

REVIEWS

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Hilary Glow (2007).
Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda.
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Power Plays: Australian Theatre and the Public Agenda is a reshaping of a PhD thesis completed at the University of Melbourne in 2007. As the co-supervisor of that thesis, my long association with the author and the project may well influence my review of the published work. This privileged position, however, also allows me to make some comments about the potential for publication beyond the PhD that are relevant in a volume that is focussed on research. Like many research higher degree candidates in drama, theatre and arts education, Hilary Glow brought many years of experience as an arts manager, dramaturge and drama lecturer at the Victorian College of the Arts to her investigation of contemporary Australian drama. As she indicates in the book, while *Power Plays* began its life as a PhD thesis, the perspectives on Australian drama outlined in the book emerged out of her long-standing interest in contemporary theatre and her ongoing work with writers as a dramaturge. Enrolment in a higher degree provided her with an additional impetus to undertake the investigation necessary to bring the ideas to fruition.

Power Plays is concerned with the ways in which contemporary Australia playwrights influence public debate through their exploration of the cultural, political and social life of the country. Glow's work focuses on a group of artists writing for the mainstream theatre — Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Reg Cribb, Ben Ellis, Wesley Enoch, Hannie Rayson, Stephen Sewell and Katherine Thompson — and is concerned with both the political and social motivations of the writers and the socio-political context in which they are writing. The book is based on a series of interviews with the artists and an analysis of their recent plays. The earliest play considered is Enoch and Deborah Mailman's *The 7 Stages of Grieving* in 1996 and the latest is Sewell's *It Just Stopped* in 2006.

Glow emphasises that these writers are not of the same generation, nor do they constitute a 'movement' like the 'Next Wave'. Her rationale for grouping them is that 'they (all) understand their work as explicitly political in the sense that they are engaged in the task of challenging systems of power'. Glow argues that the writers engage in a 'critique of the nation' using 'familiar icons, idioms and characters'. She references Ghassan Hage's idea of 'affective attachment' to a nation as binary — 'caring' or 'worrying': 'The plays here act as a critique of "paranoid" or defensive nationalism while at the same time manifesting a "caring" attachment to the images of nation they produce'. Glow is specific in what the plays are critiquing, suggesting that 'they can be read as a repudiation of the Howard Government's rhetoric around one nation'. As an 'important countervailing voice' against its 'hegemonic, nationalist discourse', she claims the plays 'speak against the grain of the neo-liberalist enterprise'.

The book is structured into five themed chapters, each dealing with a topical issue from the Howard years, analysed through the way in which these are dealt with in the plays under discussion. Chapter 1, 'Indigenous Identities', focuses on the emergence of autobiographical and biographical story telling in recent Indigenous plays, arguing that these works demonstrate a political theatre in which 'self-representation is the key rationale and purpose'. This chapter offers a potted history of Indigenous theatre since the 1960s, an introduction to the autobiographical/biographical works and an analysis *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, described by author Wesley Enoch as a 'constructed autobiography where the story of the protagonist has a metonymic relationship to the stories of others in the Indigenous community'. Glow argues that this work and others allow for a recognition and revaluing of Indigenous experience; they facilitate intercultural exchange in the theatre space, destabilising whiteness as the 'default position' and re-negotiating the idea of Aboriginality by presenting the Indigenous person as subject rather than object.

Chapter 2, 'The History Wars', begins by recalling former Prime Minister John Howard's public criticism of the so-called 'black armband' view of history and subsequently analyses a group of plays which engage with the history of white settlers and the associated dislocation and oppression of Indigenous Australians. Glow focuses on Katherine Thompson's *Wonderlands* (2003) and two plays by Andrew Bovell — the full-length *Holy Day* (2001) and the one-act *The Chair* (performed as part of *Fever*, 2002). These three plays engage with white-black relations and, for Glow, with the debate and re-interpretation of history, and the critical and contested 'relationship between national identity and national memory' where issues of race and belonging are pivotal.

Chapter 3, 'The Politics of Place', analyses dramatic representations of rural Australia through Hannie Rayson's *Inheritance* (2003), Ben Ellis's *Falling Petals* (2003), Katherine Thompson's *Navigating* (1997) and Reg Cribb's *Last Cab to Darwin* (2003). In this chapter Glow investigates the 'familiar iconography of the outback' and the way in which these works re-imagine the myth of the bush and the iconic rural character against the changing political and economic relationship between urban and rural Australia. Glow suggests that the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party both built on and exacerbated the increasing polarisation of urban and rural Australia. She sees these plays as interrogating a right wing essentialist vision of Australia which values mateship, egalitarianism and the family unit.

Chapter 4, 'Globalisation and Class', discusses a group of plays which critique the global emergence of neo-liberalism and economic rationalism and its impact on Australian politics and Australian workers. The plays are Katherine Thompson's *Harbour* (2004) which is set in the context of the dispute between waterside workers and Patrick Stevedores in 1998, and *Who's Afraid of the Working Class* (1998), a multi-authored work produced by the Melbourne Workers' Theatre. Glow argues that these works offer a bleak view of the marginalisation of the poor and working class and 'document the deterioration of a social liberalist philosophy' in the past decade.

Chapter 5, 'Fortress Australia', addresses multiculturalism in the theatre and most particularly the dramatic exploration of asylum seekers in Ben Ellis' *These People* (2003) and Hannie Rayson's *Two Brothers* (2005).

Chapter 6 focuses on plays informed by the events of September 11, 2001 and ‘the climate of fear produced by the ‘war on terror’. Glow analyses two plays by Stephen Sewell — *It Just Stopped* (2006) and *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America* (2003).

Power Plays argues that the group of contemporary plays discussed offers a compelling critique of Australian nationalism as it emerged during former Prime Minister John Howard’s administration. Given the recent change in Government in November 2007, it is a timely book in that it allows for a reflection on a discrete political period. It also offers the reader an opportunity to understand the ways in which playwrights contextualise their work and the role that dramatists can play in provoking public debate about government policy and particularly its impact on the individual. It is topical, well written without academic jargon and uses theory in a way that does not exclude the lay reader. For upper secondary and tertiary teachers it provides a clear analysis of key recent plays, many of which have become part of the contemporary Australian ‘canon’. It also includes useful source material from interviews and reviews. Because the author is so consistent in her view, the chapters offer an excellent starting point for debate about topics of genuine contemporary interest to adolescents and young adults. *Power Plays* is an excellent example of a PhD which allows for a relatively easy transition from thesis to published text. For PhD candidates looking for a thesis model that demonstrates how to develop and structure a tightly argued thesis, it is a recommended read.

I have some criticisms of this text, despite my recommendations. *Power Plays* has a rather narrow socio-political focus and a limited audience target. At times I felt it was preaching to the converted — a middle class and educated audience whose views would concur with those of the writers she discusses and with her own. Glow has drawn quite a lot of her data from interviews with the writers and, as a dramaturge, she has worked professionally with some of them. There is always the danger of celebrating rather than critiquing the works of those research subjects and sometimes Glow writes as an advocate rather than critic. Her position as an author closely involved with the contemporary theatre industry also offers a point of discussion for teachers using this text.

Janinka Greenwood and Arnold Manaaki Wilson (2006).

Te Mauri Pakeaka: A Journey Into the Third Space.

Auckland University Press: New Zealand.

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Te Mauri Pakeaka tells the story of an innovative arts education program established in New Zealand during the late 1970s and conducted until 1988 when it ended with the closure of the Department of Education, which had fostered and supported the program. The subtitle of the book, ‘A Journey into the Third Space’ refers to both the evolution of the program over its ten-year history and the creation of a ‘third space’ or meeting place between Maori and Pakeha (New Zealanders of British or European descent) where identity and culture might be explored and shared through the creation of artworks. While the authors acknowledge post-cultural theorist Homi Bhaba’s use of the term, ‘the third space’, their use is specific to the New Zealand context. The term ‘Pakeaka’ refers to ‘the pause for re-assessment occurs before a conflict, allowing the possibility of an outcome where conflict is avoided’.

The *Pakeaka* project provided an opportunity for students, teachers and members of the community to engage with Maori values, approaches to learning, art making and culture, often within the setting of the *marae*, the dedicated communal ground and meeting house which is the focus of the spiritual and practical activities of the indigenous people of the area. In this way, the *Pakeaka* project can be seen as part of the continuing process of cultural and political negotiations between Maori and European New Zealanders and a 'significant episode in New Zealand's cross-cultural history'. The book records the history of this fascinating educational experiment and the way in which it interrogates the eurocentric culture of education in New Zealand during the period. *Pakeaka* challenged not only issues of cultural identity and knowledge hierarchy but also the closed structures and philosophy of colonial education: 'What happens in the third space is unscripted. It evolves out of dialogues, confrontations, accommodation, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries'. The authors suggest that the *Pakeaka* project involved the gradual awakening of a *taniwha* or a mystical spiritual force which took on its own life as the project evolved.

Te Mauri Pakeaka is jointly authored by a Maori artist and educator, Arnold Manaaki Wilson and a Czech born 'Pakeha' academic, Dr Janinka Greenwood. While the book is broad in scope and benefits from this dual cultural perspective, it grew out of Dr Greenwood's 1999 PhD thesis, 'Journeys into Third Space: a study of how theatre enables us to interpret the emergent space between cultures', and for this reason it is appropriately reviewed in this volume on research in the academy.

Arnold Wilson was born in Ruatoki in the Bay of Plenty and went to Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland and Teachers' College before becoming an itinerant art teacher. As a young teacher, he recognised the cultural assumptions and limitations of the colonial education system and set about looking for ways to introduce Maori arts into the schools. At the Bay of Islands College he involved a group of senior students in the building of a traditional meeting house near to the school, assisting their families and community with the intricate weaving and painting that is an integral part of the building. The *marae* allowed him to extend this work along the lines of the Northern Maori Project, instigated by Gordon Tovey, the national supervisor of arts and crafts in the New Zealand Education Department, which advocated a integrated program introducing visual and performing art forms across the curriculum. In 1975, after many years of teaching and making his own work, Arnold Wilson was brought into the Education Department by Peter Boag, the assistant general of education, to develop resources for introducing Maori arts and crafts into the schools, partly as a response to the truancy and drop out rates of Maori students. Boag recognised the need for the more holistic approach that had been trialled at Bay College. Wilson wanted to take this approach further — working intensively with Maori artists and finding the spirituality and community connection behind the art. Janinka Greenwood became involved in the project in 1981, initially as a teacher taking students to a *Pakeaka* workshop, later as a drama resource person and finally as a doctoral researcher. After the completion of her thesis, Arnold Wilson suggested that they write a comprehensive history of the *Pakeaka* project and this book is the result. The authors' decision to move beyond the initial relationship of informant and researcher and write together has led to an interesting document which mediates between the differing perspectives of artist and academic, Maori and *Pakeha*, without presenting an 'identifiable dialogue'.

The structure of *Te Mauri Pakeaka* is partly chronological and also thematic. The authors have identified eight aspects of the project, which they describe as the *pou whenua* or traditional posts which chart the journey of *Pakeaka* and 'mark the territory that we call the third space'. Each *pou* is organised around a workshop and discusses a group of themes, signing not just the story of *Pakeaka* but also a journey of exploration into cross-cultural interaction then and today. There is an emphasis on narrative and a concern to communicate the cross-cultural connections and spiritual energies that emerged out of the community art-making and education. The authors stress the fluid nature of the *Pakeaka* workshops — structures and timetables were seldom set but rather emerged and the workshop leaders facilitated rather than directed, at times frustrating participants inured to rigid timetables and education by objectives. The stories of Arnold, Janinka and many others involved in the project are woven into the narrative.

Central to the *Pakeaka* workshops are their intensive nature and their setting in the *marae* or community, even when the physical surrounding might be a community arts complex or a school rather than a traditional meeting house. The book covers themes relevant to an investigation of the way in which arts education can contribute to facilitating cross-cultural connections. The text discusses the importance of the *marae* and community values to the project, the restrictions in the program and particularly the challenge to ensure that the Maori culture is communicated as living rather than fossilised, the nature of Maori spirituality, the importance of story telling, the impact of colonisation on local cultures and the relationship between biculturalism and multiculturalism. Through their reflections on the *Pakeaka* workshops over a ten-year period, the authors trace a history of alienation of land, education and young people. They signal that the creation of the 'third space' is political and stress the importance of capacity building over time through action learning.

I first read this book more than a year ago and found it was difficult to understand at other than a fairly superficial level. I found myself needing to refer to the glossary of terms throughout my reading. Late last year I had the opportunity to travel to New Zealand for a meeting of Graduate Schools of Australian and New Zealand universities, hosted by the University of Auckland. At this meeting we were 'called' to the *marae* by members of the community where we were welcomed to the University and introduced to the significance of the meeting house. This opportunity gave me an insight into the *Pakeaka* program and its cultural and spiritual underpinning and I returned to the book with renewed interest. This is a very culturally specific book, which is both its strength and weakness. If it were reprinted, it would be useful to have translations of Maori phrases throughout and a little more information about the Maori culture. My reading would have been further assisted by the inclusion of a map marking the sites for the *Pakeaka* workshops. Apart from the challenges for the international reader, the book is very well written and, thankfully, free of academic jargon.

Over the years, I have had a number of opportunities to learn about the kinds of cultural interventions developed in the New Zealand education system from primary through to tertiary. In Australia and other post-colonial nations we have much to learn from the innovative ways in which New Zealanders are incorporating Maori culture into their systems. This is a fascinating and detailed account of the *Pakeaka* project; it offers a model that might be a starting point for cross-cultural programs in other parts of the world. Even at the local level it outlines exemplary ways of mediating cross-cultural differences. *Te Mauri Pakeaka* is an important book from an historical point of view and invaluable to any postgraduate

student working in the area of cross-cultural arts education. It will be of interest to teachers looking for ideas about how to establish programs in diverse settings. For New Zealand readers this is an important historical document as well as an engaging and often moving story of a significant educational experiment. As a book that developed out of and extended a PhD thesis, it demonstrates an interesting collaboration between the initial researcher and a key subject of the research. This would be an important addition to any secondary or tertiary education sector library.