

“The Story of Rehearsal Never Ends”

Rehearsal, Performance, Identity in Settler Culture Drama¹

While Canada’s recent re-assessment of the nature of its nationhood in the 1992 referendum is one of the most widely publicized critical re-thinkings of national federations in the post-colonial world, it is not the only one. Australia’s celebration of two hundred years of white occupation in 1988 also provoked re-considerations of ownership and history particularly by Aboriginal groups.² In an age of neo-imperial trans-national trade blocs, Australia has been considering whether it belongs with Europe, Asia, or, even more incredibly, North America. Recent discussions foreshadow moves to re-constitute itself as a republic, and already, Queensland has decided to strike references to the Queen from everything but the state’s now ironic name. Reconfiguring nationhood is characteristic of post-colonial countries whose very existence results from imperial intrusions, and whose “independence” today can be construed as further disruption. Some arguments presented by the “Yes” lobby in the Canadian referendum debate or earlier debates about multiculturalism similarly caution citizens about the dangers of instability. Yet the alternative national constructions that Canada and Australia have been considering depict more appropriately the nature of the post-colonial world; these alternative entities and identities can produce greater regenerative possibilities than politicians seem to acknowledge.

In light of this more or less continual re-negotiation of cultural authenticity, I would like to re-situate post-colonial “identity” in a new, theatrical context. “Identity,” once the principal trope in establishing national selfhood, has been explored by novelists in particular in such texts as George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, which uses the image of the colonial

child, or Chinua Achebe's novels about colonial Nigeria, or Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, among many others. In these contexts, identity—often in conjunction with nationhood—becomes a crucial establishing factor (or metaphor) for a region's political, cultural, and literary independence, and often as an end in itself.

In theatrical terms, "identity" is much less focussed on completion: in virtually all cases, an actor presents an identity separate from her own. This multiplication of identities (the actor's and the character's) invests identity with immediately apparent multivalent personas that are not as inevitably discernible in other literary genres. The public nature of theatre is also conducive to taking the identity issue beyond what might otherwise remain autobiography and/or the personal to the public and the national. Since, as Keir Elam outlines in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, everything on a stage stands for something else, it is possible to "translate" the personal actions of a character on stage to "represent", signify, and even allegorize national events.

Identity has been re-played in a particularly fruitful way by the West Indian novelist, Wilson Harris, in *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) which frames the identity quest in a theatrical context which imposes on the search a repetition that is as endless as the search itself. In Harris's formulation, identity is re-played as a less conclusive, less concrete concept, yet one which is perhaps, now, more useful. *The Infinite Rehearsal* is a fictional autobiography of Robin Redbreast Glass, mediated by "W.H.," chronicling a sort of play that is merely rehearsed infinitely, rather than having the desire to culminate in a "completed" performance. Rehearsal, as Harris notes, suggests incompleteness and "elusive wholeness" (7), or illusory wholeness: it alludes to a wholeness which is never present(ed). This trope which focusses on process rather than product is particularly appropriate to post-colonial literatures which frequently modify imperial requirements of "good literature." Rehearsal, not a trope or technique necessarily integral to narrative or to poetry, is central to theatre, since the performance context invests a play with both the repetition of rehearsal and the repetition of the play's run—playing the "same" play many times. Rehearsal is usually a process that is a necessary preparation *for* performance but superseded by what is perceived to be its more significant sequel and indeed its outcome. Rehearsal becomes a much more implicitly powerful experience than in Harris's novel, and in many post-colonial plays becomes a metaphor that remains on stage beyond the dress rehearsal. It becomes part of a process in which the endlessly deferred product is secondary.

The play experience itself is inherently conducive to the revisionist strategies that post-colonial literatures deploy: in preparing a play for production, actors and/or directors revision or “re-see” how to play a particular role, each contributing his and her own knowledge, experience, and cultural position. Harris’s trope establishes identity as a repetitive process, only ever elusively whole. It is, though, repetition *with* change. As Helen Tiffin notes, decolonization is, after all, “a process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversions of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling” (17). The infinite rehearsal is not so much a counter-discourse as a continuously re-cited/re-sited one. The constant rehearsing and rewriting of the master narratives by post-colonial writers serves not to claim mastery, but to question the basis of the construction of “master.”

Many Australian and Canadian plays exploit the metaphor of theatre and rehearsal, and infinitely rehearse the construction of personal and national selfhood: they force a revision—or a re-acting—of (and to) the traditional paradigms of Canadian and Australian identity. These include Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell’s *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, Djanet Sears’s *Afrika Solo*, and Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*; and from Australia, Louis Nowra’s *Così*, *Summer of the Aliens*, and *Radiance*. Each employs the rehearsal metaphor in their attempts to enable a performance of identity which is different from the “proscribed” national one.

Brian Edwards has pursued part of this debate in the context of national identity in postmodern fiction from Canada and Australia. Edwards argues that the desire for a national identity resembles a “dialectic” which variously “quests for unity and acknowledgments of diversity” (161). Postmodern fiction concerned with the discovery associated with national identity characteristically adopts a project of “un-naming, un-creating and un-inventing” (162). Edwards quotes from Robert Kroetsch’s novel, *Gone Indian*: “This is the consequence of the northern prairies to human definition: the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self” (152). A consequence of more than just the prairies, “the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self” is, I would suggest, a consequence of life and place in a second world post-colonial setting.³ By means of the trope of rehearsal, these Canadian and Australian playwrights pursue very similar sorts of projects,

challenging the fixity of national identity to achieve particular political ends.

Interestingly, while one might expect the inclusion of New Zealand in this comparison, the bi-cultural debate there raises other issues that have not yet been played out in New Zealand theatres. The bi-cultural New Zealand context determines a different sort of identity struggle that, in its present form, has been restricted from becoming as splintered and multi-dimensional as in Canada and Australia. Maori theatre has moved to define itself in other contexts, such as both the explicit demands for land rights and justice, and the implicit desires for respect that emerge from family dramas (Potiki personal interview). Moreover, the centrality (and singularity) of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) offers a more linear history than that found in either Australia or Canada. The finished text of the Treaty acts as a founding document that might be expected to produce a transcendent meaning.⁴

While such identity disagreements may yet emerge in New Zealand, this paper will examine a particular moment in two similar settler-invader cultures: Australia and Canada. The Canadian plays argue—implicitly and explicitly—against the belief that Canada’s identity, that which was “fixed” and celebrated in 1967, continues to be defined by a few well-known signifiers (such as Mounties, Indians, and the Quebecois, and forests and snow). *Afrika Solo* and *The Book of Jessica*, for instance, deny a uniform definition of culture, identity, and nationhood by subverting the traditional performative trope that posits the finished product as the desired result. They both demonstrate that the process of *becoming* theatre—rehearsal for performance—is more significant than the performance itself. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* plays with the constructed nature of performance, and, by extension, the identity that is performed. Identity is also presented as fractured and/or plural in Nowra’s work. The Australian national identity,⁵ traditionally figured as male, white, and realist, is increasingly being refigured. Not only has the presence of writing by “migrants” and women disrupted such a narrow definition of “Australian”; writing by Koori, Murri and Nyoongah writers has also forced a re-examination of Australian identities which, necessarily, also demands a re-consideration of the *modes* of representing different models of identity.

A*frika Solo* provides a paradigm for the infinite rehearsal. A play about the accretion—rather than the discarding—of identities, *Afrika Solo* demonstrates the ways in which rehearsal usefully displaces

a final performance in much the same way that Janet's ethnic background refuses—even refutes—traditional signifiers of “Canadian.” Being African-Canadian in a predominantly white country causes Janet to wonder constantly who she is and can be. Unable to be *just* Canadian, she must always define herself in terms of her question, “Where do I come from?” She attempts to answer these questions by remembering and replaying her visit to Africa, and by re-enacting the television shows with which she grew up. Television, especially given its bias against people of African descent, provides no help in her search for an identity: the beautiful women were never black, and it was even a momentous day when black people were shown at all.

While Janet continues her search for a way to represent herself, the text of *Afrika Solo* also begins to problematize modes of representation. The physical script in drama is generally deemed to be less important than the performance text, but in the case of *Afrika Solo*, the scripted text becomes especially prominent. The play “begins” with epigraphs, an unusual but growing practice for drama: Sears's are from Malcolm X; the old spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot;” and the Star Trek motto, “Beam me up, Scotty.” The pages of the text are decorated with a pattern that could be from fabric or a pot or a basket. This Adinkra pattern is, Sears notes at the beginning of the text, representative of a “restless wandering search, `changing one's self, playing many roles” (ii). The putative primacy of the performance text continues to be deferred, in fact pushed off the stage altogether as an epistemological irrelevance at the same time as Janet rehearses her part to learn who she really is.

Part of Janet's rehearsal process involves adopting another name: she discovers on her travels that in Swahili Djanet means paradise, so by just adding “D,” she is able to “un-name” herself *and* to incorporate some of Africa and the West in her name. She attends to all the tasks that an actor rehearsing a role would do. She rehearses, over and over, the lines that she will say to Ben, the man she is leaving in Africa. She tries different lines, different inflections of the same line, all in an effort to “get it right”, to prepare for the “performance.” Through the course of the play, Djanet “gets dressed,” adding several lengths of cloth to her initial costume of jeans and a t-shirt at various points when it becomes necessary to alter her appearance. By the end of the play, she has completed her dressing, emerging in African Boubou and a headdress so that the “performance” on stage has been in fact the process of preparing for a performance. The “real” performance will come when the Djanet, who

has just completed her preparations for the “role” of Djanet, is ready to go “on” (in both senses). The identity that she arrives at is a hybrid form of Guyanese and Jamaican from her parents, British from her birth, Canadian from her country of residence, and the many African heritages that she has “adopted.” A passport indicates, even guarantees, cultural and national identity: Djanet holds four (Guyanese, Jamaican, British, and Canadian) and she acquires various African cultural “passports” during her journey.

She comes to the understanding that she *is* beautiful, and her African hips, lips, and hair become part of her “baggage” that she takes back to Canada to show off, as she would show a souvenir. Djanet’s bringing back what she learns in Africa is regenerative rather than appropriative: early in her journey she learns that she will not arrive at either a new self or the “completed” identity she begins searching for. The performative Djanet then concentrates on the rehearsal process. In the education/rehearsal process, she appreciates that “sometimes you look in the mirror and you sorta’—catch your own I” (93).

The play refuses performance, then, in the same way that Djanet refuses a specific identity. She finally asserts that her heritage is richly multiple: she refuses to claim just one. She adds to the picture of Canadian identities in a way that is empowering for a large number of Canadians: it is not just a personal exercise for her but a cultural lever to dislodge the stereotyped white Mountie version of “Canadian” from its perceived centrality. She succeeds in broadening the parameters of the field building up entities and identities rather than peeling away layers to find an essence or core. *Afrika Solo* does not articulate identity through the usual colonial split site of enunciation (of Imperial centre and colony); rather, it moves to the multivalent site of enunciation, all valencies of which are accounted for in the construction of Djanet’s “Canadian” cultural heritage.

T*he Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* is more complex in background and execution, but it too resists traditional representations politically and theatrically. Combining the talents of a white actor and improviser (Griffiths), and a Métis writer and activist (Campbell), the text describes Jessica, based loosely on Campbell’s early life. The play explores some of the doubled spirit world of the Métis tradition. Jessica, a heroin-addicted call girl is surrounded by other actors who play multiple roles, including the spirits: Crow, Wolverine, Coyote, and Bear. Later,

Unicorn, signifying Jessica's white side, appears, much to the chagrin of the native spirits. Operating within very calculated transformations, as well as instant, magical ones, the play shifts from mimesis to memory, to the spirit world, to ceremony. When Jessica learns to control her spiritual powers, she understands that until now she has just been "a face with no soul" (166), and the spirits' presence in her life introduces her to a larger identity. The final ceremony of the play sees the spirits disappearing into Jessica. In the trance that Vitaline, her spiritual guide, induces, Jessica sees a figure walking towards her and she can name that figure as herself, Jessica.

The fractured nature of many of the characters becomes significant in several dimensions. At the end of the play, the varied aspects of Jessica's identity—spiritual and physical, as well as her signifiers: displaced native, activist, writer, mother—that she used to read as a "problem" combine to produce an identity that is *more* than a "whole" in the same way that the text is more than a playscript. The split personality is deceptive: it appears to be splintered, but it is actually multivalent, not less than one, but more than one. *The Book of Jessica*, more than just a play about a Métis woman, recounts the play's protracted—and often acrimonious and painful—creation of *Jessica* (and the character, Jessica), a process that both mirrors and inverts historical power struggles between whites and Métis. Issues of identity become more confusing regarding the authors: one of the authors is invited to create and act a stage identity from the life of her co-author. The continual rehearsal process generates similar multivalences that insist on re-reading stereotypic notions of white/Indian/Métis. These forced re-readings then generate revisions of national identity/ies.

Campbell and Griffiths seem mismatched from the beginning, in terms of age, aesthetics, background, and race, but the most significant difference is that of power. The history of Empire is, after all, based on the assumption of the power to represent the "other." Imperial history produces arguments about representation and identity which threaten the project and the delicate relationship between the two women. The disagreements between the women intersect with disagreements between Métis beliefs about art and white beliefs about theatrical practices: in their decision to do the play, the two women decide that Griffiths, the white woman, will play the role of the Métis woman in the first production, but that afterwards, the role will revert to a Métis or First Nations woman.⁶ They are cognizant of the problems in such a casting decision, but they are willing to overlook the difficul-

ties in order to get the story to the stage, using Griffiths's wide experience of improvisation and creation.

The stereotypical view of "Indian" as outsider is challenged in *The Book of Jessica*. While Griffiths takes hold of the power of writing the text—indeed, her name appears first—she feels throughout the project that she is trespassing. It is she—rather than the "Indian"—who is disenfranchised. That position of not quite fitting-in⁷ is not accorded to the Métis Campbell in the experience of *Jessica*, but to Griffiths, the white woman. Her ambivalent position, to use Homi Bhabha's term, rivals Campbell's "inverted" status as "other:" as the authority figure who possesses the answers to Griffiths's questions about authenticity, Campbell maintains a considerable amount of power within the context of the *Jessica* experience, particularly because Griffiths is afraid to offend the Métis Campbell, and hence feels powerless.

This inversion of the conventional victim position does not remain static, though: it is a constantly "switching" (78) relationship. Both women find that the *Jessica* experience forces them to find the person they had "shoved away someplace" (32). The transformations of selves and their focus on the process of performing enabled the women to explore (however reluctantly in Griffiths's case) the nature of the relationship between identity and stereotype, and the connection between personal and political. While Griffiths was adept at taking on other peoples' personalities (which created difficulties as she "took on" Campbell's), she was unable to pursue the exploration of her own off-stage self. The entire text becomes a sacred and negotiated treaty of sorts and hence the medium for cultural exchange and understanding, even if it is extracted at a cost. Campbell "shifts the focus, for the white scholar or writer, from a project of moral self-purification—demonstrating cultural sensitivity or entitlement—to one of political effectiveness" (Hoy 10).

Griffiths and Campbell discover, to their surprise, that the *Jessica* experience is not finished with the conclusion of the play's run. Just as Jessica's identity is not fixed at the end of the play—coming to know her spirits and their powers is just the beginning—the dialogue between these two women continues to evolve. *The Book of Jessica* recalls and repeats the rehearsal procedure, marking the transformations of the text, the women, and the country's race relations. The invocation that Campbell and the actors enact before the curtain rises is a blessing partly to protect the actors from the spirits, and partly to draw strength from the rehearsal process. "The repetition of the invocation accumulated power and strength each time it was

spoken. All of the actors that played Jessica now, call on the strength of the previous Jessicas, so that they, in a way, become the grandmothers of the play itself" (53). The blessing itself recalls the infinite rehearsal. Griffiths continues this metaphor as she concludes the text's first section, "Spiritual Things," by musing, "I think this is still the story of the rehearsals, the story of the rehearsals never ends..." (64). The next section, "The Red Cloth," closes similarly: Griffiths refuses to end the experience with a fairy tale story that will signify any sort of closure. There is always a "post"-script in which more is rehearsed. The relationship, the play, and the white/Métis/native dialogues will have to continue to be re-negotiated, rehearsed, and re-played.

The form of *The Book of Jessica* will not allow the play text to be an icon of a successful and completed rehearsal process. It is both playtext and record of process, but these two components will never add up to a completion. The text is hybrid, not a single, conglomerated whole.⁸ The conflicting textual forms mirror the conflict between the two women as authors; they also highlight the contest between the different kinds of cultural power and different systems of signification: play, history, treaty, autobiography, documentary, interview, the cover graphic, native authenticity, white authority, and white guilt.

Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* alters the infinite rehearsal slightly to replay for the audience the "assumed" performances—assumed in both senses—of the stage Indian. Exploring the incarnations of native women in North America over the last four hundred years, the play differentiates between aspects of two contemporary women and their fragmented, historical, and imposed identities. The union at the end is not perfect, and never can be, given the manifestations of historical Indian signifiers that are layered onto these contemporary women. This dis-union, this un-invention of self, is achieved by means of explicit transformations of space, time, and characters: two actors play many roles, and the structure, set, and costumes all contribute to those transformations. The author notes in her set description that "objects and set pieces appear to be one thing but become something else; they can be turned inside-out to reveal another reality" (17). Likewise, the play reaches no smooth "theatrical" conclusions. The stage is "littered" (17) with discarded props from each of the manifestations of the two characters.

Princess Pocahontas depicts the various "selves" of the two women by

combining them into one “Indian” signifier. As the play opens, the 498th Miss North American Indian Beauty Pageant is about to begin, hosted by “George Pepe Flaco Columbus Cartier da Gama Smith,” (18) but his preferred name, Bob, de-signifies the conglomeration of signs that collude to create his “full” name.⁹ Similarly, the other characters combine to include all the ways in which “Indian” has conveyed meaning in popular culture. Rather than culminating in a greater signifier, these signs (in themselves significant) lose their meaning: they become a virtually undecipherable mass of empty signs, emptied by their being placed in contradiction to each other and to the Contemporary Women who must deal with them.

The beauty contest continues to introduce Princess Buttered-on-both-Sides whose musical signifiers establish all the stereotypes in one to reveal much more than just “Other.” As Barbara Christian has said, “many of us have never conceived of ourselves only as somebody’s *other*” (54); the play highlights just how the Indian Other is “other” to natives too. Daniel Francis usefully differentiates between “Native” (“The actual people”) and “Indian” (“the image of Native people held by non-Natives”) (9). This distinction is particularly appropriate: just as Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, in *Dark Side of the Dream* speak of Aboriginalism (in the same way that Said speaks of Orientalism), here we may speak of Indianism.

Considering various manifestations of the Hollywood Indian stereotype, the play confronts the constructed images of Storybook Pocahontas and the Cigar Store Squaw. In the Troubadour’s version of the story of Pocahontas, the storybook version of her life, he sings,

And so here ends the legend
of the Princess Pocahontas—
Fa la la la lay, fa la la la la LELF—
if you want any more, make it up yourself.
chorus
Heigh-ho wiggle-waggle
wigwam wampum,
roly-poly papoose tom-tom
tomahawk squaw. (31-2)

The obviously nonsensical chorus (filled, nevertheless, with icons of Hollywood “Indianness”) underlines the final line of the verse: that Indians will be constructed in whatever fashion whites require. *Princess Pocahontas* refuses stereotyping by ironically recombining and replaying the stereotypes to expose the constructs for the convenient, hollow, white-invented icons

that they are. The many Indianist representations available for performance in *Princess Pocahontas* can be re-used, like the bits and pieces of the set, but re-used with a critical distance that invests the performer with the cultural power. Here, then, rehearsal is slightly skewed: the rehearsed images have been replayed through several hundred years of representation.

The play also provides new roles for Contemporary Woman #1 and Contemporary Woman #2. The roles they repeatedly try to establish are designed to *begin* non-Indianist representations of native women, representations which can then be replayed in other theatrical contexts. In this context, the play's re-assessment of the place of native women in feminist debates has particular agency. Just as natives cannot be equated with the Cigar Store Squaw, nor can they be left out of International Women's Day. Contemporary Woman #1 talks about how feminism generally resists enabling all women, as individuals, to participate:

No, I didn't go to the march. (*cross to centrestage, very deliberately making footprints in sand*) So many years of trying to fit into feminist shoes. O.K., I'm trying on the shoes; but they're not the same as the shoes in the display case. The shoes I'm trying on must be crafted to fit these wide, square, brown feet. I must be able to feel the earth through their soles.

So, it's International Women's Day, and here I am. Now, I'd like you to take a good look—(*turns slowly, all the way around*) I don't want to be mistaken for a crowd of Native women. I am one. And I do not represent all Native women. I am one. (58-9)

The categorization of native women as either just native or just women continues to enforce the singular classifications of people within the national identity paradigm which institutionalizes its own specious singularity by accepting for incorporation only other singularized identities. *Princess Pocahontas* demonstrates that natives must always remain "native," not differentiated, individuated women.

With its emphasis on de-categorization—but not assimilation—the play's focus becomes a mixture of voices that "speak" graphically as well. The movement of the two women on the stage, combined with their dances and their songs suggests many voices, each with a different tune, message, and style. The text recalls Djanet Sears's graphic designs for the text of *Afrika Solo*:¹⁰ the symbol in *Princess Pocahontas* is a circle containing four circles, each bearing an ear of corn. The presence of these symbols again highlights the textual process as just that—process, and a process that is in itself significant (that is, implicated in signification). The process does not have to arrive at a specific moment or site, just as the two contemporary women

know that they will not arrive at fully reconstituted selves: the transforming natures of the women and the plays are themselves the defiant, re-active, un-inventing means to challenge the fixity of identity and stereotyped assumptions of the “Indian” place within the national identity. *Princess Pocahontas* refuses the concluding moment by explaining in Spanish and English that “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground” (60). The hearts of native women still beat strong in representations that *they* construct. While they don’t entirely refuse the signifiers that have been thrust upon them and in fact transform them for their own purposes, they reserve the right to develop their own individual signifiers for “native” and for “woman” as well.

Canada’s constitutional considerations can be more immediately read into the re-defining of identity in these plays, given the recent referendum. But Canada’s specific constitutional dilemma also has resonances with wider post-colonial concerns, particularly in settler-invader cultures. Australia’s constitution was signed on 1 January 1901, precluding the meetings, debates, discussions, and referenda that Canada is still experiencing. The recent and continuing debate concerning republicanism has been couched in terms of unity, identity, and repatriating the singular headship of state. The anxiety about security that arguments of stability and unity raise has resonances with Australian theatre where there is a tentativeness, an insecurity that results more from a changing country than an inability to write plays. Few Australians still focus on the ocker and other character types that only confirmed the stereotypes established for a minority of the country’s population. Louis Nowra’s work always includes characters who are unsure who they are and where they belong: these characters, and the plays as a whole, work as devices to communicate the post-colonial un-naming and un-creating of fixed identity. While nationally, politicians strive to produce arguments about unity, security, and how strong such a country will be, Nowra’s work capitalizes on the dis-unity of the collective Australian psyche. Three of his most recently published plays, *Summer of the Aliens* (1992), *Così* (1992), and *Radiance* (1993), reproduce the rehearsal and abrogation of final performance in a way that is similar to the Canadian plays.

Così self-consciously uses theatre, metatheatre, and autobiography to destabilize the identity that frequently characterizes settler-invader colonies. The play describes the fictional Lewis’s directorial debut with a group of

psychiatric patients in a heavily edited version of Mozart's opera, *Così Fan Tutte*. The play-within-a-play they present miraculously works, despite disasters along the way, not the least being frayed tempers, an active pyromaniac, and many broken relationships. After the "cast" and the "director" finish up their play and say their goodbyes (and Roy, one of the patients, makes plans for the next project, *Don Giovanni*), and Lewis addresses the audience to explain what happens to him and to the patients, he says, "Time to turn out the lights" (81). This play-within-a-play repeats itself quite spectacularly: at the "end," the musician begins the play all over again. The stage directions indicate that "[t]he performance is over" (76), but as the stage lights are extinguished, Zac awakes from his drug-induced torpor, announcing to the audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, the overture to *Così Fan Tutte!*" (81). He then plays on the piano Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries," accompanied at full volume by a recorded orchestra. The play-within-a-play concludes, only to start all over again. The infinite rehearsals that seem even more infinite because of the varying degrees of psychosis in the patients are "concluded" by a performance that doesn't end: again, a final, definitive performance is refused on each level of the theatrical sign system.

Così is both autobiography and metaphor of the settler post-colonial situation. Taken initially from events in Louis Nowra's past (as he says all his plays are), Lewis's life and the play's life also have agencies of their own. Yet the life story (especially when it is combined with *Summer of the Aliens*) quickly becomes a vehicle for expressing other issues that are, in *Così*, typified by the asylum. While Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* exploits a "world is an asylum" metaphor, *Così*'s world is far more complex. If the post-colonial settler condition is one of being colonized while simultaneously colonizing an indigenous population, then *Così* quite appropriately depicts the ambivalence of this situation. The asylum patients, protected from the outside world because they cannot deal with the larger world, are also incarcerated to protect the world for similar reasons of "incompatibility." The multiple roles that the patients play in the creation of the play-within-a-play further broaden the signifiers for each character in *Così*. The play refuses to rest with the categorizations that initially define everyone (including those who are not patients). The play's layers become even more complex: while a time and place are specified, the play's own agency determines its larger resonances. Autobiography gives over to metaphor, but, as ever, Nowra's plays do not rest on one metaphoric level. Like *The Golden Age* (1985), the play

for which Nowra is best known, the asylum patients can be metaphoric of Aboriginal populations incarcerated to protect the white population, but they cannot be just that. However and whatever they signify, the asylum patients again question fixed identities and roles in a post-colonial setting, demonstrating even the therapeutic results of refusing limiting labels.

As the settler-invader's life is mediated, as the asylum patient's life is mediated, so is *Così Fan Tutte* also mediated, indeed heavily edited, for playing here. Partly a convenience, partly for humour, partly for the counter-discursive implications, the cut script in its re-rehearsed state becomes the trope for identity politics. Modification, re-reading, re-editing, rehearsing demonstrate the inappropriateness of a definitive version of the opera and of Australian identity/ies. No pre-determined identity is possible or assured in this play's world, as the versions of each character's self are "played out:" the roles that they choose, the roles that they are given, and the multiple selves created by the psychoses of many of the patients. The characters continually re-create "self" throughout *Così*, sometimes tragically, as Lewis's epilogue-of-sorts reveals. The performance and rehearsal metaphors replay far more than just the acted world.

The notion of split and multifarious identities is developed further in the play that immediately precedes *Così*. *Summer of the Aliens* considers Lewis at age 14, approaching adulthood one summer in the early 1960s. *Summer of the Aliens* is in part a play about growing up, and the fully-grown narrator, Lewis as an adult, stands at the edge of the stage throughout the play and watches himself: there are, then, two Lewises on stage. The adult Lewis mediates the younger man's activities for the audience: "That's me: Lewis. ... I'm waiting in the gully for the shooters to finish" (2), as his oblivious, younger self prepares to rescue spent cartridges.

Unlike many of the other plays, and indeed most other plays by Nowra, the performances in *Summer of the Aliens* are not designed to imitate a play. Rather, it imitates *play*, rehearsal of identity and self, and highlights layers of specularity both in terms of an audience watching and in the context of the conscious construction of self, and the shifting nature of identity and how performance helps to create that identity. The narrator re-evaluates his younger actions and wonders what might have happened if things had worked out differently. At one point, the narrator forces Lewis to go back and re-vise an action that he has just completed. The narrator occasionally merges with the action to help out the young Lewis, culminating in a ques-

tioning of the younger self that forces a re-evaluation of the self that both Lewises have established for themselves. Identity is not the innate trait that the young Lewis had assumed it to be. The aliens of the title live within everyone, the young Lewis decides, and this results in everyone possessing a fractured persona. Lewis learns how this fracturing begins to affect him: the play reconciles the two versions of Lewis (young and old)—not *to* each other—but to *mimicking* each other.

The young Lewis learns that the way to survive is to rehearse roles: he mimics adults as they mimic other adults, scenes from their own childhoods, and their fantasies. There is mimicry with difference here, a concept to which Nowra alludes in his introduction. The acting and en-acting of a “life” can always only be a compilation of personas, not a final, completed self. The Frankenstein activity that Nowra says he mimicked in the *writing* of the play (“I was a Teenage Alien,” x) also becomes incorporated in the *action* of the play: “Like the doctor, I have raided the graveyard of my memory and have created a monster out of the various limbs and appendages I could dig up” (x). This is a much more personal (than national) account of identity, but its place in the paradigm is nevertheless significant in that the *acting* of many personas that forms the basis of the play—both in construction of characters and in their doubled manifestations on stage—deconstructs any desire for singular representation.

Mimicry is not the only way in which to construct identity, as the “experience” of Dulcie, Lewis’s childhood friend, demonstrates. Dulcie is sent to a “reformatory” girls’ home after being blamed for sexual abuse perpetrated by her stepfather, and Lewis never sees her again. The narrator takes the opportunity to ask Dulcie what happened to her. Her response is: “I don’t know, because you don’t know” (83). This “anti-definition” of Dulcie’s character oddly recalls the Troubadour in *Princess Pocahontas* who tells the audience, “if you want any more, make it up yourself” (31). In both plays, Pocahontas and Dulcie resist quick labels or stereotypes: perhaps they are ultimately “not knowable.” The absence of specificity for Dulcie’s future (now past), and the transformability of Lewis’s past emphasize the possibility of a much more elastic definition of self that eventually helps Lewis to determine his own multivalent sense of self.

Lewis’s father leaves the family yet again, and the narrator comments that he never heard from him again. The narrator takes this opportunity to question his father onstage, as the “action” of the play is suspended for the

narrator to examine the threads of his life: "Where did you go after that?" His father's response, "Wherever you imagined I did" (72), as open as Dulcie's statement about her "future," suggests each of the several possible interpretations of self that Lewis is left with can be true. Lewis's father refuses any form of definitive identity or narration, something the doubled construction of Lewis eventually also achieves.

The narrator concludes the play by telling the audience, "Eventually Lewis and I merged. To become me, because of him" (84). Two actors still remain on the stage, however: the merging is never "perfect." The premiere of *The Summer of the Aliens*, in Melbourne, starred Louis Nowra as the narrator. Known more for his writing than his acting, Nowra's way of playing the "role" was significant in the context of this paper. He played the part as if he were recalling details, remembering his lines, rather than replaying a fluidly rehearsed part; in other words, he did not "become" the narrator or "act" his part.¹¹ Nowra's performance was less like a performance, more like the mediation of life, reality, and identity. The play cannot be a representation of the completed past if it can be interrogated like this. *Summer of the Aliens*, then, is a consideration of the possibilities of a life, presented in a form that mirrors those possibilities, and becomes, like them, conditional, mediated, and infinitely rehearsed.

Nowra's most recent play, *Radiance*, continues in this same vein of infinitely rehearsing the self. The play opens with three half sisters (Mae, Cressy, and Nona) meeting after many years to bury their mother on the central Queensland coast. The youngest, Nona, mimics the middle sister's work as an opera singer: Nona recreates *Madama Butterfly*, the role she saw Cressy perform once in Adelaide. The performance parodies opera and Puccini's story, but it also highlights Cressy's fractured identity. Skilled at playing someone else from an early age to escape the memories of her childhood, of being taken away from her mother and being sent to live in a convent in Brisbane, Cressy assumes with ease the identity of others in operatic roles.

Mae's "play acting" involves wearing her mother's wedding dress, a dress that her mother never wore, a prop for a performance that never took place. Bought on layby for the day that her lover would leave his wife and marry her, the dress remains hidden in shame until Mae discovers it. In an attempt both to exorcise the ghost of her mother and to try to feel from it who her mother was (and by implication, who she is), Mae introduces the central link between the sisters, an Irish folk song, "Who is She?" This song, a par-

ody of identity, is, the women discover, the only thing that they all learned from their mother. Mae in particular is desperate to determine who she is, while Cressy keeps trying to escape her memories and to become the other people that she embodies in her personal—as well as her performing—life. Nona, on the other hand, defines herself through the Black Prince, her father, about whom her mother spun stories. She decides that if she can only meet him, then she'll know who *she* is. She presents a variety of scenarios about how she'll meet him at a rodeo, and even make love to him, reserving the announcement of her identity until the morning after. The play concludes with the revelation that Nona's mother in fact is Cressy who was raped at age 12 by a man who was no prince; the total disintegration of everything that had defined Nona necessitates a complete reconstruction of her persona. The three all rehearse their identities and personalities in different ways that pursue the trend of *Summer of the Aliens*. The new knowledge of re-ordered kinship at the end of the play does not resolve anything since the identities that are confused and composite at the beginning of the play remain so at the end. In other words, the constant rehearsal of Cressy's playing other people, of Mae's determination to answer her question—"Who is she?"—and Nona's desire to define herself through her father are activities that intersect centrally with the rehearsal motif. The answers to all the questions that the women have about themselves are magnified by the rehearsal.

While they try to contain themselves and their identities, the uncontainable identity metaphor spills over, just as the water of the mud flats in *Radiance* engulfs the actors on the stage. In the premiere production of *Radiance* at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney in 1993, the stage was flooded with about five centimetres of water as the sisters walked across the wet mud flats and the lighting produced endlessly changing swirling patterns on the walls and ceiling. Brian Thomson's design appropriately conveyed the innumerable and the forever unanchored answers to the question they sing, "Who is she?"

Identity in these plays can be added to, but it does not add up to a final sum or solution. The texts insist on repetition with transformation, rejecting the notion of performance as a singular moment of presence. The "process" of re-negotiation is more important than the moment of arrival, a moment which will in fact never arrive. Rehearsed and provisional identity is, then, paradigmatic of hybrid cultures which com-

bine but don't fuse several cultures to create a new entity, but not a specific, singular one. Laura Mulvey talks about Canadian identity being political first, bringing culture and ideology to the debate secondarily (10). It seems, though, that the theatrical metaphors demonstrate implicitly the political dimensions of national identity/ies.

If the metatheatrical metaphor can become a strategy for post-colonial resistance, then infinite rehearsal is one important way of recognizing the un-fixed, malleable, changeable, transformable and transformatory nature of colonies. These unstable qualities do not de-stabilize governments or peoples; rather, they ironically re-stabilize by allowing people to recognize that they need not fit into a specific national type. The un-naming, and un-creating can be as productive as unity and singular representations were once thought to be. The entire post-colonial situation is one of concocted and re-concocted identities, which must be accommodated, not hushed up or shoved into embarrassed corners.

Tony Fry suggests that in the search for a clearer sense of the future of Australian studies, "we need to say farewell to nation (as nation state). Just as from other parts of the world nations are saying farewell to us, in their breaking up, deformings and reformings" (19). This is, I think, hasty. As long as the rhetoric of nation can be altered to recognize the continuous reforming of the components of nationalism, such a drastic measure is unnecessary. Homi Bhabha recognizes the positive possibilities within the national paradigm: "The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, the ethnography of its own historicity and opens up the possibility of other narratives of the people and their difference" ("DissemiNation" 300). By embracing on such notions, and re-directing the infinite narrations of the nation, the infinite rehearsals in Australian and Canadian plays take on important political dimensions that suggest multi-valenced directions for both countries in constitutional, political, and artistic arenas.

NOTES

- 1 "Infinitely Rehearsing Performance and Identity: *Afrika Solo* and *The Book of Jessica*" was published in *Canadian Theatre Review* 74 (March 1993): 35-39. This paper has emerged from further consideration of many of the issues in the early paper. The title of this paper is from *The Book of Jessica* 64.
- 2 The recent announcement that the 2000 Olympic Games will be held in Sydney has created speculations that Aboriginal groups will again—understandably—use international events to embarrass the Australian government sufficiently into acting on the High Court judgment concerning land claims.

- 3 “Second world” is a concept that Alan Lawson has discussed in “A Cultural Paradigm for the Second World.” In “Un/Settling Colonies,” he argues that the settler-invader colonies are forever caught between the First World authority and authenticity of Europe, and the First Nations authority and authenticity of the displaced and desired indigene.
- 4 This is not to suggest that there is perfect agreement regarding the Treaty. Disagreements exist over interpretations and translations, not over the originary and/or derivative identity/ies that the document and its primacy have established.
- 5 Constructed by writers earlier in this century (such as Vance Palmer), the Australian National Tradition posits a singular literary tradition dating from the 1890s that was designed to create a positive and positivist direction for the young country. It did, however, prove to be quickly ingrained and exclusionary. See also Alan Lawson 1980, Richard White 1981, and G.A. Wilkes 1987.
- 6 This contract was later broken by Griffiths and Paul Thompson, the director of *Jessica*.
- 7 Campbell records in her book, *Halfbreed*, several such experiences about Métis people not quite fitting the clothes that they wore or the situation in which they found themselves.
- 8 Hoy seems to arrive at a similar conclusion, that the text appropriates *and* restores the health of the community, just as Campbell says art is supposed to do.
- 9 Ruby Langford’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town*, an Australian Koori autobiography of sorts, begins with a similar listing of all the names by which Langford has been interpellated. The names do not, however, become emptied of signification as they do in *Princess Pocahontas*. Langford concludes, “You can think of me as Ruby Wagtail Big Noise Anderson Rangi Ando Heifer Andy Langford. How I got to be Ruby Langford. Originally from the Bundjalung people” (2).
- 10 The graphics in *Princess Pocahontas* are created with the help of Djanet Sears.
- 11 Nowra was asked not to repeat the role in the Sydney production in 1993. In an arts column with the playful headline, “Summer actors, summer not,” Nowra reported that, “If I wanted to be in it, then it wasn’t going on” (qtd in Jones).

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