres a company might specialise in one of numerous more specific forms. The mere name of a London theatre – the Adelphi (melo-drama), Gaiety (musical comedy), Drury Lane (spectacle sensation drama), Savoy (comic opera) or Surrey (in lower-class south London) – was sufficient to indicate a known type of product, while comparisons with certain London performers such as John Liston (known for broad, lower-class character comedy) or Charles Mathews jr (light, elegant, gentleman comedy) were also shorthand guides to acting and production styles. In Australia the repro-duction of many of these plays, selected and sometimes reworked according to perceived colonial tastes, followed within months or at most a few years. If successful, such plays were toured and became part of the standard repertoire, were copied in abbreviated form for smaller venues and were plagiarised, parodied and endlessly quoted in anecdote and cartoon. The importance of all this activity is unquestionable; any history of Australia in the period to 1930 written as if such cultural institutions did not exist or were marginal to more serious subjects is missing major sites of public activity, discourse and display. In a society largely devoid of the pre-industrial European festivals, British Australians turned for their pleasure-making to horse-racing carnivals, sporting contests and the theatre. Because these occasions were where people from different classes and walks of life were seen in close proximity at

the same time, they in turn became the dominant metaphors of a society trying to imagine itself as a diverse yet unified community that shared common interests and concerns.

Approaching Australian theatre history

In spite of the research and publications between 1948 and 1978 of Paul and Frances McGuire, Betty Arnott, Leslie Rees and John West,[4] the existence of this industry was forgotten by all but its own retired and aging participants. Its sheer size was also under-estimated. In the early 1980s Eric Irvin and Margaret Williams were still assuming that single-author monographs covering the entire colonial and early Federation periods were possible and would be sufficient.[5] None of these authors' works could be said to be authoritative, although Irvin's listing of Australian plays written in the period before 1914 as an appendix to his *Australian Melodrama* (1981) remains useful, and Williams particularly deserves to be recognised for her efforts in locating many of these playscripts and arranging for their deposition in state and national library collections. One of the limitations on the present volume is that so many colonial Australian playscripts have not survived; but thanks to her efforts the choice of plays available for inclusion is much wider than it was previously thought to be. Williams was also the first theatre historian to read a large number of these scripts, to attempt to analyse them in detail and to realise and argue that 1929–30 is the major boundary for this activity, not the World War of 1914–18. While that War began a major transformation of Australian society, it had delayed consequences for the stage.

The study of nineteenth-century Australian theatre, including the plays chosen and the commentaries on them in this present anthology, is now more firmly grounded. The shift began in 1984

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[4] Paul McGuire with Betty Arnott and Frances Margaret McGuire, *The Australian Theatre: An Abstract and Brief Chronicle in Twelve Parts with Characteristic Illustrations* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1948); Leslie Rees, *Towards an Australian Drama* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1953); John West, *Theatre in Australia* (Stanmore, NSW: Cassell Australia, 1978).

[5] Eric Irvin, *Australian Melodrama: Eighty Years of Popular Theatre* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1981); Margaret Williams, *Australia on the Popular Stage 1829–1929* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983).

with Harold Love's edition of *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, containing a rich selection of primary materials from reviews, letters, diaries and visual sources. Next, two major research projects greatly expanded the factual basis of historical inquiry. The first, under the supervision of Veronica Kelly, is a comprehensive listing of all 'Australian' plays (defined very loosely) presented in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne or (less thoroughly) elsewhere in Australia, between 1850 and 1890.[6] The second project of documentation, begun by Philip Parsons in 1986 and eventually published a decade later, is the encyclopaedic *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, with its hundreds of scholarly entries for the colonial period, including biographical notes on artists, histories of particular companies and theatre in different cities and regions, descriptions of the stories and stage histories of major plays, architectural and technical information about particular theatre buildings, as well as subject entries on matters such as acting, audiences, repertoire, theatre design and touring, and major genres such as pantomime and melodrama. Consequently, only brief details are provided in the present volume.

In the period to 1995, therefore, Australian theatre history went through a necessary phase of intense empirical research into original sources. It put aside the ephemeral, the hagiographic and the improbable, as well as the overarching generalisation and the grand statement, and focused on getting the basic facts right. However, the study of the workings of theatre as an institution and as social practice at a particular time in history requires consideration of its original cultural context and its location within those processes of generation and communication that were encouraged or silenced by wider social beliefs and interests.

What follows, then, is an attempt to account for the phenomenon of theatre in Australia between 1832 and the end of the nineteenth century in three ways in which it might be said to relate most directly to wider issues in Australian cultural history: as an entertainment industry generating employment and communal and

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[6] *Annotated Calendar of Plays Premiered in Australia 1850–1869* and *Annotated Calendar of Plays Premiered in Australia 1870–1890*, ed. Veronica Kelly (Brisbane: University of Queensland Department of English, 1995 and 1997).

individual wealth for both men and women, as well as shaping the patterns of work and leisure in the colonies; as a system for representing contemporary and historical understandings of external reality, including Australian-resident people and Australian places and events; and as a storyteller, using that system of representation and allegedly 'Australian' narratives to create myths of origin and identity.

The theatre industry and society

Theatre in colonial Australia was a large, complex and diverse industry and, as such, it poses problems of analysis that may not be as evident in simpler or more coherent phenomena. There are separate histories of vaudeville, circus and pantomime, of particular artists, theatre buildings, companies and communities, and of the work of different groups of technicians. What may be a moment of great change in one part of an industry and therefore will be written about as a decisive watershed in such partial histories may be quite unimportant to another sector of the industry or to the audience experience of the event. Conversely, as we already have seen, another change such as the challenge of sound film may affect all parts of an industry and its audiences simultaneously and dramatically, though not necessarily in the same way (stage artists went bankrupt; audiences enthusiastically voted for Hollywood movies; theatre electricians became cinema projectionists).

Further complexities occur because of the constraints in the distribution practices of theatre. Performances were witnessed by audiences in different places at different times; this and the varied life experiences of those audiences themselves open up the possibility for discrete histories to be written for theatre in different geographical places at the same time. Until the West Australian gold rushes of the 1890s, theatre in Perth was very different (small scale, predominantly amateur) from that in Sydney or Melbourne, and there may have been significant differences too between city and bush and in the composition of audiences which went to different kinds of performances. Certainly, theatre artists themselves thought so. Different cultural locations also experienced different histories: the 1920s were remarkable for a series of brilliant operettas and musical comedies which dominated the capital-city

stages and made their artists and managers extremely wealthy, while companies playing the lower-class venues and in the bush found silent film a major competitor and were doing it tough.

Commercial theatre therefore was not a simple or uniform trade or phenomenon. It had diverging and semi-independent areas of work, each with its own individual power-brokers, powerful 'respectable' companies and copying and copyright-evading parasites, co-operating and competing craft practices and knowledge, professional traditions and innovations, social hierarchies and assumptions, internal industrial struggles, public and private crises, small and large victories and defeats.

However, it is dangerously easy to seize on such differences and to see only particular histories as being possible or to celebrate difference as local autonomy, national characteristic, or class or cultural resistance. Theatre was a mass public entertainment. In Australia this was even truer than in England where there were sharper class divisions and where religious prohibitions were stronger. Visitors from Europe regularly commented that, the night after the Melbourne Cup or the small-town picnic-races, the theatres were as crowded as the racecourse had been in the afternoon; everyone from the Governor and the Lord Mayor to the jockeys and the occupants of the cheap St Ledger paddock went to both entertainments. Anyone who imagined themselves worldly, multidimensional, sophisticated and wise pretended to have been at more places than they had been and seen more than they saw, claimed to know what the latest trends in public taste and interest were, knew who the great stars of the stage were, had some notion of the characters, the plots and the key moments in the seminal stories of the times, and could follow (or pretend to follow) the intertextual jokes which both public gossip and stage burlesque exploited to excess. Parody genres – a grouping that included classical burlesques, pantomimes, Gilbert and Sullivan *opéra bouffe* and Oscar Wilde's comedies – assumed the audience's familiarity with a rich potpourri of other texts. The pleasure of viewing such plays in part depended on identifying as many witty borrowings and generic inversions as possible. Recognition, publicly affirmed by laughing in the right places, declared one's cultural competence.

Theatre and Empire

Colonial Australia measured its theatre against the imperial centre and was measured by it. To know and to be able to gossip about what was happening in London was more important than to know what was going on at the local Theatre Royal, but commitment to colonial cultural improvement required knowing both. In the early phase of the industry, modesty such as that demonstrated by the *Sydney Monitor* in 1842 was appropriate:

> We are not silly enough to compare our little theatre with the great London houses, or the little London houses, or to measure the standard of our performers by an English standard. We do go ahead a little, we *have* gone ahead a pretty tarnation way already within the last half century, or its a pity; but we are still somewhat behind the advancement and refinement of our friends in the *other world*, we have not lived so long as our fathers; the *Victoria* and the *Olympic* are not *Covent Garden* and *Drury Lane*; Knowles is not Macready, Nesbitt is not Kean, Prout is not Stanfield, Sydney is not London. But while we do not compare, we can at least imitate.[7]

Later in the century, however, bold comparisons *were* made. If a visiting commentator wanted to flatter, then he or she declared Australian theatre to be as good as London theatre and its audiences as sophisticated. Antipodean productions could even – as in the number of extras George Rignold or Bland Holt used in their spectacle melodramas – claim to have exceeded the 'original'. But they were not original: they were reproductions, carefully copied from models and prompt scripts shipped from London and even using the same illustrated playbills.

Conversely, if writers wanted to believe 'London theatre' (whatever that was, given its diversity) to be the standard and to be associated with it, they described what happened in Australia as provincial. George Bernard Shaw thought Janet Achurch had coarsened her performance style after two years in the colonies, though he would have said the same if she had spent a period of time at the Britannia in the East End or the 'transpontine' Surrey

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[7] 15 March 1842, p. 3.

to the south of the Thames or out on a regional tour.[8] The notions of city, suburb, province and Empire were reified as fundamental differences of sophistication by critics and actors who proliferated funny stories about the horrors and absurdities of playing 'the colonies' or 'the smalls'. Wybert Reeve claimed that he once found himself in the English provinces playing Ross, Banquo and the First Murderer, 'which necessitated my murdering myself and reporting to Macbeth I had done so'.[9] To resist being marginalised and belittled in this way, Australian theatre developed an identical genre of 'up-country theatrical' or 'in-the-early-days' anecdotes about performing on gin cases in skittle alleys or on billiard tables with candles stuck on nails for footlights and a blanket for a curtain. The point always was to distance now from then, or here from there. The occasional success of Australian actors (particularly women actors) in England was acclaimed with national pride much as sporting successes were and are; they were international bench-marks for Antipodean cultural achievements.

Theatre as social practice

Such stories of high art and low entertainment, no-expense-spared spectacle and impoverished improvisation, glittering international success and small-town knockabout, are unreliable guides to actual performance events and conditions. But they imply what was possible and desired as a norm, what theatre could hope to be as well as what it could be reduced to. Similarly the sanitised auto-biographies of colonial actresses may tell us only which male managers were gentlemen and which audiences polite and generous, but they also tell us what myths about herself a woman as actor at this time might hope to construct and how she wanted to be remembered. Theatre history is not just the extensive plot descrip-tions published in newspapers, nor the opening-night reviews, nor the archivally verifiable. If we ignore the gossip, the jokes, the memoirs and tall stories and the bogus history in search of the factual and substantial, we may establish a truer picture of what actually went on but miss part of a larger understanding of what

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[8] *CTA* 16.
[9] Wybert Reeve, *From Life* (Adelaide: George Robertson, 1891), qtd *CTA* 485.

people in nineteenth-century Australia thought theatre could be made to mean.

Generalisation becomes possible therefore because, amongst all the diversity and volatility, the British-Australian public at large retained wider understandings of 'theatre' itself. Most colonial newspapers carried at least weekly columns of theatrical news, both factual and anecdotal – with items freely copied from one another, so that a good story could find its way around the country within a few weeks – and such columns offer a guide not only to the stage's diversity, but also to its popular esteem or its disgrace. From the 1860s the weekly newspapers, such as the *Australasian* and *Town and Country Journal*, were, as the latter's title suggests, distributed and read throughout the colonies. Twenty years later, the same was also true of the independent weeklies *Table Talk* (edited from Melbourne) and the *Bulletin* (based in Sydney). These were major purveyors of both detailed performance reviews and theatrical gossip. In addition the public was invited to read hundreds of actors' personal memoirs, a major genre of book publishing throughout the second half of the century. If we want to understand theatre as social practice then we have to consider such evidence, not as factually true, but as a guide to the meanings of the stage in society.

If we turn to the meanings expressed through stage stories, then how any play or stage genre interacted with society was multi-layered, even when a play's subject matter was controversial. For example, in 1889 the actress Janet Achurch, having in London just produced and starred in the first English-language production of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, toured Australia and New Zealand for two years, performing in that play to great controversy and acclaim, backing up her commitment to Ibsen's theme of women's emancipation by interviews and even by giving a matinée performance for the benefit of the Women's College of the University of Sydney.[10] What influence should we allow this tour in noting that in 1893 New Zealand became the first democratic legislature in the world to give women the vote, followed by South Australia in 1894 and by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901? Coincidence is perhaps too modest – after all Achurch met with

[10] *CTA* 15–16.

hostility only at the start of her tour and left having generated widespread admiration and goodwill – but direct cause is too great. The ideas and experiences which produced those legislative changes had been absorbed by their proponents across many years. A reference in one of the plays in this volume, the 1871 Sydney rewrite of the pantomime *The House that Jack Built*, hints at an earlier moment in this great debate:

> . . . but soft! alas!
> The *Matrimonial Causes Bill may* pass.
> The Upper House *may* let the measure through . . .
>
> $(285:5-7)^{11}$

This was one of four bills inspired by John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869).[12] The NSW *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* (36 Victoria No. 9), eventually enacted on 3 March 1873, states in its radical and hotly debated clause 15: 'A sentence of judicial separation may be obtained *either by the husband or the wife* on the grounds of adultery or cruelty or desertion without cause for two years and upwards' (my emphasis).[13] The architect of this act, the crusty William Forster, himself the author of unperformed plays on 'the woman question', died seven years before Achurch arrived in Melbourne at the start of her tour.[14] But legislators can only propose change; it is up to the wider parliament and their constituency to accept them. Colonial societies that in two years had moved from viewing *A Doll's House* as a 'controversial' play to being an 'acclaimed' one, may well have been electorates that also went from being unready to support women's suffrage to accepting it.

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[11] Page-and-line number citations refer to the present volume; line-numbering includes act and scene markings and stage directions.

[12] *SMH*, 4 December 1871, p. 4.

[13] For comment on earlier and similar legislation, see the Academy Edition of *The Journal of Annie Baxter Dawbin July 1856 – May 1868*, ed. Lucy Frost (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1998), p. 17 and n. 45.

[14] *ADB* IV. 198–9; see also Dorothy Green, 'William Forster and the Drama of Ideas', *ADS*, 1.1 (1982), 21–37.

Theatre as show business

Another danger in analysing theatre as an industry is in senti-
mentalising, romanticising and becoming nostalgic about a form
of entertainment ('There's no business like show business') that
overwhelmingly trades in sentiment and romance, and appeals to
homely values and to the good old days when life allegedly was
simpler.[15] What went on organisationally and economically was
far less benign. Most companies were run autocratically and
ruthlessly, with non-unionised labour, long hours for poor rates
of pay, extensive travelling and minimal backstage facilities with
no running water or toilets. Many theatre companies were extended
family institutions and were as warm or as oppressive (or both) as
close familial relationships can be. The adolescent star of the 1880s,
Essie Jenyns, gave up a remarkable and potentially world-wide stage
career as soon as possible after her twenty-first birthday allowed
her to marry without the consent of her tyrannical stepfather, the
actor-manager W. J. Holloway.[16] Other groups were closed closets
in which the sadistic and sexually deranged as well as the power-
mad could indulge themselves. In a court case in Madras in 1910,
evidence was heard that one of the Australian-based Pollard Opera
Companies was run by a man who had punched and kicked a girl
in the stomach, beaten another with a stick in the street and on a
separate occasion thrown her against a bathroom wall, and attacked
others with sticks and straps causing bruising and bleeding which
required medical attention. In addition he was having a sexual
relationship with a sixteen-year-old cast member using other girls
as young as twelve as 'chaperones'.[17] This is an extreme example
and rightly led to an outcry and changes in the regulations regarding
child labour, but life for many performers offstage was arduous,
powerless and precarious.

Equally, however, colonial theatre was not just tatty troupes of
itinerants of dubious character who skipped town without paying

[15] For an extended study of this phenomenon, see Susan Bennett, *Performing
Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (New York: Routledge,
1996).
[16] *CTA* 307.
[17] *A. H. Pollard v. F. Rouse* (1910), 33 The Indian Law Reports: Madras Series
288–99.

their bills, though all but the most distinguished of colonial actors of both sexes were viewed by many with a suspicion similar to that given to the proprietors of sideshow-alley booths a century and more later. But the commercial performing arts were capable of great popular and artistic achievements, and the governors of the various colonies regularly could be seen in the dress circle at special performances advertised on silk playbills. Some artists achieved great status and respectability: in 1858 George Coppin became one of the first actors in the western world to become a member of parliament,[18] while many of his fellow stage-entrepreneurs were accepted into business and sporting clubs and served on civic committees. The theatre was also one of the few professions in which women could become financially independent and, surprisingly, women actors in Australia were not assumed to be as morally loose as their English and continental sisters. 'Actress' did not automatically carry suggestions of being little better than a courtesan or prostitute. Indeed, by the century's end the Vaucluse or Toorak afternoon tea-party at which the leading actress was the guest of honour was probably more common than the club dinner for the leading male actor.

The theatre profession

Theatre quickly divided between professional artists, attempting to establish viable economic structures within which to operate, and amateur groups, performing for their own pleasure and sometimes with a reforming 'literary' zeal. However, in many areas of nineteenth-century stage life, particularly outside Melbourne and Sydney, there was more cross-over between amateur and professional than is customary today. Visiting commercial companies sometimes supplemented their forces by using local performers in minor roles or as non-speaking extras, while female actors were often in demand for otherwise amateur shows to make up for the absence of 'respectable' women prepared to tread the boards. Musicians in particular were often local personnel and, though hired for all kinds of entertainments, made their primary livings elsewhere:

[18] *CTA* 162.

> At the Empire Theatre, Brisbane, the violinist is an accountant and in private work. The clarionet player is a cabinet maker by trade, the cornet player is a tailor, and the trombone player is a motoring engineer. At a house in Bundaberg there are only three musicians, the cornetist works at a cycle shop, the violinist as a butcher, and the euphonium player is employed at the meatworks.[19]

Nevertheless the purpose-built theatre was labour-intensive in a way that is unimaginable today, visibly crowded with actors, musicians and front-of-house staff, while backstage a web of unseen ropes, machinery and scaffolding required dozens of mechanists, lighting operators and stagehands (see illustration 1 – follows p. 314).

Faced with small and scattered centres of population, the first groups of actors had adopted the touring patterns of performance which many of them knew from working in the English provinces. They followed a circuit determined by horse-racing carnivals or agricultural shows which brought people together into viable audience groupings. The first performance spaces were almost all associated with hotels, first as converted rooms within them and later as adjacent purpose-built structures. Consequently many entrepreneurs speculated in providing a variety of leisure pursuits: drinking, gambling, sporting contests, singing, music and variety entertainments as well as story-telling theatre. Growth was rapid; by the 1850s the theatre buildings were the equal of and similar to many major English playhouses (comparisons were made) and a bourgeoisie was emerging capable of sustaining commercial seasons of grand opera. By the century's end there was a complex web of leisure activities and of the many businesses whose trade depended entirely or in part on stage shows: wig-makers, make-up retailers, costume designers and dressmakers, bill-posters, caterers, hotels and cafes near theatres. The decline of the 'legitimate' five-act tragedy was lamented not just by *littérateurs* but also by publicans, since it had four intervals during which patrons could buy drinks.[20] Bus, cab, train, tram and ferry services were all organised around the starting and finishing times of matinée and evening perform-

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[19] *Brisbane Courier*, 20 March 1929, p. 22.   [20] *Bulletin*, 6 May 1926, p. 36.

ances, and theatrical entertainments in turn had to fit into those established routines and expectations. In 1907, for example, the J. C. Williamson organisation arranged special excursion trains from regional Victoria and offered discounted travel-and-show tickets to its Melbourne production of *Mother Goose*. Patrons could leave Ballarat on Friday afternoon, see the show that night and return on a special train leaving Spencer Street at 11.50 p.m., or stay on for a Saturday morning's shopping and the Newmarket Handicap.[21]

The relative comfort and safety of steamships and the opening of both the Suez Canal and the US transcontinental railway in 1869, followed by the Canadian Pacific railway to Vancouver in 1885–87, meant that by the century's end there were well-established circuits internationally. The Australian theatre industry became part of a global culture of touring entertainments; in 1892 the English magazine *Theatre* claimed that 'the circuits of Bristol, Norwich, and York of the last century are now replaced by those of the United States, South Africa, India, and Australia, and a modern actor thinks as little of a season in Melbourne or New York as his grand–father did of a week starring in Edinburgh'.[22] Actors were able to negotiate reduced charges on sea travel in return for favourable advertising. Daniel Bandmann deliberately interspersed his account of his travels in Asia and Australasia, *An Actor's Tour; or, Seventy Thousand Miles with Shakespeare*, with comments such as 'the Pacific Mail Steamship Company is one of the most obliging, courteous, and safest in the world, and has reduced journeying to the antipodes to a luxury'.[23]

However some artists argued that, rather than participate fully in a global entertainment industry which toured the great stars of the day, Australian commercial theatre should be an economically separate mirror of English and American theatre practices, using their plays, copying overseas venues and staging techniques, but otherwise remaining independent and thus providing opportunities for local talent to develop. These options were part of the general

[21] *Ballarat Courier*, 1 March 1907, p. 5.
[22] Evelyn Ballantyne, 'Some Impressions of the Australian Stage', *Theatre* (April 1892), p. 186.
[23] Daniel Bandmann, *An Actor's Tour*, ed. Barnard Gisby (Boston: Cupples, Upham, 1885), p. 7.

economic debate between free trade and protectionism; however, neither group was very interested in promoting Australian play-writing, since both recognised that this was an industry whose basic shape and direction were determined elsewhere. Only a small minority of artists or entrepreneurs in the colonial period imagined that theatre in Australia could be something significantly different in the way it operated or in the entertainments it presented. Innovation was seldom allowed and less often successful; the Australian-written play could be just a matter of changing city and suburb: 'London' to 'Sydney' or 'Camberwell' to 'St Kilda'. This tells us a good deal about the way in which local geography could become a symbol and a measure of progress against the yardstick of London, but only the scene designer was thereby empowered to make more than a token allowance of difference. The original play which tried to deal in a more sustained or detailed way with Australian society was seldom more than a novelty item.

Tradition and change

Changes in technology, acting styles, company structures and links with other industries and repertoire all followed overseas trends. But by the 1860s Australian theatrical tradespeople – stage technicians, costume makers, etc. – had established their competence, and these skills and products no longer needed to be imported. However, Australian-based actors found their livelihoods threatened by the dozens of major overseas stars who made world tours, particularly in the 1850s, 1860s and 1880s when the colonial economies were buoyant. General economic factors in England and in Australia interacted: the 1870s saw English actors asking for touring salaries at which Australian managers baulked;[24] and, while English theatre boomed in the 1890s, a severe financial depression in Australia made that decade one of the least prosperous or innovative in the history of the Antipodean stage.

Change was frequently controlled by what has been called 'bounded alternatives': different ways of producing the same or a similar effect.[25] The history of stage lighting is a useful example.

[24] *Argus*, 31 October 1870, p. 5.
[25] See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical*

Most accounts offer the usual dates at which new inventions were deployed: when gas replaced oil and wax candles (1840s in Australia), the introduction of limelight (1850s) then electricity (1880s), with accompanying changes in intensity, flexibility and safety. Yet technological change in any successful industry is usually adopted to improve existing practices marginally or make them cheaper, not change them.[26] If critics like Ellen Terry and Nellie Stewart had been right and if the use of electricity with its harshness and greater intensity had overnight revealed the patent artificiality of theatrical sets, props, costumes and acting, then electricity would not have been adopted, let alone embraced with such enthusiasm, as it was in the 1880s. Electricity enabled actor-managers to do better what they had been doing all along: manipulating technology in the service of spectacle, atmosphere and realism; safety and convenience were very much the minor bonuses. Audiences may have felt safer in buildings less likely to burn down; they may have marvelled at newer, better sensations; but the discourse of realism controlled representation and response. There might be a number of choices of materials and approach for an artist working within the system, but they had to produce broadly the same effect.

The most important change to the effect on audiences in the way in which light was used in the nineteenth-century playhouse was the gradual preference for darkening the auditorium. This had long been done for special effects such as magic-lantern scenes, and it became technologically simple to achieve from the time the gas tap to the auditorium chandelier was installed, enabling the audience as well as the stage lights to be raised, lowered or switched off (the pilot light for reigniting them followed soon after). The auditorium began to be darkened throughout the performance in the 1860s and, though some managers resisted the change until much later, audiences progressively were persuaded towards less public and participatory ways of viewing and listening to plays.

If we were to mark a node, a moment of genuinely radical change for Australian theatre within the general period 1832–1930, both as an industry and as a system of representation, then it comes in

Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Modes of Production to 1960 (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.   [26] Ibid., pp. 4–6.

the years around 1880. Strong birth rates from the time of the gold rushes onwards, combined with net adult migration out of some colonies in the lean years of the 1870s, meant that the population was on average rapidly getting younger, more equally balanced in terms of the numbers of men and women and more likely to be Australian-born.[27] Economically the 1880s were the most prosperous decade of the century for the eastern colonies, and smaller 'Bijou' theatres with their higher minimum price of admission (two shillings) enabled a more select audience to define itself by its preferences in entertainment, while audiences from all classes voted with their discretionary spending for new styles and genres. This shift was noticed at the time. The old Shakespearean Daniel Bandmann, touring Australia and the far east in 1879–82 after a decade's absence, observed deprecatingly: 'A low class of entertainments, especially opera bouffe, sensational rubbish, and variety shows, find greater favour now.'[28] He blamed this new 'indifference to the higher aims and ideals of art' on the Australian convict heritage,[29] but the Antipodean colonies simply were following the English-speaking world. *HMS Pinafore* arrived in 1879 and the era of comic opera (operetta, musical comedy) as the dominant genre commenced, while soon afterwards the first Australian plays to achieve both long runs and regular revival appeared, appropriating the juvenile and popular taste for 'sensation' drama. A new generation of actor-managers (J. C. Williamson, Arthur Garner, George Musgrove, Alfred Dampier, Bland Holt and Wybert Reeve) all started their managerial careers with major productions; railways began to link the major capital cities and reach out into the bush, changing and expanding the touring circuits and making possible the carrying of large numbers of actors and the heavy set-pieces and mechanical equipment on which superior production values relied.

In the same years the quality of staging took a sudden leap upwards, probably inspired by the arrival in 1879 of the London Comedy Company with its luxurious costumes, furniture and

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[27] E.g., see V. H. Arnold, *Victorian Year Book 1973: Centenary Edition* (Melbourne: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics Victorian Office, 1974), pp. 1069–75.

[28] Bandmann, *Actor's Tour*, p. 9.   [29] Ibid., p. 91.

settings. Thus began, assisted by the railway and the steamship, the practice of importing complete London casts (often with designers and musical directors). This led to the demise of the earlier system whereby a visiting star was supported by the local stock company. Already, opportunities for Australian-resident actors were under threat. For the next eighty years Anglophilic critics and audiences would look with eagerness on every new London importation as evidence of not just better acting styles and stories, but also of how to dress, live and behave. Obviously they did so before 1879 as well, but the celebrated stage designer George Gordon's arrival that year from London with the Comedy Company can be seen as a moment which marked decisively the market advantage of maintaining close links between London fashions and furnishing and Australian stage-design practices. The commercial stage embraced the idea of product placement forty years before the Hollywood film studios; George Bernard Shaw noticed it on the London stage, wonderfully characterising the new emphasis on a glittering surface veneer in plays set in contemporary high society as resulting in 'a tailor's advertisement making sentimental remarks to a milliner's advertisement in the middle of an upholsterer's and a decorator's advertisement'.[30]

Class, gender and regional differences

One important consequence of this change was that different kinds of companies and different tendencies in the composition of audiences began to emerge, divided along age, gender, class and city versus bush lines; and the Australian play became associated principally with the juvenile or less sophisticated, masculine, rural and least wealthy sector of society. However, this split was never complete nor always welcomed by managements. Throughout the second half of the century, managers tried to increase revenue, and actors to improve their own social standing, by promoting theatre-going as a respectable activity. The moves to turn down the houselights, and legislation restricting liquor sales, meant that

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[30] George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, 3 vols (London: Constable, 1932), III. 58; Joel H. Kaplan, 'Bad Dressmakers and Well-Arranged Worlds: Fashion and Society Comedy', *Modern Drama*, 34 (1991), 327–39 (p. 329).

the behaviour at a rough theatre in 1900 was probably better than that at most playhouses two generations earlier. Nor was the Australian market large enough for any company or venue manager to be able to ignore any sector of it: there always remained a contested middle-ground of broad popular appeal which offered the greatest economic rewards for what was, after all, commercial activity.

However, before 1900 this consensual taste seems to have resisted the overtly Australian play, which was not central to the repertoire of any troupe apart from second-ranking companies such as those led by the actor-playwright George Darrell or the provincial Dan Barry. The one partial exception is Alfred Dampier's company during the years of his major successes: roughly 1886–92. It is not coincidental that of the last two plays in the present volume, *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *The Kelly Gang*, the first is one of Dampier's two most popular pieces and the second was plagiarised in part from his other great national triumph: the stage version of *Robbery Under Arms*.

The appeal of this material to some audiences is most marked after 1880, when overt representations of Australia in pantomime declined, and the emerging national melodrama was associated with convicts, bushrangers, the popular history of the gold-rush era and big-city crime. Such plays brought in additional numbers of young working-class male audiences and drove away people who considered themselves more respectable, including more strictly socialised and supervised young women. Not that women were a powerless group; by the end of the century the 'gallery girl' was a phenomenon to be reckoned with, as large numbers of young women formed fan-clubs in support of their favourite actresses. But their group-influenced tastes seem overwhelmingly to have been the same as those of their wealthier sisters, gravitating towards the musical and the fashionable, the operetta and the society comedy. There were no major Australian plays of this kind, while a play about convicts was doubly difficult: popular in Brisbane, Sydney and Hobart where historically convictism had most shaped local history; but a frost in Melbourne, the largest and most prosperous city for most of the second half of the century.

Economic factors therefore were a powerful disincentive to

staging the Australian play. Its supporters often paid only sixpence, at most a shilling, to sit in the pit or gallery, compared to those who sat in the three- to five-times more expensive boxes or dress and family circles. No company could afford to ignore the dress-circle audience. The repertoire of even a Darrell or a Dampier comprised at least seventy-five per cent overseas plays, mostly from London, while the most prosperous managements had by the century's end created a world of sophistication and glamour on both sides of the footlights, and audiences in turn made the theatre the place to be seen as well as to see:

> A Saturday 'first night' at the Princess's Theatre, Melbourne, is a picturesque sight, for the great auditorium is then always filled to overflowing. Of the three circles the lower one alone is dedicated to the Goddess of Fashion; in it are ladies, resplendent in peacock-like, bejewelled costumes, with gleaming white shoulders and throats. Their attendant squires, though usually correct in funereal evening suits, have been known to defy *les convenances*, towards the New Year, when the thermometer is well above the hundred, and appear in white drill suits and crimson sashes. On these oppressive nights, the whole of the arched roof is opened, letting the soft warm air into the building, and replacing the painted canopy by the dark vault of the sky illumined by the Southern Cross. In the pauses of the orchestra, or when the music is soft, one can hear the sound of running water as it gently trickles amid the illuminated alcoved grottos of ferns.[31]

The three- or four-tiered playhouse itself was an English symbol of class society, with the cheapest seats often reached by a different door in a side street and each area having separate foyers and refreshment areas: see illust. 2 (a) and (b). To some extent where you sat and how much you paid was a product of class allegiance rather than angle of view or distance from the stage, although this began to be blurred as the introduction of orchestra stalls started to push the old 'pit' to the back under the dress-circle balcony above (illust. 3). Furthermore, England was not Australia, price differentials were not as great and wages were generally better. Class

[31] 'Maorilander', 'Play-going in Australia', *Playgoer* (December 1902), p. 70.

mobility gave flexibility: one might experiment with different experiences on different occasions, going to cheaper seats when with same-sex friends (safety in numbers), but spending more when courting, and varying one's behaviour and clothing to suit the location. One also went to the theatre for other reasons. As the major public buildings in the city, theatres were hired for all sorts of events from political meetings to sporting demonstrations and presentations, amateur concerts to church services. Each audience might arrange themselves and behave differently.

A fashionable and performing society

In the second half of the century there were also many social activities which echoed the commercial stage and carried its meanings into new areas. Many of the favourite characters for fancy-dress balls, a very popular Victorian pastime for middle- and upper-class society in Australia as elsewhere, were those copied from drama, comedy and pantomime. Marie Schild's *Album of Fancy Costumes: Characters Suitable for Fancy Costume Balls* ([1881]) included dozens of sketches of theatrical characters, together with advertisements for fashion houses such as 'Auguste and Co., Costumiers de Paris' (though with a London address) which declared themselves to be 'Costumiers to all the Principal Theatres in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States'.[32] But in case that suggested exclusivity and unreachable affluence, Schild announced that she could provide 'the paper model of any Costume herein', while a footnote added 'Residents in Australia can obtain paper models and coloured prints' through a Melbourne wholesaler.[33] Men too adopted stage characters for fancy dress occasions. Reporting 'a Masquerade at the German Hall' in 1888, *Queensland Figaro* described a 'Mr. H. Lose', as 'an old Corporal, with French military dress and cocked hat, in almost exact imitation of Signor Majeroni as he appeared on the stage'.[34] Participants at a 'Shakespearean Ball' in Melbourne in 1898 went further: groups selected a particular play for their 'set', Elizabeth I and her court paraded round the room to a fanfare of trumpets, a 'wild Rustic Dance' was followed

[32] Marie Schild, *Album of Fancy Costumes* (London: Miller, [1881]), p. 28.
[33] Ibid., p. vii.   [34] *Queensland Figaro*, 7 July 1888, p. 22.

by a 'stately minuet', while the President's Set, who chose *As You Like It*, had photographs taken of themselves posing in character in front of appropriate Forest-of-Arden backdrops.[35] Not surprisingly, some of the guests were themselves members of the theatrical profession and had provided many of the costumes and props.

Another reason for respectable society and women in particular to take an interest in stage performance was that, in the last twenty years of the century, actresses, epitomised by Ellen Terry, Lillie Langtry and Sarah Bernhardt, became the acknowledged exemplars in matters of fashion, deportment, make-up and elegant behaviour in general.[36] The arrival of the first 'Gaiety' Company in Australia in 1888 had 'all dainty *élegants*' copying its star, Nellie Farren,[37] while in 1891 Melbourne *Punch* satirically captioned a caricature of Bernhardt wearing knee-length rubber boots in one of the roles she performed on her Australian tour that year: 'Costume of the Week. What Madame Bernhardt's rural appearances may yet bring about on the Block.'[38] Nor was this enthusiasm confined to the *haute bourgeoisie*. Possibly the first reference to large numbers of young women unashamedly occupying the cheapest seats occurred during the 1888 Gaiety Company tour, when the critic for *Melbourne Punch* was astonished to notice 'dozens of tiny bunches [of flowers] being showered from the most unexpected quarter – the gallery'.[39]

Picture postcards, a craze which began in the 1890s,[40] distributed images of these fashions, faces and figures around the world. Young women, in Australia as elsewhere, could examine closely what they were supposed to look like and wear, if they wanted to impress. At about the same time Australian newspapers and magazines began including theatrical columns directed particularly at women who were assumed to be primarily interested in fashion, gossip and

[35] *Tatler* (Melb.), 27 August 1898, pp. 12, 13, 23; 3 September 1898, pp. 1, 2, 12, 13.
[36] E.g. *Sydney Mail*, 20 August 1887, p. 402, where Bernhardt is said to surpass Langtry in her 'genius of dress'.
[37] *Melbourne Punch*, 21 June 1888, p. 395.
[38] Ibid., 25 June 1891, p. 426.   [39] Ibid., 21 June 1888, p. 395.
[40] Peter Bailey, 'Musical Comedy and the Rhetoric of the Girl', in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–60 (p. 53).

'society' matters, rather than in the storyline. Exhaustive passages laboriously annotated every detail of the latest and most desirable 'toilettes' to appear on the stage. The cost of stage costuming and jewellery became advertising copy and a 'review' of a play for these readers could omit details of the plot entirely. When Tittell Brune (one of the favourite subjects of Australian postcards) appeared in *Camille* in 1905, *Table Talk*'s 'Ladies' Letter' account gives no indication that it was a controversial mid-nineteenth-century play about a high-class prostitute.[41] Its *demi-monde* world had become an excuse for an outrageous excess of furs and frippery (illust. 4).

Every new actress visiting the colonies was expected to bring with her a wardrobe of the latest European fashions, while the Australian dress-making industry, both for street and stage, was well established and able to copy the latest trends quickly. Australian women actors such as Nellie Stewart could therefore participate to some extent in this fetishising of the extravagantly overdressed female body and in marketing their images through picture postcards (illust. 5).[42] *Table Talk*, advocating a reform in women's 'walking dress' in 1895, proposed a 'smart short skirt and gaiters, over full knickerbockers' and reminded readers 'Such a dress is really becoming, as anyone who saw Miss Nellie Stewart . . . will testify.'[43]

One of the many difficulties for creating plays with Australian settings was the contradiction between representations of colonial life, particularly in the bush, and this expectation that such women actors should dress as leaders of European fashion. Plays set in contemporary London or Paris high society invited magnificent gowns, jewellery and hats; most Australian plays did not. A critic in 1874 noted of the heroine in Helen Lucy Benbow's *For £60,000*, set in rural Victoria, 'Miss Bowring has exceptional ideas of dress. As a rule ladies do not walk alone in the bush in a dress suited for the lawn on a Cup day.'[44] This problem was later solved in two ways: in rural plays by having as the heroine a city-dweller who

[41] 16 February 1905, pp. 22–3.
[42] See Alexandra Joel, *Best Dressed: 200 Years of Fashion in Australia* (Sydney: Collins, 1984), p. 29.
[43] 25 January 1895, p. 16.
[44] *Representative* (Castlemaine), 3 November 1874, p. 2.

visits the bush locale, and in 'society' plays such as the Bland Holt localisation, *The Breaking of the Drought* (1902–03), by including both country and city scenes and by forming advertising and marketing alliances with Australian-based fashion houses.

Another of the popular Victorian pastimes which made the living stage a central part of social discourse was home theatricals, which began to be commercially supported in the 1860s by the publication of books of short plays, some based on stage hits, some original, suitable for the domestic living room and a cast of friends and relatives. By the 1880s, Australian newspaper columns regularly reported on such 'Private Theatricals', which had begun to be advertised to the general public and to move from the parlour to the town hall, offering comedies, farces and comic operas. Here too the wider interest of middle-class society in public self-presentation (self-confidence, stylish clothing, deportment, correct speech) and courtship rituals (singing and dancing at parties) blurred the edges between private and public, between the proper literary education and grooming for public life of the young man and for social life of the young woman, and the performance skills of the professional entertainer. Indeed, it is even possible that such homely entertainments not only reflected and parodied the commercial stage, but influenced the development of Australian stage stories. It seems likely that Benbow's *For £60,000*, included in this volume, was written as just such an amateur entertainment and was later taken up, not entirely successfully, by the professional theatre. One intriguing aspect of what is otherwise a relatively minor work is that it seems to preview, with more than coincidental accuracy, characters and speeches in the popular and extremely successful Australian commercial stage plays of thirty years later.

Representing the world

MODERN MELODRAMAS

How great in its way is the modern play!
    And how grand are the great 'effects!'
Far greater the stage than in Shakespeare's day,
    Though his efforts one still respects!

> But it comes with a thrill and a shivering shock,
>   And it seems very real to me,
> When the good ship strikes on a cardboard rock
>   In the midst of a muslin sea![45]

Surveying a century of stage storytelling, it is rather too easy to see the stock characters, repetitive story patterns and obvious limits to stage realism as evidence of a form of entertainment entirely bound by convention, and to speculate that audiences either interpreted melodrama with the same mocking distance that it is often given today or that they were very unsophisticated if they took what they saw and heard in the theatre as a mirror of their own lives. It is true that even at the time there were many anecdotes about such lack of sophistication, particularly if such audiences were lower class, provincial or colonial:

> A great deal could be written about Australian audiences. On more than one authenticated occasion, the villain of the drama has narrowly escaped chastisement, and perhaps losing his life, through some quick-passioned, chivalrous playgoer in front taking it into his, or her, head to rescue the oppressed heroine. An excited sailor once actually risked his own life, and succeeded in descending from the front row of the 'gods,' so anxious was he to administer summary punishment.[46]

But here we find the us versus them, London versus colony binary in operation. The account was intended for London readers, to flatter their sophistication and to imagine the writer as someone who had travelled widely in distant, savage places where there would, nevertheless, be pockets of sophistication capable of admiring the performer (thus justifying the journey) and childlike innocence in need of instruction.

   In a less naive or childlike way, however, the means by which nineteenth-century theatre represented the world were crucial to its success. As early as 1836 the *Sydney Monitor* was insisting that 'The greater the illusion experienced by an audience, the more people are tempted "to go to the play"', and that the effect of 'fine acting' was to delude the mind 'into an unconscious belief in the

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[45] *Arrow* (Sydney), 17 August 1907, p. 10.
[46] 'Maorilander', 'Play-going in Australia', p. 70.

reality of the scene'.[47] The greatest praise for acting and for stage settings were for them to be 'realistic' and it is essential, if we are to try to understand something of the power of stories seen and heard on the colonial stage, to consider more fully the ways in which represerters and representations were interpreted in relation to what audiences understood as real life.

If we look at the size of the auditorium compared to the stage, the distance of a large part of the audience from the footlights, and remember that, at least until the 1860s, the auditorium remained fully lit, then clearly stage illusion had its limitations (see illust. 6). Theatre-going was a social experience and was never as individual-ised or as dream-like as, in the next century, cinema-viewing would be. Nevertheless, as can be seen most easily from plays about contemporary society, convincing attempts were made within that space to present as many as possible of the recognisable surface details of modern living. The introduction of complex stage machinery extended that capability and made possible detailed representations of panoramic landscapes, spectacular natural events such as earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions, disasters including shipwrecks and railway accidents, and spectacles from popular carnivals to military battles.

The present editor has adopted the view, reflected in the detailed explanatory notes provided for those plays which refer explicitly to the immediate social context in which they were written or performed (language, politics, personalities, events), that, whatever their merits or otherwise as literature or drama, these works are 'windows' onto preoccupations and ways of thinking expressed for the most part in language current at a precise moment in colonial history. To make this claim about stage plays, with their explicit licence to condense, exaggerate and fantasise, is not to adopt a simplistic 'mirror of life' approach to the understanding of theatrical images, actions and language. Rather it is to insist that the 'realism' or otherwise of such stagings mattered; certainly it was frequently commented on. Ways of knowing the world through dramatic representation were an ongoing struggle in that period, as now. At one extreme, extra-textual reality intruded in many ways,

[47] 6 August 1836, p. 3.

perhaps nowhere more obviously than in the links we have already noticed between stage costuming and fashionable street and evening wear and between theatrical settings and the bourgeois domestic interior. At the other extreme were the attempts to close off theatre from issues of measurable representation entirely, as a historical romance or a J. C. Williamson fantasy musical or pantomime attempted to do, toying with the local and recognisable from the safe vantage point of another time, place and world. But even here, in an era which saw human nature as essentially unchanged across time, the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra was converted into the familiar paradigm of a great man brought down by a wanton, and a fantasy Japanese bogey man became just another variety of villain and was considered representable by actors in a 'realistic' way. The modern space-adventure film makes much the same assumption.

Representing others

It has not been possible to include records of Aboriginal performances in this volume; the radically different conception of the purpose of what Europeans might identify as 'theatre' held by traditional Aboriginal societies requires separate investigation. Most of the dance drama of Aboriginal people prior to anthropological film is probably unrecoverable except through oral tradition,[48] though amongst its few traces are newspaper accounts of its occasional appearance as exotic interludes in commercial Anglo-Australian theatre by the 1850s, if not earlier. *Harlequin King Blear and his Three Daughters* at Melbourne's Queen's Theatre in 1856 offered a corroboree of six Aboriginal men from the Murrumbidgee area dancing a war song and a hunting song, which the audience found 'much to [their] amusement'.[49] Aboriginal people had little control over the ways they were represented in such exploitations, which nevertheless even in the 1850s must have been the way most Anglo-Australians knew of this other culture. The *Age* could assert in its review (2 January) of the *Harlequin King Blear* staging that

[48] See further Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Editing the Oral Text: Medieval and Modern Transformations', in *The Editorial Gaze*, ed. Paul Eggert and Margaret Sankey (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 173–92.

[49] *Age*, 2 January 1856, p. 2; see also *Empire* (Sydney), 27 January 1857, pp. 1, 4.

'Now-a-days . . . one may live for years in Melbourne without knowing more of the original inhabitants than if we were in an English town', suggesting that intercultural contact for city-dwelling Australians was already limited to and informed by stage performance. Such token cultural cross-overs were rare, and later in the century disappeared from the public stage. They did not return until the cinematograph was introduced. Instead, from the mid-1830s onwards, white actors caricatured black peoples in 'Jim Crow' routines (illust. 7). We can safely assume that blacked-up white actors played all the Aboriginal roles in the plays in this volume (illust. 8); they would continue to do so in Australian live theatre until the 1940s. Walter Cooper's *Hazard* (1872), in many respects still an entertaining comic murder-mystery, unfortunately also includes one of the least acceptable of such representations, the 'nigger minstrel' role of 'Jubilee Jake' adopted by a European character as a disguise.

It is interesting to note that even in the earliest surviving play written, published and performed in Australia, Henry Melville's *The Bushrangers* (1834), the Koori words used (e.g. 'gin' for an Aboriginal woman) are anglicised from the Sydney Dharuk people, not those of the Tasmanian peoples where Melville lived and where his play is set (and where the alternative 'lubra' was used). An eastern-Australian register of words and phrases had been taken into English to represent all Aboriginal societies and was already in place and resistant to further observation, expansion or revision. Nevertheless, whatever their referential status, the allegedly Australian descriptive words and phrases in these plays often precede, sometimes by many years, their earliest recorded appearance in the *Australian National Dictionary* or the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which depend relatively little on recorded speech. Such words in the plays may not tell us what Aboriginal people, convicts, or other groups called one another in that place and at that time; but they are self-evidently new words to the European writers who were using them to try to represent the country and the human beings that colonial experience obliged them to describe. To be able to name the world was an important step towards mastering it; it is no coincidence that the incompetent British 'new chum' character in Cooper's *Hazard*, with his

characteristic 'thingamy' and 'whatsoname' (338:1–2) is incapable of precisely identifying anything.

The theatrical activities of non-British immigrants, like Aboriginal ritual performances, were largely separate from the dominant industry. Though their performaces were more recognisably entertainment designed for formal viewing, such communities lived in separate quarters or ghettos both in cities and on the mining leases and elsewhere in rural Australia. Amongst the best organised of these were the Chinese tent theatres of the 1850s and 1860s (variously described as opera, ballet or circus). There were a number of companies travelling from southern China and possibly Peking (Beijing) to the Eastern Australian goldfields where they played almost exclusively to their own expatriate community.[50] There was, however, some cultural crossover. A few Australian commentators wrote about what they saw and heard at such performances, while members of the Chinese community were sometimes noticed in the pit and gallery of the Melbourne and Sydney playhouses.

Numerous non-English-speaking European communities also attempted to translocate their cultural traditions to Australia, though there is far more evidence of this from the early years of the twentieth century than there is for the colonial period. What performances there were by French, Italian, German, Greek and other European groups in Australia mostly took place within their own communities, although the operatic stage brought such languages and repertoires to wider attention. There were also occasional tours by foreign-language dramatic companies: a small French-speaking troupe performed opera and 'vaudeville' in Sydney as early as 1839,[51] while the visit by the major Italian actor Adelaide Ristori in 1875, also performing mostly in her own language, showed the possibilities for cultural exchange.

The dominant theatrical culture however was an English theatre in Australia, looking back to Britain, sideways towards the United States of America and inwards towards its own middle-class

[50] Harold Love, 'Chinese Theatre on the Victorian Goldfields', *ADS*, 3.2 (1985), 45–86.
[51] Elizabeth Webby, 'Australia and Europe: Literary and Theatrical Connections 1788–1850', *Quadrant*, 27 (June 1983), p. 27.

community. It chose to represent all others by exaggeration and created stereotypes of race and class based sometimes on very little observed knowledge. It was easy to parody such conventions and assert a greater 'realism', as Henry Lawson did in his comic poem 'When your Pants Begin to Go' (1905):

I have noticed, when misfortune strikes the hero of the play,
That his clothes are worn and tattered in a most unlikely way;
And the gods applaud and cheer him while he whines and
    loafs around,
And they never seem to notice that his pants are mostly
    sound;
But of course he cannot help it, for our mirth would mock his
    care,
If the ceiling of his trousers showed the patches of repair.[52]

However, the marker of good acting, effective representation, continued to be determined by approved theatrical norms and conventions, not measured against real life. Criticising an Aboriginal corroboree presented in 1874 by white actors in the inaugural Bendigo season of Benbow's *For £60,000*, the reviewer for the Castlemaine *Representative* suggested not that the cast employ, study or consult Koori peoples themselves, but that 'If black skin tights, such as the Girards [an acrobatic troupe] wore, could be obtained, and the blankets dispensed with, the actual corroboree would be much more effective.'[53]

To some extent the representation of others was made possible by developments in the ways actors could alter their body shape and facial and hair colouring. The invention of greasepaint in the 1860s was followed about ten years later by rapid changes in the degree to which the physical dimensions of character – particularly racial characteristics – were able to be realised in performance. Late nineteenth-century books on make-up are extraordinary expressions of racial ideology and anxiety, and perhaps nowhere else were sub-Darwinian notions of racial difference and social evolution so clearly visioned as on the public stage. In Charles Fox's *The Art*

[52] Henry Lawson, *When I Was King, and Other Verses* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1905), pp. 125–6.
[53] 3 November 1874, p. 2.

of Making Up for Public and Private Theatricals (*c.* 1890) he advised
actors to consult 'works on Ethnology' such as Pritchard's *The
Natural History of Man*, Nott and Gleddon's *Types of Mankind*
and Knox's *The Races of Men*. Fox notes that 'the nations which
spring from Teutonic stock are of good height, and possess well–
proportioned limbs; they have clear complexions, blue eyes and
fair hair.' He gave genealogical explanations for racial and inter-
racial difference, but allowed 'Professor Huxley's claim that 'a dark
type can also be traced' amongst the English, 'no doubt due to
early intermarriage with the many different races which formed
the armies of the Romans'. Fox insisted that 'the fair type is how-
ever much more numerous, and consequently regarded as the true
one' ('Complexion – No. 2½ or 3. Hair – Fair'). Racial difference
within England could be explained by class: stage costermongers
and 'street Arabs' (homeless youths) were to be made up differently.

Having disposed of this anxiety about the purity of the Anglo–
Saxon race, Fox went on to a typology of humanity throughout
the world, giving different wig and greasepaint combinations for
Scotch, Irish, Welsh, 'the American', 'the Mongolians', French,
Portuguese, 'the Spaniard' ('handsomer than the Portuguese . . .
though he is rather undersized'), 'the Wallachians', Greeks, Danes,
Italians, Finns and Laps, Jews, Hindoos, Persians, Arabs, Chinese
(complexion no. 5½), Japanese (complexion no. 6½) and some
dozens of other 'races', including three types of Egyptians:
'Ethiopian', 'Indian' and 'Berber'.[54] As the British empire expanded
and consolidated its vision of an international order dominated by
the fair Anglo–Saxon race, the public stage responded with stories
of Imperial adventure in which audiences saw a greasepaint
facsimile of the peoples of the world, sometimes lent added
verisimilitude by being set within a circus-like frame of real animals
(illust. 9).

Speech and music

The representation of cultural and class differences was also a
matter not just of actor, costume, stage setting and role, but of

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[54] Charles Fox, *The Art of Making Up for Public and Private Theatricals; Advice
to Amateurs etc.* (London: Drake, Driver & Lever, [*c.* 1890]), pp. 6, 38.

training and convention. The use of the voice is a good example
of why particular histories of stage crafts tend to be blind to their
own part in larger patterns of meaning. As a channel of communi-
cation, voice has traditionally been approached in its own terms
(volume, musicality and inflection, interpretative emphasis, tone,
accent and the changing aesthetics of speech training); but voice
was also central to the representation of self and otherness. The
nineteenth-century theatre was a primary site of public oral display,
affecting not just how people spoke, but with what effect and in
what contexts. The savage condemnation by Sydney critics of early
performers who dropped their aitches and the later blurring of
'lower-classness' with 'Australianness' in minor character roles
contributed to a class-based construction of self and other,
depending on where one was positioned both in real life and in
imaginative response to the performance. Beautiful British voices
were as important as beautiful European clothes; speech was
implicated in the construction of 'the colonial' as lower-class and
of the theatre itself as a culturally central window onto the Empire
and its others. It is doubtful if any of the major roles in the plays
in this volume would have been spoken in anything else than stage
speech, a musically structured, richly expressive separate register
defined by the acting profession. The norm was upper-middle-
class London; extremes of high and low class as well as the
differences of other regions and other nations were available for
eccentric delineation.

Stage conventions and patterns overrode 'realism': well-bred
Australian heroines did not speak in Australian accents, while
Australian bush workers, if their dialogue was spoken as written,
often sounded like English or Irish servants (which, until the 1870s,
many of them were). American intonations were often heard but
were less acceptable in strongly 'English' roles, Scottish accents
were liked by theatregoers whose origins lay there, while the Irish
roles Dion Boucicault wrote for himself moved that country centre-
stage. Nevertheless most dialect characters were restricted to the
sub-plot, the minor players, the eccentric walk-ons; they were not
the voices that audiences were expected to identify with. Part of
the power of many plays, as in much literature of social reform,
was that they put central characters with middle-class sensibilities

into working-class situations of oppression and suffering. From his dignified manner of speaking, Rufus Dawes's noble nature and upbringing would have been evident to everyone watching *For the Term of His Natural Life,* though not to his persecutor Maurice Frere. Even Ned Kelly's speeches are noticeably more articulate and less inflected with Irish pronunciations and slang than those of his mother or his less savoury companions: his moral complexity begins with his vocal centrality.

If the spoken word was the guide to presumed intellect, wit, decency and heroic sensibility, music was the marker for sub-conscious emotion and often too the code for changes of mood, locale and the passage of time. Every theatre had an 'orchestra': more than twenty players at a major metropolitan playhouse during seasons of opera and musical comedies, a house band of perhaps eight to ten for legitimate theatre, fewer in smaller towns.[55] Every company, amateur and professional, regarded live music as crucial to a successful staging; indeed, the loss of such musicians to the silent-film exhibitors in the first decade of the twentieth century caused the collapse of some amateur groups. Performers regularly included new popular melodies in the middle of seemingly quite inappropriate non-musical plays, while part of the attraction of the annual pantomime was the inclusion of the latest tunes, either as written or in parody form. Copyright on music was lax and popular songs were appropriated by Australian entertainers long before the appearance in the colonies of the comic opera, musical play or music-hall act in which the song had originated.

Most major companies employed resident musical directors who composed or arranged overtures and incidental music, distributed the band parts to the local musicians at each venue, rehearsed and conducted them, and carefully collected the music again when the season finished. Part of their duties included knowing the cues for all the plays in the company's repertoire, as music was just as crucial to straight drama as it was to more obvious melodic genres. In spoken narrative, musical scores were used very much as films and television stories use music today. Those prompt scripts or published texts which contain musical cues, including more than

[55] *CTA* 382–6.

half of the plays in this anthology, show that music framed the action, altered the mood by segueing between sequences, introduced and reintroduced individual characters by melodic phrase motifs, accentuated their comic or tragic exits, indicated 'time passes', accompanied action sequences and anticipated each dramatic climax.[56] Some scenes, particularly those of a romantic or pathetic nature, were underscored by music throughout; others had no accompaniment once the scene began. Music might reinforce or challenge a play's subject and style: it is interesting to note, for example, that the melodies used in the convict drama *For the Term of His Natural Life* were from an English comic opera. Conversely, music might add local colour which a play lacked: in 1888 a season of the English play *The World Against Her* in Sydney was enlivened by a grand march 'Sons of Australia'.[57] The conductor on that occasion, Herbert Percy Kehoe, composed nationalistic music at different times for the Dampier, Darrell and Holt companies, including an 'Australian Overture' for *Robbery Under Arms*, and elsewhere a song and choral march commemorating the revolt at the Eureka stockade and a 'Race Galop . . . Descriptive of the Melbourne Cup Race'.[58] But it was one thing to name a piece of music in honour of a local event, contemporary or historical, another to give a recognisable difference to the texture of the sound itself. European instruments were used and European melodic forms provided the models. With the exception of the occasional attempt at the sound of an Aboriginal corroboree, as in the Charles Horsley composition used in both *The South-Sea Sisters* and *For £60,000*, the music itself remained within known and predetermined boundaries.

Storytelling

The most successful plays on the nineteenth-century Australian stage were London plays, plus a significant number from the United States of America. While there was a degree of local acceptance

[56] Irvin 203–6.   [57] *SMH*, 27 April 1888, p. 2.
[58] Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Richard Fotheringham (Sydney: Currency, 1985), p. viii; *Lorgnette* (Melbourne), 1 March 1890, p. 7; *Lorgnette*, 114 (April 1893), pp. 6–7.

or rejection of the latest overseas hits, a statistical survey of the century's greatest successes in Australia would almost certainly correlate closely with those in England and the USA. Further, most of the several hundred 'Australian' plays which have been identified in the colonial period are either minimal localisations from overseas plays or, at best, original stage versions of well-known English and American novels.[59] Australian-written plays which directly represented some aspect of Australian society, such as those found in this volume, were for much of the period only occasionally staged and usually were short-lived. Of the first four plays in this collection, *The Bushrangers* had three performances only, *Arabin* and *The South-Sea Sisters* one each, while *Life in Sydney* was banned and never performed at all. The first long runs of Australian-written material came in the 1850s and 1860s, and were predominantly burlesques, pantomimes and other kinds of fantasy styles and subjects. The first play included here that may be said to have impacted upon significant numbers of Australian theatregoers through repeated presentation was *The House that Jack Built*, which had a successful Melbourne season in 1869 and others in Sydney and Brisbane in the 1870s. Walter H. Cooper, author of the 'sensational comic drama' *Hazard; or, Pearce Dyceton's Crime* (1872) included here, showed that successful seasons of Australian-written melodramas and comedies were possible. One of his plays, *Foiled; or, Australia Twenty Years Ago*, was still being revived fifteen years after his death; regrettably it is now lost. Benbow's *For £60,000* had a good run in Bendigo in 1874, but lasted only a few nights in Melbourne and Sydney.

Consequently only the last two plays in this volume, *For the Term of His Natural Life* and *The Kelly Gang*, could claim to be long-running and frequently revived popular successes. There were at least ten stage versions of Clarke's novel of the convict era performed in Australia and New Zealand before 1900, while in the periods 1878–80 and 1896–1930 there were many more about the real-life Kelly gang of bushrangers. Perhaps if we combined the total number of performances of all these versions, each might find a place amongst the most popular plays of their time though,

[59] See Kelly, *Calendar 1850–69* and *Calendar 1870–90*.

as noted earlier, the fact that both appealed to the cheaper end of the market would not have made them the most lucrative.

The colonising stage

When Australian authors attempted substantial representations of Australian scenery, characters and social relationships, they did not do so in genres of their own devising. In Eric Irvin's resonant words, the European stage 'discovered Australia' in the decades after the colonising explorations of England's Captain James Cook and France's La Perouse began to provide the popular theatre with material for representations of the exotic South Pacific.[60] Such works drew into their mythic fantasies reports from the antipodes of the death of Cook, the mutiny on the *Bounty* and the establishment of the early convict settlements in New South Wales and Tasmania. 'Fact' was sometimes an advertising ploy but it was never a limiting factor; indeed an opera called *Botany Bay* appeared in 1787 even before the first fleet left Portsmouth.[61] This and later European stories were firmly controlled by stage traditions of narrative, costuming, characterisation and scenic spectacle, by contemporary beliefs about other lands and societies and about the likely effects on European civilisations of their relocation to such environments. The stage had its own colonising agenda and in the next forty years the clown figure of Harlequin and the libertine Don Giovanni were transported as convicts to New South Wales in pantomime and burlesque. These were British jokes for British audiences; the playwrights' notions of geography were at best 'impressionistic'.[62]

The infamous exploits of the early bushrangers were quickly appropriated by the English theatre industry, but there is little reason to see such representations as founded on accurate reportage. There was already an established genre of novels and stage stories about outlaws. It is noteworthy, for example, that when Don Giovanni arrives in Australia, he finds that the Governor of the

[60] Irvin, 'The Stage Discovers Australia', *Twentieth Century*, 21 (1966), 170–5; Cliff Hanna, '"A Bit of Cackle": Australia's Beginnings in English Drama', *ADS*, 3.2 (1985), 5–20. [61] Hanna, 'Beginnings', pp. 14–15.
[62] Veronica Kelly, Introduction, *Giovanni in Botany*, *ADS*, 23 (1993), 102–6 (p. 105).

colony is none other than Jonathan Wild, the notorious eighteenth-century king of London thieves and the model for Mr Peachum in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). The romantic high-wayman of the same ballad opera, Captain Macheath, was drawn from other Newgate Calendar stories, including that of Jack Sheppard, who would later appear undisguised in his own stage plays. This 'social bandit', though neither revolutionary nor leader, expressed the discontent of society's victims.[63] Schiller's *The Robbers* (1781) went further and formalised in non-comic drama the split between the genuinely evil criminal and the proto-revolutionary Gothic hero-villain, whose actions are motivated at least in part by an unselfish desire to root out and punish official corruption and right social wrongs, even as he recognises his own decline towards monstrosity. By the time the first bushranger dramas started appearing in the 1820s therefore, playwrights had a range of character types, personal characteristics and motivations to draw on to explain chivalry and barbarism, private outrage and public revolt, the crimes of the poor and those of the rich.

Caught between competing images of South-Sea paradise and convict hell-hole, Australia was from the first an unstable imaginary place in the minds of British playwrights and audiences. The theatre served as a vehicle for both representations. The ticket-of-leave man returned secretly to the 'civilisation' of England is a character in several mid-century English plays, while the gold-rush 1850s confirmed an alternative impression, which had already filtered back to Europe, that Australia was indeed a sunny and prosperous south land for the enterprising and adventurous. 'A Pioneer', walking in London's West End in the 1850s, found both positive and negative ideas combined in one composite image:

> . . . driving along Oxford Street, was to be seen a gorgeously painted car with a representation of a huge nugget of gold on its top, driven by a supposed digger, with the usual red shirt and high boots, and of a most villainous cast of countenance,

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[63] Veronica Kelly, 'Explorers and Bushrangers in Nineteenth-Century Australian Theatre', in *The Writer's Sense of the Past: Essays on Southeast Asian and Australasian Literature*, ed. Kirpal Singh (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1992), pp. 125–9.

advertising a panorama of the gold-fields of Australia on view at the Egyptian Hall.[64]

The wealth-beyond-dreaming image of gold waiting for the adventurous digger was combined with suggestions of accompanying lawlessness, represented by the driver's 'villainous cast of countenance' and his red shirt, later the defining code of the bushranger. But in Australia the same idea would be reworked as an icon of national progress. At the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne, the central image in the Great Hall was an enormous gold pyramid representing in volume the output of the Victorian goldfields from 1851 to that time, surrounded not by miners or bushrangers but by the flags of the seven colonies involved (including New Zealand), and agricultural, mineral and mechanical displays.[65] At the same exhibition a federated nation was boldly anticipated in Richard Henry Horne's lyric masque, *The South-Sea Sisters*, performed at the opening concert. It is included in the present volume.

In England the convict era was the dominant myth early in the century, with J. Amherst's melodrama *Michael Howe: The Terror of Van Diemen's Land* (1821) being by a London author and staged for south London audiences, as was W. T. Moncrieff's extravaganza *Van Diemen's Land; or, Tasmania in 1818* (1830). Both were based on published reports of the bushranger Michael Howe's career, but used character types appropriate to their respective genres and the class interests of their audiences. David Burn's *The Bushrangers* (1829) has superficial claims to being grounded in on-the-spot reportage, since Burn (*c.* 1799–1875) was a Tasmanian resident from 1826.[66] However the play was staged in Edinburgh in September 1829 while he was briefly back in his native Scotland (probably it was written on the journey there) and dealt with the career of the bushranger Matthew Brady who predated Burn's first arrival in Hobart. There was no professional theatre in Tasmania at the time; Burn was writing for the British stage and its audiences.

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[64] 'A Pioneer', *Reminiscences of Australian Early Life by a Pioneer*, illust. Hume Nesbitt (London: Marsden, 1893), pp. 241–2.
[65] *Argus*, 25 October 1866, p. 5; *Australian News for Home Readers*, 27 October 1866, pp. 8–9.   [66] *ADB* I. 181–2; *CAL* 134.

The first Australian plays in Australia

This history of nearly fifty years of English stage stories about Australia, means that Henry Melville's *The Bushrangers; or, Norwood Vale* (1834), the first play in this volume, has no claim to being the first theatrical representation of colonial life and, like those earlier scripts, it was at least as much a product of European stage tradition as local documentary reportage. Its small but undeniable claim, however, is that in 1834 it became the first substantial play on an Australian subject written, published and performed in an Australian colony.

Melville's rudimentary plot begins with Mr Norwood, who has come to Van Diemen's Land after being financially ruined in England. Already Australia is a land where the wrongs of the old world might be set right, 'a land where honesty and perseverance will triumph – where the industry of the meanest labourer is sure to find a competence' (16:16–18). In other respects he is the conventional 'heavy' father with an unjustified suspicion of his daughter's worthy lover Frederick Seymour, who in turn must demonstrate his heroism to win the father's approval. Similarly Marian is a conventionally ineffectual heroine, not the more spirited currency lass of later plays such as her namesake in *Arabin; or, The Adventures of a Settler* (1849).

The action of *The Bushrangers* concerns the revenge that three runaway convicts try to exact on Mr Norwood, who has told the police of their whereabouts. They kidnap Marian and then return to murder him, only to be defeated by Frederick and by an Aboriginal leader Murrawha. A traditional stage noble savage, Murrawha seeks revenge because his wife and children have been murdered by Harry Fawkes, the most repellent of the bushrangers. The convicts' attempts to terrify settlers into silence must have had some resonance in 1834, and the blaming of the massacre of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples solely on such outlaws also provided a way to consider theatrically a difficult subject. By the time of the play's publication and performance all but a handful of the Aboriginal people had been moved to Bruny and to Flinders Islands; this was already a safe fantasy.

Detailed descriptions of city life were a major subject for drama throughout the nineteenth century, with one seminal text being

Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London (1821), on which the second play collected here, *Life in Sydney: or, The Ran Dan Club* (1843), was modelled. Based on Pierce Egan's serial of London high and low life in the late Regency period, *Tom and Jerry* had been a popular success at several London hippodramas in 1821 and throughout the English-speaking world for many years afterwards. The storyline of the most enduring dramatisation, by W. T. Moncrieff, had the country squire's son, Jerry Hawthorn, going off to explore 'Life in London' guided by his city cousin 'Corinthian Tom, the London Sportsman'.[67] 'Corinthian' is copied from Shakespeare's term for Prince Hal, who – according to the official British nineteenth-century interpretation – trained to be a good king by mixing easily with all classes of society in the *Henry IV* plays and learning the language of the alehouse. (It is no coincidence in *Life in Sydney* that Tom's surname is 'King'.) In *Tom and Jerry* the third member of their group, a university student down from Oxford called Dr Bob Logic, is 'a perfect pocket dictionary of all the flash, slang, and cant patter',[68] who explains at Jerry's bewildered prompting the language of the underclasses they encounter. Apparently egalitarian, even anarchic and carnivalesque, such down-class journeys of exploration can also be seen as surveillance operations: recording alien voices, testing the possibilities of subversion, acquiring the political power to contain and reincorporate those voices.[69] In nineteenth-century Britain the first steps towards a democratically-elected parliament were being taken with the 1832 electoral reforms, and there were popular voices to be listened to. As Prince Hal openly states, learning to speak the language of the lower classes will enable him to command the allegiance of 'all the good lads of Eastcheap' in peace and war, in London and at Agincourt.[70]

[67] W. T. Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London: A Burletta of Fun, Frolic, and Flash, in Two Acts* (New York: Samuel French, n.d.), repr. in *Nineteenth-Century Popular British Drama Acting Editions: Part III: Comic Plays*, series editor, Richard L. Lorenzen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), p. 4. (For the authorship of *Life in Sydney*, see below, pp. 46–7.)   [68] Ibid., p. 9.
[69] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 35ff.   [70] William Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, II. 4. 6–17.

Tom and Jerry reached Sydney in 1834[71] and was frequently revived, including on 28 July 1843 at the Royal Victoria, just three days before the script of *Life in Sydney* was completed. A comparison of the two demonstrates how localisation could work, with parallel character-types, settings and actions selected to offer a future fantasy of a Sydney as populous and as full of life and entertainment as London. Moncrieff's original play was subtitled *A Burletta of Fun, Frolic, and Flash* and has Tom and Bob Logic taking Jerry on a tour of London's high and low life. They promenade through the Burlington Arcade, dance at Almack's Assembly Rooms in the fashionable West End, watch a blackface dance by Dusty Bob and African Sal at the lower-class All-Max in the East, overturn a sleeping sentry in his watch box at Temple Bar, visit a gambling club and go to Tattersall's Auction Bazaar where they see a cockney simpleton called Jemmy Green tricked into buying a worthless horse. Gradually the three are reduced to ruinous poverty, but the somewhat minimal plot resolution is provided by Jerry's fiancée Susan Rosebud, who teams up with Tom's and Logic's companions Kate and Sue. In a variety of disguises the three women characters also see life in London through less-approving eyes as they follow, deceive, dance with and sing for the young men who ultimately are convinced by their fiancées' displays of their talents (and their bodies) that imprisonment in marriage and respectable life is preferable to imprisonment for debt.

In staging this picaresque adventure, stage managers drew on all the resources of the popular stage, particularly its preference for music, feats and entertainments. This episodic and quasi-narrative structure was enshrined in law: until 1843, only the patent theatres Covent Garden and Drury Lane were licensed to perform spoken drama. Other London theatres were supposedly limited to singing and other non-dramatic entertainments, although this was interpreted liberally. The term burletta – applied to both *Tom and Jerry* and *Life in Sydney* – indicated a limiting case. In *A History*

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[71] *Sydney Monitor*, 4 June 1834, p. 3; 7 June 1834, p. 2. For *Tom and Jerry*'s controversial reception in Australia see Richard Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville: The Australian Popular Stage 1788–1914* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1990), pp. 24–5.

of English Drama 1660–1900 Allardyce Nicoll points out that burletta strictly ought to refer to burlesque comic operas 'which deal in a ludicrous way with classic legend or history', but that by the nineteenth century 'it had come to mean nothing but a play which could with safety be given at a minor or unpatented theatre'.[72] Nicoll quotes the then censor, George Colman the Younger, who attempted a definition of burletta in a letter to his superior, the Lord Chamberlain, on 24 February 1824:

> Five or six songs in a Piece of one Act for example, where the songs make a natural part of the Piece (*and not forced into an acting piece*, to qualify it as a Burletta) may be perhaps considered so far a Burletta, as not to be refused by the Chamberlain.[73]

Colman was putting a high-art gloss on what at one end of the spectrum included opera but at the minor theatres was a fragmented and opportunistic appropriation of high and low dramatic narratives, enlivened with music, song, dance and spectacle, interspersed with the latest variety turns and athletic exhibitions.

Tom and Jerry was always associated with this alternative, populist world of hybrid theatre and was therefore an ideal vehicle for a sequel with an Australian setting. The play's guided tour structure meant that scenes of London life for Jerry to witness could easily be replaced by those of Sydney: Macquarie Place, a low-class tavern, a high-class hotel, a *nouveau riche* auctioneer's mart, a hideaway for deserting sailors and a major example of public monumentalism: the new Darlinghurst Courthouse. The rudimentary and conventional storyline allowed the three women actors playing the heroines space and time to demonstrate their singing and dancing skills and opportunities to put on masks and fine ball gowns and to display their legs wearing 'breeches' in male disguise: in short, to combine individual skills and local allusions with the genre expectations for women performers on the nineteenth-century popular stage. The motif of Jerry learning the local dialects gave an excuse for explanations of allegedly unique convict and settler slang terms, while bringing the foolish Jemmy Green to Australia enabled colonial society to position itself as more sophisticated than cockney south London: Jemmy is one of the first Australian

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[72] Nicoll III. 194–5.   [73] Nicoll IV. 138 (emphasis in original).

stage 'new chums'. The convict playwright James Tucker went further in another sequel also written in the 1840s: his *Jemmy Green in Australia* makes Jemmy the central character of that play and, as in *Life in Sydney*, the victim of a land-auction swindle.

The London of *Tom and Jerry* is essentially a playground, as yet uncomplicated by the darker vision of poverty, misery, squalor and crime that came with growing urbanisation and industrial-isation. But even this earlier city of pleasure and freedom is a young male construct; for Susan Rosebud, London is 'dangerous', requiring 'secure disguises',[74] and for her Australian equivalents the protection of their men would be necessary if they were discovered to be unaccompanied women in Sydney's Rocks area. The struggle over the ways in which the city could or should be represented spilled over into questions of stage censorship, as those committed to social control attempted to understand and predict the ways in which audiences might interpret dramatic realisations of such cities. *Tom and Jerry*, when first performed in Australia, had moved the *Australian* to observe: 'that which may be very harmless in London, may be very pernicious here';[75] and in 1846 the Colonial Secretary would extend his powers over the stage to include English plays, agreeing that what might be approved by the Lord Chamberlain could be 'locally objectionable'.[76] From the Colonial Secretary's perspective the local setting of *Life in Sydney* made it doubly dangerous: the pranks of gentry and Oxbridge gentlemen of rank in far-away London were easier to interpret as harmless fun, the Prince Hal-like excesses of aristocratic youth, than similar behaviour in a settlement of convicts, soldiers, sailors and runaways of all kinds, where the divisions between exclusivist free settler and emancipist ex-convict were bitter and deep and where violent street battles between police and street gangs persisted throughout the rest of the century.[77]

One of the most attractive of the plays included here and one which could be restaged as a charming historical curiosity is James

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[74] Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry*, p. 6.
[75] 6 June 1834, p. 2; see also *Sydney Herald*, 9 June 1834, p. 2.
[76] Oppenheim 528–30.
[77] E.g., see G. C. Mundy, *Our Antipodes*, 2 vols (London: n. pub., 1852), I. 53.

R. McLaughlin's 1849 comedy-melodrama *Arabin; or, The Adventures of a Settler*. It was based on a novel written and published four years earlier by the Melbourne-based newspaper editor, city councillor and personality, Thomas McCombie. The novel takes as one of its major subjects its hero Doctor Arabin's homesickness and restlessness: while McCombie was a strenuous advocate of British immigration, he tried to give his readers an honest account of the psychological as well as the physical difficulties they would encounter in the colonies. In several dream sequences Arabin is tortured by memories of his childhood home and Scots upbringing, and only at the end is he reconciled to living happily in Australia. The play picks up Arabin's enthusiasm for the Australian bush:

> This is a strange New World. How mighty is the silence of these Forests! The notes of the bell-bird break upon the ear, and all nature seems in a sublime and magnificent repose. It is a lovely scene; and if I could make up my mind to live and die on one portion of the globe, it would be on such a spot as this.
>
> (138:3–7)

The play's storyline deals less comprehensively with Arabin's gradual shift from the life of a wanderer to that of a squatter, but records the good fellowship provided by his visits to the settlers Mr and Mrs Butler and brings into the foreground his conventional but stylish romance with Mrs Butler's sister, Marian Waller.

Amongst the most interesting scenes in both novel and play for a modern reader are those in which Marian rejects the advances of the unstable but passionate neighbouring squatter, Mr Willis. In both, she is unmoved by the revelation that he is a British aristocrat who has inherited a large fortune at 'home'. In the novel he refers to her slightingly as a 'native cornstalk'.[78] The play expands on this: 'Well, you rejected me. I laughed then, in my agony: I gnashed my teeth, to think that I, who might have married the noblest, and the fairest of Britain's daughters, should be unable to win the heart of an unsophisticated Australian Maid' (178:11–14). Already in the 1840s the trope was emerging of a brave,

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[78] Thomas McCombie, *Arabin; or, The Adventures of a Colonist in New South Wales. With an Essay on the Aborigines of Australia* (London: Simmonds & Ward, 1845), p. 14.

independent-minded, young Australian-born woman, accomplished but unpretentious, at home in the bush as in the city, representing the spirit of the nation that was to be. Later Australian colonial and Federation plays would make her a stock central character. Imagining a nation as a young woman is of course traditional. But in a pioneering society where self-reliance and adaptability took their place alongside more conventional feminine values and where many real-life women rode astride, shot game, chopped wood and ran small businesses and large properties, the figure was a powerful and believable marker of difference from imagined European conventions and social and gender hierarchies.

Pageant and pantomime

As the nineteenth century progressed, a split opened up between the popular stage with its increasingly sensational and spectacular repertoire and traditional poetic drama with its elevated language and refined tone. 'It is hardly to be commended', observed the *Sydney Mail* in briefly noticing Walter Cooper's *Hazard* in 1872, 'that the legitimate drama should be put aside for pieces so murderously sensational.'[79] In Australia a significant number of pseudo-Shakespearean and Romantic verse dramas were written and published by Australian 'literary gentlemen', including major politicians such as Alfred Deakin; occasionally there would be an amateur reading or single performance of one of these, but few had much impact. One of the more successful was written by the English poet and dramatic critic Richard Henry Horne, resident in Australia from 1852 to 1869. He managed to have his version of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* given a single performance in 1857,[80] while a 'comedy in blank verse', *A Spec in China*, received two in 1860. Included in this volume is Horne's short 'lyric masque' *The South-Sea Sisters*, which (as already noted) was written for and performed at the opening concert for the 1866 Intercolonial Exhibition in Melbourne, with incidental music by the equally distinguished composer and conductor Charles Edward Horsley.

[79] 20 July 1872, p. 77.
[80] 'Osric' (Humphrey Hall and Alfred John Cripps), *The Romance of the Sydney Stage* (Sydney: Currency, 1996), p. 240.

The South-Sea Sisters barely qualifies as drama, since it has neither individual characters nor a storyline beyond the sequencing of episodes in Anglo-Australian history to that time. But it offers a glimpse of some ways in which both literary and public culture were imagining an Australian nation: the language and allegorical images they were employing, and the quasi-dramatic pageants and processions they used in ceremonies designed to commemorate and celebrate progress by memorialising the past.[81]

At the other end of the spectrum of the uses to which music and theatre might be put, the pantomime was one of the most popular genres of drama introduced into Australia in imitation of British professional theatre. Though originally they had been performed at any time of the year, pantomimes came to be associated with post-Christmas festivities. With their emphasis on topical jokes about local personalities, places, and newsworthy events and gossip of the preceding twelve months, pantomimes were often localised, at least in part, as they were taken from one English town to the next. They provided therefore a flexible form which could be further adapted and used to represent Australian social life: town, suburb and country, architecture, parks, gardens, roads and landscape, significant events, notable people and political intrigues. However, the degree to which stage material was presented as recognisably familiar varied; some localisations were primarily visual backgrounds to conventional plots. One playgoer, thirty years later, remembered the 1855 Melbourne pantomime *The Magician's Daughter; or, Harlequin, King of the Golden Island* as containing 'a scene representing the St. Kilda Beach, with the waves all rippling on the canvas, while the foreground was occupied with the residence of Jocopo, the Magician'.[82] In fact advertisements of the time have the 'exterior of Sig. Jacobo's mystic cell' as scene 4 and 'Sea shore, supposed to be near St. Kilda' as scene 5, but this is what one would expect as an act of memory and inter-pretation – the conflation of Australian landscape with traditional character and story.[83] Topical references and slang expressions were

[81] See Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia*, pp. 8–12.
[82] 'Pantomimes of the Past', *Table Talk*, 4 December 1885, p. 5.
[83] *Argus*, 26 December 1855, p. 8.

regularly added or ad-libbed without substantially altering the basic script, but there are occasional intriguing advertisements for more unambiguously Australian (or more thoroughly localised) works, such as *Harlequin in Australia Felix; or, Geelong in an Uproar*, staged in that city in 1845 and often claimed as the first pantomime with fully-Australian subject matter.[84]

Advertisements for *The Magician's Daughter* in 1855 claimed that 'Books of the words, with full description of the pantomime, will be published on Wednesday morning at the *Argus* Job Printing-office',[85] but no complete libretti for such colonial entertainments survive until those of a decade later. The earliest extant is for the 1866 *Gulliver on his Travels!; or, Harlequin Old Father Christmas and the Fairy Queen of the Silver Acacias!* by William Mower Akhurst. Reusing and combining plots, characters and visual effects was endemic in nineteenth-century popular theatre, and it is not surprising to find that Akhurst's 1866 Australian version of *Gulliver* had a 'Scene III. – A Marine Suburb of the City of Lilliput. The sea coast with broad sandy beach and practicable sea',[86] strongly reminiscent of the St Kilda Beach scene of *The Magician's Daughter* a decade before. As in such earlier work there were only a few direct references to Australia but many hints, such as the main character's name, Dr. L. L. Gulliver, after the Melbourne 'advertising Doctor', abortionist and politician, Dr. L. L. Smith.[87] The next year Akhurst's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* was still Europe-oriented, even offering as one of its many subtitles *The Good Child's History of England*. But in his 1868 *Harlequin Robinson Crusoe; or, The Nimble Naiad, the Lonely Squatter, and the Lively Aboriginal*, and even more explicitly the next year in *The House that Jack Built; or, Harlequin Progress, and the Love's Laughs, Laments and Labors, of Jack Melbourne, and Little Victoria*, Akhurst began to develop a proto-national allegory of Anglo-Australian society. However, this should be seen as celebrating the local rather than rejecting the Empire. In 1870 Akhurst returned to London where he continued to write for the popular stage, including in 1876 a new version for

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[84] *CTA* 261–2.
[85] *Argus*, 26 December 1855, p. 8.
[86] W. M. Akhurst, *Gulliver on his Travels!* (Melbourne: Abbott, 1866), p. 11.
[87] *ADB* VI. 151–2.

Sangster's Grand National Amphitheatre of *Gulliver on his Travels*, but seen from a British perspective (illust. 9).[88]

Within an overall mood of holiday fun, carnival inversion and community celebration, the Christmas pantomime could insert satirical barbs into the powerful and the pompous, who were expected to tolerate their own discomfiture, as the traveller J. A. Froude observed when he visited Melbourne in 1885:

> . . . the Governor and his suite were invited to a special perform-ance. We had an operatic pantomime . . . Some improvised singing, with allusions to local politics, was good natured and well received. The Governor came in for his share of wit-pellets, and laughed as loud as anyone.[89]

By this time however, the pantomime was sliding back towards traditional plots and settings and the topical 'wit-pellets' were only occasional. It is in Akhurst's late 1860s libretti and in those of his successor Garnet Walch in the 1870s, that we find the colonial pantomime in its most vigorously national form.[90]

What Akhurst, Walch and others like them wrote was, strictly speaking, the pantomime 'opening'. Many eighteenth-century scripts are principally descriptions of pantomimic action,[91] with four characters, Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon and Clown, becoming the best known and most widely employed. In the early nineteenth century the genius of Joseph Grimaldi made the clown role dominant and ensured that this highly physical part of the entertainment continued to be popular. Even in the 1880s Froude could still note that 'Two monsters pulling each others' noses in the background, while the chief actors in the play were discoursing in front of the stage, brought down the house.'[92] Energetic physical action was always important, whether strictly choreographed in

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[88] Eric Irvin, 'Nineteenth-Century English Dramatists in Australia', *Theatre Notebook*, 30.1 (1976), 24–34 (p. 26); Programme collection, Theatre Museum, London.

[89] J. A. Froude, *Oceana, or England and her Colonies*, 1886, abridged and ed. Geoffrey Blainey (Sydney: Methuen, 1985), p. 41.

[90] See Garnet Walch, *Australia Felix; or, Harlequin Laughing Jackass and the Magic Bat*, ed. Veronica Kelly (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1988).

[91] E.g. John Rich, *Harlequin Doctor Faustus; with the Grand Masque of the Heathen Deities* (London: T. Payne, [1724]).   [92] Froude, *Oceana*, p. 41.

dance routines or anarchically upstaging the dialogue, and visual excess was also expected, from the delicate magic of the transformation scenes to the grotesquery of the papier-mâché 'big heads' worn by some characters (illust. 10).

Nevertheless, pantomime could be more substantial than this. In *The House that Jack Built* (1869), Akhurst consciously set out to write a history of the colony of Victoria, capitalising on the recent death of the colony's 'founding father', John ('Johnny' or 'Jack') Fawkner. Interestingly, the role of Jack was played by a male actor rather than the more usual woman wearing tights; the pioneering allegory, it seems, was intended to be treated seriously and not blurred by the ambiguity of cross-dressing. Two years later an unknown writer localised the play for Sydney audiences. (Both versions are included in this volume.) Although the performance style shifted towards burlesque with both the hero and the heroine 'Little Australia' being played by male comedians, once again historical elements were foregrounded. The reforming politician John ('Jack') Robertson, the hero of the land reforms in the 1860s, had to his supporters' astonishment and dismay recently gone into alliance with his conservative opponents. This gave the Sydney re-writer the opportunity to combine present satire with a celebration of past achievements.

Melodrama and comedy

If Akhurst is the major figure in establishing Australian authors and subjects in the genres of pantomime and burlesque, Walter Hampson Cooper occupies a similar position in relation to melodrama and comedy. Cooper was the first playwright to localise successfully the emerging popular genre of 'sensation' melodrama, the first known to have had his plays succeed both at home and in the United States (where no fewer than three of his plays were widely performed in the early 1870s) and the first to have had at least one play occasionally revived for many years. An experienced actor who also directed many of his own plays, Cooper knew exactly how to achieve the stage effects he wanted: *Hazard; or, Pearce Dyceton's Crime* (1872), the only sensation play of his to survive, is particularly noteworthy for the precise stage directions which

show how certain illusions were achieved in the era of shutter scenery and gas light.

Hazard is also one of only a relatively small number of surviving colonial plays to attempt to represent an Australian city in any detail. In his work as a journalist, principally for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Cooper had explored some of the lesser-known haunts of Sydney and written what the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* describes as a 'distinguished series of articles on "Sydney by night" [that] mirrored vividly the dives and bawdy houses and their European and Chinese clients'.[93] He clearly set out in *Hazard* to put less sleazy but equally specific images of Sydney on the stage, including a suburban villa, Sussex Street near the wharves and Darling Harbour; and peopled the play with recognisable squatter, politician, worker and society character-types in distinctive Antipodean clothing. Such bold local representations both surprised and shocked the *Town and Country Journal*. The play was 'not so sensational but that it might be true', its critic 'Biron' wrote, while several times in the course of a long and otherwise highly appreciative review emphasising that 'it cannot be taken as evidence of colonial life in Australia'. The critic acknowledged that the bad English, laziness and self-serving sentiments of the politician character 'Sponge Lofer' were accurate and that the comedian William Andrews had based his interpretation of the role on two real-life Sydney personalities, but added that these facts 'only reflect disgrace on our elective system, however true may be the sketch in the abstract'.[94] Whereas the fantasy genres (pantomime, burlesque, extravaganza) were able to be satiric without giving offence, the perceived realism of melodrama, even when comic, placed its representations in a more disturbing frame of reference.

There seem to have been relatively few women playwrights in nineteenth-century Australia. No doubt some of the many anonymous and pseudonymous works were by female playwrights, but literary (and financial) success in such a dubious profession was, for many women, something to be admitted only in restricted circles.[95] Their unacknowledged contribution to other plays is

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[93] *ADB* III. 453–5.   [94] 27 July 1872, p. 116.
[95] One example of this is 'Waif Wander' (Mary Fortune), author of 'the first

certain; women after all were strongly represented in the theatre profession and the collaborative nature of theatrical-script development hardly needs arguing. Garnet Walch, interviewed in 1890 by the Melbourne magazine *Table Talk* at the time of the opening of his and Alfred Dampier's stage version of *Robbery Under Arms*, mentioned warmly the contribution that Dampier's wife, Katherine Russell, had made to that dramatisation; but she was never credited as co-author.[96]

Russell was in fact one of the most successful of perhaps only a dozen women authors known to have had work performed on the Australian stage before 1890.[97] Her comic version of the Flying Dutchman legend, *The Phantom Ship*, which entered the Dampier company's repertoire in 1880, was performed for eleven nights in Sydney in 1886 and twelve in Melbourne in 1890–91 and no doubt there were regional performances as yet undocumented. Most of the colonial women playwrights were, like Russell, also professional actors. Nevertheless, even to arrive at this small number of women playwrights, we are obliged to include such marginal figures as Mrs Henry Hughes, whose 'opera di camera' libretto *La fête du village* was given a single performance starring her husband with his music students as the rest of the cast at the Melbourne Athenaeum Hall in 1875; a translation of an Italian play 'by Miss Solomon' for Adelaide Ristori the same year; and a 'petite burlesque' written and performed by the actor Georgie Smithson as part of a benefit evening at the Sydney Theatre Royal in 1883. Furthermore, in every other noted case except one, the plays claimed as original by colonial women authors were versions of works that existed in earlier dramatisations. A sceptical view of at least some of these achievements would be that the scripts were based on those earlier plays but claimed as original by professional actors for the purpose of evading the expanding practice of copyright litigation.

book of detective stories to appear in Australia, by the first woman writer of such stories' (Miller-Macartney 477). In 1868 she also co-wrote a pantomime (*SMH*, 23 December 1868, p. 8).

[96] 14 March 1890, p. 4.

[97] This estimate is based on Kelly, *Calendar 1850–69* and *Calendar 1870–90*.

The one exception is Helen Lucy Benbow's *For £60,000*, collected here, which also seems to be unique in that it was an original full-length play and was by an Australian-resident woman author who was not a professional actor. It had three commercial seasons between 1874 and 1876, in Bendigo (then known as Sandhurst), Melbourne and Sydney. Further, at Benbow's benefit performance in Bendigo, the actors at the Royal Princess Theatre performed as an afterpiece another short play she had written, thereby making her the only known Australian colonial woman playwright with more than one performed play to her credit.

The melodramatic storyline of *For £60,000* is conventional – the abduction of the heroine by the villain and her rescue, after setbacks, by the hero – and, indeed, had changed little since Melville's *The Bushrangers* forty years earlier. But the play includes, possibly for the first time, several of the national motifs that would become standard in Australian melodramas. Benbow's Emma Lakeland is a development of the bush currency-lass type which started to appear in *Arabin*'s Marian Waller. Emma may be the first of many stage heroines to point out scornfully to the villain that he has 'no timid English girl to deal with, but an independent, fearless Australian' (403:30–32). A colonial variation on a stock character is a comic 'loquacious maiden of uncertain age' visiting from England (399:14–15), who assumes her superiority to colonial society and therefore her right and duty to be Emma's chaperone and instructor in 'maidenly modesty, etiquette, and womanly propriety' (407:13–14). This character-type, with her dislike of Australia and complaint that she has 'come sixteen thousand miles to be called an "old maid," and told to "shut up!"' (408:27–28), would appear little changed in a major success of the Federation stage, Bert Bailey and Edmund Duggan's *The Squatter's Daughter* (1907), where she is similarly abused for her assumptions about gender and Empire. If the authors of such later works did not have a copy of Benbow's play beside them as they wrote, it can only be because such moments of national self-definition by then had become generic.

For £60,000 also continued the already established convention in Australian rural drama of introducing Aboriginal characters and a corroboree, but (again like *The Squatter's Daughter* thirty years

later) combined the exploitation of their exoticism with a statement concerning their dispossession. The callous comedy of the speaker, the 'chuckling bushranger' Ruffian Bill, adds to its unpleasant power:

> BILL . . . He [King Charley] is fretting his old black heart because the free selectors have taken all that the squatters left of his native plains, and, he says, he'll have nothing to leave his sons when he dies – he, he! Its odd that a blackfellow should have a heart, ain't it? But he's breaking his – he, he! (*Chuckles softly*.) (412:3–7)

Benbow's play is certainly not free from racial stereotyping – the Aboriginal people attack the station and assist in Emma's abduction – but it is made clear later that they have been manipulated by the true villain, Horace Tradby. Both Emma and her lover Fred Oakleigh assert the indigenous people's lack of malice. As in Melville's *The Bushrangers*, 'civilised' colonial society had decided that abuses against Aboriginal peoples and consequent conflict could be blamed on brutal and manipulative white ex-convicts.

The first Australian stage classics

Given its convict origins, colonial European Australia was more than usually sensitive to what was in any case one of the era's great obsessions: crime and punishment. By the 1830s, penal Australia was an atavistic survival of earlier practices in a British society which was shifting towards less savage retribution for relatively minor crimes. This jurisprudential shift was echoed in two story archetypes organised around two traditional legal procedures: the testing of evidence and pleas in mitigation.

In the first type of story, of which *For the Term of His Natural Life* is the major Australian example, an innocent person is found guilty of major crime and made to experience the horrors of penal servitude. Such stories are essentially liberal-conservative, since there is no question that a genuinely evil criminal exists and the resolution depends on his unmasking. But they allowed audiences to imagine themselves accidentally condemned to the torture of another world of barbarism from which no one could emerge unscarred, to ponder how frequently mistakes occured in real legal

proceedings and to wish both for more careful considerations of evidence and for more humane conditions of imprisonment in case an error had been made. Lord Blackstone's great reforming legal principle, 'It is better that ten guilty persons escape than one innocent suffer',[98] took on extra urgency as the popular stage used its repertoire of tricks to present stories about mistakes in evidence, both through external coincidences of time, place or perceived identity (brothers, twins, doppelgängers, disguises) and internal tricks of memory (dreams, amnesia, imaginative suggestion), and then indulged in representations of the horrors of undeserved imprisonment and torture.

The second mythic pattern is not concerned as much with errors in law but with setting out social conditions that might lead those not inherently evil to commit criminal actions. Again, a powerful identification of audiences with the criminal was invited: there but for fortune, such stories suggested, go you or I. Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) provided one of the great archetypical narratives, with the petty poacher Jean Valjean's theft of a loaf of bread initiating a pattern of suffering and acts of forgiveness and redemption ignored by the vindictive, vengeful authority figure Inspector Javert. By the time of the Kelly Gang dramas, including the early dramatisations of 1878–82 and the stage *Robbery Under Arms* (1890), but particularly in the very large number of Kelly plays and films presented in the period 1898–1930, the story type had come to focus on circumstance, family obligations and loyalties. The erroneous assumption of guilt by association or mischance led to persecution by corrupt officials and police, and overreaction to minor infringements led in turn to acts of major crime. The role of the bushranger as a rebel against wider state injustices (particularly in the sub-text of the conflict of English with Irish) was muted, reduced to individualised representations of oppression and confused by including comic Irish policemen amongst the representatives of the state.

What links both types of story together is the clash of competing value systems which leads the innocent to conceal their blamelessness or drives the outlaw to greater crimes. In Marcus Clarke's

[98] *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, bk IV, chap. 27 (1765), qtd *ODQ* 110.

novel, Lady Devine is in Victorian terms a fallen woman: she has had a clandestine sexual relationship with her cousin Lord Bellasis and at the time of her marriage to Sir Richard Devine is already pregnant. When her son, the young Richard Devine, is arrested in circumstances where his innocence can be established only by revealing his mother's 'mistake' and his true parentage, he chooses instead to conceal his own identity by becoming the transported convict Rufus Dawes. No suffering or punishment can make him break the oath of silence that family honour requires of him.

This conflict between family values and the institutions of public law and order lies at the heart of the Kelly Gang myth as well. (This was not merely theatrical artifice: the real Ned Kelly railed in his Jerilderie Letter against the oath of office taken by members of the police force, which required them to betray their own families to the law.) Every playhouse and silent-film version of the legend elaborates on this theme either explicitly or implicitly, as Ned Kelly reacts to the molestation of his sister by a drunken constable, tries to control the behaviour of his impetuous younger brother and ruminates on the consequences of his revolt against society and its representatives.

Because of their long-running popularity, the last two plays in this anthology need to be approached rather differently from the first seven. The two most successful stage versions of *For the Term of His Natural Life* were both first staged in 1886, by George Leitch and Alfred Dampier respectively. This was the first Australian stage-story to become part of an ongoing national repertoire, with versions appearing in the repertoire of many companies for at least thirty-five years. Like *Les Misérables*, the stage interpretations of Clarke's novel offered no easy solution to their delineation of the conflict between the family and the state. Dampier's play, written for him by the politician-playwright Thomas Walker, is that chosen for inclusion here. As well as having a longer stage history than Leitch's, it was consistently more popular with audiences.

Around 1898 the provincial Dan Barry company risked the possibility of censorship and performed the first of the second 'wave' of Kelly Gang plays. For the next thirty-odd years, stage and film variants of that story could draw crowds in the city and the bush, from one end of the country to the other. The version chosen for

inclusion in this edition, that by Arnold Denham and another first staged in 1899, was the best known and one of the longest-running of these. (For the composite authorship, see pages 566–8.) Like *Jack Sheppard* and the other English highwayman dramas from which they derived, the Kelly Gang plays ended by grimly agreeing that honesty was the best policy, but similarly failed to explain how the conflict of family and official values could be reconciled.[99] That is one reason for their enduring fascination and power.

Conclusion

Theatre, as it was understood by colonial society, was a carrier of popular myths and a means of expressing mass enthusiasms and anxieties, as well as an industry controlled by the marketplace. In the wider sense of a reality that includes dreams and nightmares, shared obsessions and fantasies, it was as real in its representations as its creators could devise and its technology would allow. In an era which predated the development of many of the alternative providers of information and entertainment to which we are accustomed today, theatre incorporated the news report, the documentary, the annual review of the year's events, the travelogue, popular science and popular history, the fashion parade and the advertising demonstration, as well as the satirical commentary and the voyeuristic or exhibitionistic spectacle.[100] It could be used as a marker of progress or laughed at as an index of primitivism, be acclaimed as a temple of respectable morality or condemned as a sink of iniquity, express conservative values or be a vehicle for radical utterance or a place of carnival freedom.
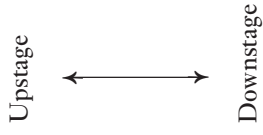
Theatre's cultural meaning was produced by the interplay of all these influences, attitudes, events and genres; by respectable pomp and rakish scandal; by George Rignold as an impeccably British Henry V while equally proper British gentlemen-actors

[99] See J. B. Buckstone, *Jack Sheppard*, in *Trilby and Other Victorian Plays*, ed. George Taylor (London: Oxford World's Classics, 1997), pp. 1–83.

[100] The relation of the theatre to the news media is considered in Harold Love, '"Are You Christopher Sly?": Actors, Journalists and Murderers on the Nineteenth-century Melbourne Stage', in *Masks of Time: Drama and its Contexts*, ed. A. M. Gibbs (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1994), pp. 165–76.

BACKSTAGE

Upstage

↕

Downstage

STAGE LEFT

STAGE RIGHT

Door c. (Centre)

U.C. (Up Centre)

Goes U.L (Goes Up Left ↗)

D.L. (Down Left)

D.R. (Down Right)

R.3.E.

R.2.E.

R.1.E.

L.3.E.

L.2.E.

L.1.E.

WING
SPACE

WING
SPACE

PROSCENIUM

ARCH

FORESTAGE

FOOTLIGHTS o o o o o o o o o

o o o o o o o o o

ORCHESTRA

AUDITORIUM

Plan of the stage, c. 1870

pretended to be convicts under the lash, or cross-dressed as Charley's Aunt. The beliefs such performances generated were sustained by improbable memoirs, by advertising puffs, anecdotes, rumours and lies as much as by real talent, engrossing true stories or genuine production triumphs; by partisan and false accounts of the stage's own history as much as by accurate report or genuine documentation. The public meaning of theatre was unstable, contradictory and based on myths which affected a far wider community than regular theatregoers. The cultural significance of a popular play was produced as much by the legends about it as by the experiences of particular theatregoers at particular performances; indeed perhaps even more by gossip and in spite of any one performance. But, to colonial society, theatre *mattered*. By examining the legends and the popular narratives that the entertainment industry produced and consumed, as well as the more sober realities of its financial structures and means of operation, we can witness something of how that society imagined itself and the world around it.

Note on nineteenth-century staging

As far as is possible, where a playscript in the present edition uses a term which relates to the specifics of staging conventions and techniques, an accompanying footnote explains any aspect of that staging that may not be evident to the reader. One such matter, however, is common to many of the plays: the system of identifying actors' entrance and exit points, and positions and movement on the stage, by a number of abbreviations: 'L.1.E', 'R.U.E', 'D.C.' etc.

For much of the nineteenth century, scenes were changed by sliding on and off two flats or shutters which met in the middle of the stage and together made up the vertical surface on which a picture of the background to a scene could be painted. Grooves in the stage floor and similar grooves above the stage held the top and bottom of each sliding flat while side ('wing') and top ('border') flats blocked out the view of the backstage area. This meant that the stage floor was divided up by these grooves (which ran parallel to the footlights) and the spaces between the wings were the logical entrance and exit points ('E') for the actors. These corridors were consequently numbered 1, 2, 3 (rarely more) from the proscenium

arch backwards, although sometimes 'U' (Upper) was used instead of 2 or 3 to indicate any entrance or exit other than the one closest to the front of the stage. 'L' (Left) or 'R' (Right) indicated which side of the stage the entrance was to be made from or exit made to (the *actor's* left or right, which was the reverse of the audience's). A flat might have a door in it or an upstage 'cut cloth' representing a wall or trees might block only part of the upstage area so a centre entrance ('C') was possible. Positions and movement on the stage were similarly coded left, centre or right, upstage ('U' – towards the back of the stage) or downstage ('D' – towards the audience).

The diagram on page lxxviii shows the system as it would have appeared around 1870. Before this time some theatres, following eighteenth-century and Georgian practices, still had stage boxes and ante-proscenium doors at each side between the proscenium arch and the footlights. The forestage consequently was wider early in the century, but almost disappeared in many theatres built after 1880. The introduction of flown scenery eliminated the need for grooves in the stage; but there were still wing pieces dividing up the sides of the stage, so the old numbering system continued to be used. Another innovation was the introduction of the box set for interior scenes to make the set look like a three-dimensional room (Act I of *Hazard*, staged in 1872, is an early example of this in Australia). The wing pieces representing the side walls of a room went from the proscenium arch backwards at an angle to touch the 'back wall' flat. This meant that the only entrance points were 'practicable' (functional) doors built into those flats. This could not be represented using the old numbering system, but the other abbreviations have survived to the present day.

Editing rationale

Four of the plays collected here (*Life in Sydney*, *Arabin*, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, *The Kelly Gang*) survive only as unique manuscripts.[101] The other five were published as reading versions in their own day. Only Akhurst's *The House that Jack Built* and its anonymous Sydney derivative were commercial publishing ventures (associated with the performance seasons for each

[101] A second, incomplete manuscript survives (prologue and first two acts) of

pantomime); Horne's *The South-Sea Sisters* was a commemorative booklet for the single public ceremony at which it was performed, while Melville's, Cooper's and Benbow's works were each published at the author's expense. All are extremely rare items; only a single copy of Cooper's *Hazard* has been located.

This paucity of sources removes the need for much of the normal business of scholarly editing: the collation of versions, the selection of a copy-text from amongst competing versions and the production of a reading text drawn from these sources, following some stated and consistent principle of emendation. All the plays have been selected for inclusion because they were intended for public performance, but the relationship between the written dialogue and that spoken on the stage, and between the staging instructions (or lack of them) and the movements, gestures, positions, scenery and effects actually realised in production, are both problematic and, to a greater or lesser extent, irrecoverable.

The unpublished manuscripts were intended principally as records of dialogue and sometimes of accompanying action and technical effects; they were not intended to be read for pleasure and vary from the carefully hand-corrected *Arabin* to the extremely slapdash *Kelly Gang*. The printed texts also vary: from the apparently uncorrected page-proof state of *For £60,000* to the letter-perfect *South-Sea Sisters*; and they offer staging instructions varying from the minimal (*The Bushrangers*) to the technically precise (*Hazard*).

While each of the plays has its own particular problems for an editor, the present anthology has adopted as its aim the accurate transcription of each copy-text, respecting as far as practicable the different forms of both manuscript and printed sources. The rendering of manuscript in printed form involves certain adaptations, but nevertheless the principle followed includes transcribing unaltered orthographically any unusual or foreign words and retaining the given forms of punctuation, contraction, abbreviation, compound words, hyphenation and capitalisation, however widely these may vary from modern practice. Capitalisation is followed

For the Term of His Natural Life; however, this appears to be a later, non-authorial transcription.

both in presence and absence, although in holograph manuscripts it is sometimes difficult to distinguish capital letters from small ones. A similar policy has been adopted with the printed copy-texts. Original spellings with historical warrant and eccentric spellings that are not misleading are allowed to stand, as well as other inconsistent presentations. There is always the possibility in playscripts that such forms are meant to encode aspects of spoken language; that is, that they are intended, however imperfectly, as guides to the phrasing, emphasis or rhythm of dialogue. Thus, for instance, interrogatory sentences ending with a full stop are allowed to stand. Although this sometimes results in a noticeable inconsistency, the changed form may well indicate a desired interpretative emphasis. The principal exception to this rule of non-intervention is where unintended ambiguity or obscurity would result from a failure to standardise. In such cases the original form has been listed in the foot-of-page apparatus or, where a number of similar emendations are required (as in *The Kelly Gang*), additional silent categories for the editing of that playscript are announced in the Note on the Text preceding it. In addition, a measure of standardisation in font and typographic layout has been imposed, but nineteenth-century practice has been followed as far as possible, and sample reproductions are provided to give a sense of the original's appearance.

Where necessary, lacunae and illegible elements have been resolved as follows. In each case, editorial intervention is signalled by square brackets and is not separately listed:

1. Any word or portion of a word, apparently omitted inadvertently and required for syntactical sense or for staging reasons, has been added in square brackets where the intended meaning is clear. Otherwise the lacuna remains, although an explanatory note at the foot of the page may speculate on possible meanings.

2. Where a manuscript is indecipherable or incomprehensible, the reading is represented by '[. . .]'; if a speculative reading is given, it is followed by [?]. In some cases, an editorial note can be found at the foot of the page discussing the difficulty.

3. Many of the playscripts are not preceded by a list of characters or settings; where lacking in the copy-text, they are editorially supplied in square brackets.

Editorial emendations, keyed to the main text by superscript letters, are otherwise listed in full at the foot of the page, with the exception of the following general silent categories of emendation:

4. Character names present in abbreviated or variant form have been expanded or standardised. Transcribed play-titles preceding the text retain the capitalisation and punctuation of their copy-text, and facsimiles are provided; but in editorial matter, Contents and half-title pages, the variant forms of the titles have been standardised to a single presentation.

5. Square brackets in published texts have been replaced by rounded brackets (parentheses), so that square brackets may enclose matter that is editorial in origin. Brackets are standard-ised as roman, not italic.

6. Song, play and opera titles, stage directions and other second-ary textual materials that are not in italics have been italicised, placed in parentheses as relevant if these are lacking, and run on. Where a continuous sequence of stage directions is each so enclosed, these directions have been combined within one set of parentheses. However, all character entrances and any accom-panying stage directions have been placed on a separate line at left, removing silently any parentheses or brackets in the original. Holograph underlining, whether single or double, and typed underlining, have been presented as italics, stage locations in italic capitals and the capitalising of full words in ordinary stage directions has been reduced.

7. Except in stage directions, wherever absent apostrophes are required to avoid confusion (e.g. I'll, he'll), and wherever inverted commas are needed to complete a quotation or a parenthesis to complete parentheses, the absent elements have been silently added; but 'its' for 'it is', 'theres' for 'there is', and 'theyve' for 'they have' and the like are allowed to stand in most cases, and similarly errors (judged by modern standards) such as 'your's' and 'MR BUTLER*s parlour*'.

8. The typographic layout of the printed plays, as well as that of the plays in manuscript, has been partially standardised, including regularising the indentation of margins and ignoring

ornamental rules and devices (but respecting, as far as practic-
able, special indentations for songs and the like and changes in
font size); standardising ornamental lettering and capitals; and
starting new Acts (or their equivalents) on a fresh page. Names
of characters in speech headings and stage directions have been
capitalised, expanded and placed flush left, with the text
indented. (The capitalising foregrounds who is speaking and
flags entrances and exits. It also allows actors to skip ahead and
easily locate their speaking and behavioural cues, and readers
to follow this process.)

9. Dashes are presented as spaced en–rules, whatever their form
in the copy-texts; but the special use of longer dashes is respected:
those representing unfinished sentences are spaced, those for
incomplete words are not. Variants consisting only of the
italicising (or underlining) of punctuation are not recorded.

10. Exclamation and question marks do not necessarily terminate
a sentence. But in the absence of other terminal punctuation
(e.g. a dash or a full stop), where the next sentence begins with
a capital letter, a full stop is supplied silently; and also vice versa
when a full stop is present and the next sentence begin with a
small letter. Sentence fragments and stage directions are
exempted from this category.

Where emendations require explanation, this is given at the foot
of the page. Editorial problems particular to an individual play
are discussed in the relevant Introduction or Note on the Text.

Function of the explanatory notes

All these playscripts were intended as direct acts of communication
with actors and other theatre tradespeople, while the published
works also attempted a direct engagement with a general readership.
It was assumed by all the authors that the ordinary reader would
have a sufficient knowledge of the conventions of nineteenth-
century staging not to require the glossing of specialised theatrical
technical terms or abbreviations, while the performance event
similarly relied on a common knowledge base – social, political,
geographical, historical, cultural, literary, theatrical – shared

between author and artists and their audience or readers. While a few authors such as Horne may have sought to transcend the specific historical circumstances in which they lived and have aimed to produce works of enduring literary merit, most were keen to represent the local and particular in their works and some actively sought to include as much of the detail of contemporary life, language, art and politics as possible.

Explanatory notes at foot of page (keyed as superscript numerals sequential throughout each play) are used principally for matter affecting the understanding or interpretation of a word, phrase or scene. This occurs usually on the first occurrence of the reference requiring explanation, unless a later insertion seems likely to assist the reader more. Where a reference occurs to a prominent person who has an entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the British *Dictionary of National Biography* or another standard reference work, the reader is directed to it. Similarly, for other matter requiring explanation, the reader is directed to appropriate and (where possible) scholarly sources. Where a person's forename is unknown, the source is followed to supply his or her title. Imperial weights and measures, currency (pounds, shillings and pence) and fahrenheit temperature are explained in Note on Equivalences.

The aim of the explanatory notes is to situate each play within relevant contexts, including events, major personalities, popular enthusiasms, anxieties and gossip of the time; shared cultural knowledge of star actors and dramatic genres; nineteenth-century stage effects and the technical stage–craft which made them possible. Such meanings were themselves framed by conventions about the times of performances and of parts of the performance, about venues and their geographical location within cities and towns, of theatre itself as a suitable place to represent some subjects and not others, and of the uses to which nineteenth-century playwrights assumed written or printed play texts could be put.

The present edition aims to provide as thorough and detailed guidance in these matters as possible, but no editor can hope to reclaim for a modern readership all the specific meanings, jokes and allusions encoded in these works for their own times, nor be able always to anticipate what assistance new readers will require to maximise reading enjoyment and understanding. There are

always other meanings not yet understood, historical slippages not noticed and probable modern misunderstandings not warned against. The editor can only hope to have begun the task of communicating with accuracy and complexity the dramatic writing of one period of history to another.