

Re-Orienting Australasian Drama: Staging Theatrical Irony

JOANNE TOMPKINS

WITH THEIR ECONOMIES ever more reliant on Asian investment and tourist dollars, Australians and New Zealanders are continually reminded that their futures lie more with Asia than with Europe. The form by which this Asian monolith is represented varies widely, depending on political platforms. In Australia, for instance, the Labor government draws a more positive picture of Asia¹ than does the more protectionist and anti-immigration National Party. The basis of contemporary critical thought regarding literary and artistic representations of Asia and the Orient—which may or may not infiltrate the realms of international politics—is, of course, Edward Said's 1978 key text on racism and East-West relations, *Orientalism*. Said explores the representational practice whereby Western political and intellectual domination over the East defines the nature of the Orient as potentially both evil and weak and that of the West as strong and righteous. Power, knowledge, language, and the right to speak and write are authorized by the West; submission, silence, lechery, and corruption are relegated to the Orient. *Orientalism*, however, does not address adequately the Australian and New Zealand experiences. While the narrow political spheres that redefine and re-present Asia may at times be Orientalist, Australian and New Zealand drama do not fit neatly into Said's structure. This paper considers the power of the Oriental "Other" in Alex Buzo's *Norm and Ahmed*, John Romeril's *The Floating World*, and Vincent O'Sullivan's *Shuriken*.

Among the critiques of Said's work are those by Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg² and by Dennis Porter.³ They focus on Said's ahistorical, a-geographic, and a-generic readings of his ex-

emplary texts, readings that would situate Australian and New Zealand drama—and drama generally, for that matter—in an awkward position that cannot be explained solely by Said's methodology. Said's delineation of the dichotomy of the European and the Oriental is based on an opposition that depends on a stereotyping of both sub-units. Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, maintains that binary oppositions must be interrogated in terms less simplistic than those employed by Said. Bhabha writes that

[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of "fixity" in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity . . . connotes rigidity in an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always "in place," already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (18)

Bhabha finds that the argument of *Orientalism* begins to fail in Said's "reluctance to engage with the alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of these two economies" (24) of Western and Oriental. Said's model, according to Bhabha, is misleading because of his implicit suggestion that "colonial power and discourse [are] possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification" (25). Said's unidirectional model also discursively and retrospectively disempowers the "Other," re-inscribing a powerful colonizer and a powerless colonized subject. Bhabha has determined that there is an ambivalence within each part of the opposition that prevents quite so clear a manifestation of power in one side and acquiescence in the other. He sees in the silence of the colonial subject a possible location of positive signification. This paper repositions Orientalism in the context of the genre of drama and of Bhabha's argument about binaries.

Norm and Ahmed, *The Floating World*, and *Shuriken* confront stereotypical representations of Japan and other regions of Asia and provide two possible ways of dealing with Orientalist fears of the Asian "Other." The first model, exemplified by *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World*, employs the existing stereotypes

within the binary structure to undermine and counteract racist behaviour. Many of these stereotypes date back to figures almost as old as the white presence in Australia. The Chinese opium and lottery-ticket seller from the gold-rush days appears in full parodic form in both the original version of Alfred Dampier's *Marvellous Melbourne* (1889) and the revised version (1970) by the Australian Performing Group. The rapacious, evil, sadistic Japanese warrior, in the Second World War and in his more recent form, the plundering corporate giant, both appear unproblematic in Jill Shearer's *Shimada* (1989). Such characters and traits, embedded for decades in the culture as "true," defy the abandonment of the "Yellow Peril" or "White Australia" as official policy. The threat that Asia apparently poses, both economically and politically, persists as a topic of dramatic interest in the 1970s and 1980s, and re-emerges in discussions of immigration, trade, and tourism in the 1990s. The second model, that employed in *Shuriken*, subverts the construction of binary oppositions and attempts to defuse racist discourses outside the confines of the binary.

Porter notes that *Orientalism* fails to recognize "the possibility that more directly counter-hegemonic writings or an alternative canon may exist within the Western tradition" (181). This may arise from Said's failure to read for generic specificities and for those devices, particularly irony, that can substantially alter meaning. Later, Porter points out that Said overlooks "how literary texts may in their play establish distance from the ideologies they seem to be reproducing" (192). While in any genre irony can be a useful tool to reframe a character, utterance, or action, drama is inherently equipped with particular means of questioning, for example, racist discourses and behaviour. Its public forum gives the genre a reputation for having the potential to change public opinion. Since its classical origins, drama has had significant effects on political discourse. Specifically, a character on the stage is able to indicate kinesically (by gestures) the distance between words and actions. The structuring of a play and its production immediately enables the interpretation of the given action, characters, and dialogue in very different ways than those apparent in the strictly written text. The frequent disjunc-

tion between the lighting, staging, music, and costume elements of a play (to name a few theatrical elements) is crucial to the theatrical experience. Conflict arises initially through the imbalance of several of the coded pieces of information that constitute the dramatic event. This conflict can also transpire, for example, within the elements of language.

Counter-hegemonic possibilities exist as well within an exploration of the limits of stereotyping, particularly in demonstrating the restricting, and unrepresentative, nature of such representations. It is thus possible for *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World* to maintain — more or less — the structure on which Said's *Orientalism* is based and yet to give agency to the ambivalence of the binary that Bhabha sees as more accurately characterizing any dual system. Said overlooks these possibilities located in drama because he assumes that all genres work in the same manner and that concern with the surface of a text is adequate (Said 20).

Orientalism also fails to take into account the different geopolitical composition of the contemporary world. While Australia and New Zealand are not members of the Europe that underwrote the original Orientalist dichotomy, they are former colonies of Britain. As such, they carry some of the assumptions that were created and reinforced in imperial and post-imperial days; but as independent colonies, they can maintain a distinction from the imperial mandate. An awareness of settler colonies as "Second World"⁴ — that is, both colonized and colonizer — is critical to the placement of the "Other," but *Orientalism* does not allow for this distinction.

Furthermore, Said's framework is unable to allow for the fact that in the view of the English, Australia and New Zealand were desirable colonies because they did not present the difficult race issues posed, for example, by the colonization of India. India's considerable material wealth was compromised to some extent by race: India was the jewel in the economic crown only. New Zealand's and Australia's indigenous populations were overcome and/or overrun much more easily by settlers. Yet the apparent absence of racial difficulties did not automatically establish the settler-invader colonies as the unmodified Imperial

Centre within the Pacific. Granting such autonomy to distant colonies disseminated too widely the authority and control that "Empire" signified. Australia and New Zealand paradoxically were perceived to be at the *ends* of the earth, and, therefore, difficult to imagine as *neo*-colonial in their own right. They were the antipodes, a colonial backwater where only convicts, derelicts, and human "refuse" were transported, ridding Britain of its unwanted: they were thus both Britain and its opposite. As such, Australia and Australians, New Zealand and New Zealanders do not represent the stereotypical Western dominator of the Orient and the Oriental. The terms of the binary, therefore, already register ambivalence (to use Bhabha's phrase), an ambivalence that is inevitably manifested within the plays. In, among other things, the combination of their fierce patriotism and the "cultural cringe," Norm in *Norm and Ahmed* and Les in *The Floating World* both assert Australia's dominance and defend their perceptions of its inferiority.

More recently, Japan represents in Australia, particularly, a new economic threat. Australia has attempted to establish itself as a powerful, "white" centre of the countries and colonies of the Pacific, but Japan's postwar economy has overshadowed Australia's performance in the Pacific. Australia's geo-historical background as both powerful and powerless belies the neatly packaged, precise units of Orientalist behaviour that Said's text suggests.

Norm and Ahmed and *The Floating World* both exploit layers within the binary opposition that refuse the tacit descriptions of nation that Said implies in *Orientalism*; they deconstruct Orientalist discussions of Asia. *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World* exemplify Linda Hutcheon's definition of irony, which "opens up new space, literally between opposing meanings, where new things can happen. . . . [T]his is where the action is" (17). Among the types of irony that Hutcheon identifies is the constructive type, which is the "sort of ironic paradox that pushes our notions of the accepted and acceptable into new, liminal spaces, the spaces between meanings" (19). It is compelling to combine this with Bhabha's assessment of the vast spaces within each of the terms of an opposition: irony is, then, a possible way to locate the movement from Said's binary to Bhabha's ambivalence.

Norm and Ahmed (1968) pairs two stereotyped characters in an East-West match that succeeds not in denigrating the Pakistani student, Ahmed, but in challenging Norm's—and by implication Australia's—attitudes about the presence of the "Other" in Australia. About a meeting of a "typical Aussie bloke" and a "foreigner," *Norm and Ahmed* uncovers the latent racism in the Australian who purports to be "tolerant," but who eventually beats up Ahmed and leaves him for dead. The play opens with the heavily built Australian, Norm, waiting to strike up a conversation with the diminutive Ahmed, asking him for a light, even though Norm has just lit and extinguished his own cigarette. The characters' physical differences in stature and the audience's awareness of Norm's apparent deception create a sense of complicity that constructs the possibility of audience identification with the seemingly warm, friendly, and more powerful Norm. The play's initial shaping of the somewhat timid Ahmed suggests that he is of secondary importance. The Orientalist signifiers of difference are established visually, but the European is duplicitous; thus his presentation automatically ironizes and problematizes Orientalist signs.

It takes little time for Norm's stereotyped images of foreigners and of Australians to surface. By convincing the wary Ahmed that there are "[n]o Bombay stranglers around here" and that he is "quite safe" (3), he ironically reinforces the notions of Asia as dangerous and evil and of Australia as a secure haven. Norm's racism is illustrated first by his reminiscences of the war. Unable to "cotton much to the Egyptians" (8), Norm demonstrates, using the hapless Ahmed, the violent move he supposedly executed on an escaping prisoner. As Norm prepares to grab Ahmed, significantly, by the throat, Norm's language changes: Ahmed no longer represents an Egyptian but a "Gyppo," one of a "cunning lot" (8). Ahmed becomes the impotent prisoner in both the example and in the conversation that he is prevented from leaving because of Norm's apologies and because of his own fear of contravening laws of civility. In Norm's mind, Ahmed is any and all of the cultural commodities that Asia can represent.

Norm allows Ahmed some representational mobility, but only within a limited semiotic field of Orientalist stereotypes. Ah-

med is permitted not one representational characteristic but several within a range. This mobility is allowed as long as Ahmed adheres to a few simple rules: Norm is in charge; Ahmed must keep his "place." Norm cautions him that while he can have his own opinions, "don't go throwing your weight around" (11). In other words, Ahmed must be unseen and unheard. Although in Norm's view Ahmed's "true" place is in his own country, if he is in Australia, he should occupy the specific jobs in specific locations within Australia reserved for a predetermined number of non-white foreigners. When given a chance to speak, Ahmed exceeds the narrowness of the stereotype. He is politically active and determined to help free Pakistan from oppression; his intelligence, far superior to Norm's, is easy to spot in his vocabulary, his pattern of speech, and his rhetoric. While he may reflect certain Orientalist aspects at the beginning of the play, he is not the "fixed, stable" Oriental of Said's critique, where "[n]o dialectic is either desired or allowed" (Said 308). Refusing to be written within Norm's discourse of superiority and racism, Ahmed is not the ignorant foreigner Norm needs him to be. Ahmed is particularly aware of the atrocities experienced by the Anzacs, and his final statement about history addresses contemporary racial hatred: "the Anzac legend is often invoked in support of . . . other campaigns" (Buzo 11). Norm's repressed violent nature cannot understand that Ahmed perceives the irony in Norm's own personal crusade for the White Australia policy. Ahmed succeeds in demonstrating that the "weaker" term in the binary has some power of its own; it is not as constrained as Said's paradigm suggests.

Katharine Brisbane attributes Norm's final attack to his understanding, however dim, of Ahmed's "triumph":

From Ahmed he [Norm] has received only politeness and an inexplicable reserve in which he smells superiority. And that is the only thing the free white Australian cannot stand. His powers of reasoning may have betrayed him in the past but his prejudice he can rely upon.
(Introduction xi)

Norm's final demonstration of his power over Ahmed is a brutal assault. Meant to shock by its severity and suddenness following a supposedly amicable chat, the attack validates only Norm's

physical superiority. He has lost the verbal battle, the battle in and for discourse. The physical domain is his sole means of re-asserting his desire for control. Norm has epitomized the "ocker"—the exaggerated stereotypical Australian male—throughout the play. His name and his stereotypical construction suggest the Australian "norm." By means of dramatic inversion, the ironic constant reassurance that Ahmed was in no danger critically undercuts Norm. Ahmed, severely beaten, possibly dead, actually wins the balance of symbolic power, a direct reversal of the play's opening. The audience identification that the play constructs for Norm at the beginning is irretrievably inverted or overturned. The physical presence of a silenced Ahmed in the theatre carries more weight than Norm's Orientalist stereotypes. Thus, while the structure is still intact—Norm, the strong white Australian, is triumphant over a weaker, silenced "Oriental"—the assumptions the audience makes about the Orientalist stereotype are not left untouched. Ahmed's silence is enforced by the West, but Ahmed does not remain the silenced Oriental. Norm, on the other hand, remains fixed in his duplicitous intelligence and his racism. It is he who is most trapped within a narrow system of representation, a character limited to one or two characteristics. In *Norm and Ahmed*, the ironic voice in particular creates a space for the exploration of ambivalence in the Eastern portion of the West/East construction: while the Westerner is deliberately relegated to a stereotyped character, the "Oriental" is granted semiotic independence from the stereotype.

Romeril's *The Floating World* (1974) extends the apparent threat of the "Other" and continues to explore Australia's distinctive relationship with Asia as a precarious extension of Britain, as a victim of Japan in the war camps, as a conqueror of Japan at the end of the war, and now as an economic subordinate to a Japan that has taken economic control of the Pacific.

The Floating World addresses Australian attitudes to Japan almost exclusively from the perspective of the disintegrating mind of a former prisoner of war, Les Harding, a reluctant passenger on a cruise ship to Japan. The play is constructed in such a way that the shipboard activities contribute both to Les's mental

deterioration and to the audience's understanding of his prejudices. In Les's psychotic state, the passenger ship is transformed into a Second World War troop ship. Because of a late booking, Les is bunked in a cabin not with his wife, Irene, but with three other men. Les's mind returns to the war and the stereotypes it reinforced. A Malaysian waiter becomes the enemy as Les cannot forget that he and his fellow Australian soldiers were wartime prisoners and slave-labourers of the Japanese. A bunk-mate becomes McLeod, a buddy from the war, despite the stranger's insistence that he is really named Williams. Their destination—Japan—creates consternation for Les, who is ever concerned that someone will accuse him of “scabbing on his mates” for having anything to do with Japan. His war is not over. Having bottled up his resentment about the war for 30 years, Les's repressed anger erupts onto the stage and can never again be contained. After an attempted knife attack on one of the waiters, whom Les sees as “the Japanese enemy,” Les is removed from the ship in a strait-jacket.

During the course of Les's disintegration, the Malaysian waiter, dressed as a Japanese Army Officer and known then as “Captain of the Dippy Birds” (9), sets up dippy-bird toys around the stage. These liquid-filled plastic forms with bird-like faces are perpetual motion devices, of sorts, that, when positioned properly, bob their heads in and out of glasses of water. The toys are also both reflective of the wartime impressions of the Japanese and Les's enduring impressions of the country and an ironic note on current Japanese economic power. The dippy birds reappear at various times in several corners of the stage and are designed to “re-enforce” Australian assumptions about Japan, particularly postwar industrial Japan.⁵ The bobbing dippy birds parallel both the drifting of Les's mind from “reality” to a state of breakdown and the entertainment on the ship. They are not, as Brisbane believes, a metaphor for Australia's power in the world. She asks in the introduction to the text of the play,

[a]re we embracing our position as a leader of the Pacific World at last? Or are we merely succumbing to an international Dippy Bird culture? Such answer as [Romeril] gives is an angry one. (“The Play in the Theatre” xxix)

The suggestion that Australia must be first and that succumbing to the Japanese culture is abhorrent is in itself an Orientalist response that misreads the play. Rather, the dippy birds assist in the deconstruction of the stereotyped representations of Asia and Asians, aided, ironically, by the racist comedian.

The shipboard comic's routines act as a backdrop to Les's disintegration. At the opening of the play, Harry, the straight man to the ship's entertainer, recites in stream-of-consciousness fashion a litany of "traditional" stereotypes of Japanese behaviour. The "comedy" also provides a more sinister function, reinforcing the apparent superiority of the West and the base of hatred in jokes that centre on race. Of course, the play does not validate such reactions; the comedian's function is to illustrate the Orientalist beliefs held by many Australians. With this backdrop in place, the play pursues the stereotypes to defuse their potency as Orientalist constructs.

It is in the drifting of Les's mind that the exploration of racism takes place. Just as Les confuses his bunk-mate with his old army buddy, Les mistakenly attributes Japanese characteristics to every Asian on the ship. This confusion culminates in his attack on the waiter, whom he mistakes for the Japanese "enemy." As the audience apprehends the mistaken identity, it may extend the error to the idea of stereotype: these stereotypes that perpetuate Orientalist attitudes are perhaps also mistaken identities/identifications. The play proposes through the metaphor of Les's weakened mind that racist behaviour can be arrested by recognizing that the individual identity of the "Other" is not the stereotyped "Oriental" that Les expects.

The play's conclusion finds Les, bound in a strait-jacket, calmly describing his horrific war experiences. The monologue demonstrates more concretely how Les reached his current state of mind. Yet the point is clearly to demonstrate the perils of war, not the evils of the Japanese. Allan Ashbolt's introduction to the play notes that Les "fails to understand that brutality results from war rather than from race" (xi). Madness and Orientalist behaviour merge in Les's recollections of the war. His various representations form for the audience a means of complicating the Asian stereotypes to demonstrate how racist the Orientalist semiotic field is.

Both *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World* maintain the basic structure of the binary opposition; but they also explore dramatically the racist stereotypes beyond the limits that the structure can represent. The Asian characters in these two plays refuse to be restricted to the fixed field of Orientalist personality traits that Les and Norm see as predetermined and universal. Likewise, the Australians are constructed as duplicitous and unstable, terms that are generally reserved for the Oriental. *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World* demonstrate the flaws in the narrow, Orientalist definitions by also questioning the definition of "Australian." Neither term of the binary can be as stable as Said's analysis of Orientalism requires.

The second possibility for dealing with prejudice and racism on the stage is to undermine completely the binary system, as O'Sullivan's *Shuriken* (1985) does. Based on an actual event and set during the Second World War in a New Zealand prisoner-of-war camp for Japanese soldiers, *Shuriken* brings East and West together, recognizing that the Western title for New Zealand is geographically false. Chronicling the relationships between New Zealand warders and the Japanese prisoners of war as they learn to communicate with each other, the play culminates in the attempted rebellion of prisoners from the prison camp. O'Sullivan's notes in the play's preface emphasize the gravity of this meeting of cultures: "It is difficult to think of two peoples less prepared for each other personally than New Zealanders and Japanese in the 1940s" (7).

The play is intended to be staged on two levels—with the "Camp Commandant and the Adjutant usually . . . seen on the upper level. The prisoners and other ranks of the New Zealanders share the normal stage area" (8). The division of the stage, then, is based not on race but on power. Such a construction immediately breaks down the assumed New Zealand/Japanese opposition. O'Sullivan seems determined to foreground power rather than race:

Shuriken, then, is a war play without "goodies" or "baddies." There was nothing that could make the average Japanese soldier at ease in a New Zealand POW camp, and there was no way the average Kiwi soldier could grasp how his charges thought. I wanted to write a play,

then, about quite ordinary men, thrown into a setting where there could only be confusion. (8)

The play does not occlude race, however. After opening with an Orientalist film sound track from the war era, the play continues to construct the traditional opposition, as the Commandant distinguishes between the "good" New Zealand flag and the "bad" Japanese flag. The character ignominiously named Pom expresses his hatred for both the Japanese and the Maoris. Even though Pom has lived in New Zealand for 30 of his 34 years, his name implies that the grounding of racism is in imperialism. His intolerance is extreme, and the use of this character becomes very effective in exploring racism.

When Pom tries to equate the Japanese and Maoris because they are both "Other," the obvious distinction between forms of "otherness" quickly defuses to totalization. That the "despicable nature" of the Japanese is assumed to be identical to the "despicable nature" of the Maoris becomes ironically plain on several occasions when the soldiers' discussion moves to the invasion of Aotearoa, the Maori name for New Zealand:

Tiny: Why can't you damn well try to see things from their point of view for once? Make a bit of an effort?

Jacko: Bloody good reason why, Tiny. This is my country for starters. . . .

Tiny: Just saying that kind of thing doesn't get us far.

Jacko: But I don't want to go far, see. We've never gone hankering after places on the other side of the world, tried to take over somewhere that doesn't belong to us, have we? When you hear about them being so sensitive to what we think you just come and tell me about it, OK? (58-59)

Those things that Jacko insists make the Japanese "bad" are precisely the same as those of which Maoris accuse pakeha New Zealanders; the pakeha are as guilty of invasion as the Japanese. The construction of "Japanese" as evil is therefore problematized: if the Japanese are "bad" for invading, then their enemies in the Second World War cannot be guilty of the same thing. That the British *are* guilty of invasion emphasizes the complexities of the colonizer/colonized binary that Bhabha discusses and that O'Sullivan complicates in *Shuriken*.

Just as the New Zealanders are clearly distinguished (for instance, the racist Pom, the religious Ernie, the somewhat culturally aware and tolerant Tiny), the Japanese do not remain merely in the stereotypical images of the play's opening. The play also incorporates other aspects of Japanese culture that are not generally associated with the kamikaze and samurai war heritage, including the artistic forms of Noh theatre and haiku poetry. The Japanese prisoner who is writing the poem cannot believe Tiny's comments that the New Zealanders have no way of expressing deep personal emotions, which the Japanese haiku accomplishes. The Japanese do register their contempt for the New Zealanders, especially Pom, through a form of metatheatre, combining wrestling and drama, which obviously has a significant impact on the other prisoners. This two-fold device represents Japanese culture *and* re-situates Pom's racism in a context outside both the New Zealand/Japanese and the New Zealand/Maori oppositions. In the course of the brief play-within-a-play, the other prisoners cry out "Kill, kill" in Japanese:

It is hard to tell how serious the game has become. The kneeling First Prisoner bows his head. The Third Prisoner raises his broom handle high. He brings it down swiftly to within a fraction of the other's neck, who gives a long scream, and falls slowly forward. He then raises his head slightly and looks about.

First Prisoner: Pom!

The other prisoners relax and laugh. (65-66)

Pom's racist behaviour becomes an object of entertainment and disgust for both the other New Zealanders and the Japanese.

Rather than reiterating the limits of Orientalist stereotypes, *Shuriken* stretches the boundaries of those stereotypes as a means of subverting the binary. The most important element that the play incorporates is the insertion of a third term into this binary, which further undermines the binary's power. The third term is the Maoris, "the other culture which was perhaps as far removed from pakeha New Zealand as it was from the Japanese" (O'Sullivan 8). Pom tries to establish the Maoris as just as bad, evil, and "Other" as the Japanese, and the Japanese also categorize Tai, the Maori character, with the pakeha New Zealanders. Neither attempt at preserving the binary can be successful. The play presents three inevitable terms. A tripartite "binary" is impos-

sible; thus the negative operations of power assumptions that reside in binaries are effectively deconstructed in this play.

Tai is crucial to the continued deconstruction of traditional stereotypes. He is able to joke with Tiny—who recognizes the irony—by adopting a stereotypical Maori response to illustrate the usual racist assumptions: he says self-mockingly, “Us, boss? You got the wrong Maori this time, boy” (74). Tai does not resort to physical violence when the exceptionally vile Pom provokes him, and the play likewise does not offer violence as a solution to the racism in New Zealand. Instead, Tai sings a mourning song for his dead, pakeha brother-in-law (who is killed in the war by the Japanese) in untranslated Maori. This essentially also de-centres English as the language of significance. Tai is able to pay tribute to his brother-in-law while maintaining his dignity and his cultural heritage.

It is in language that the greatest disruption of the binary occurs. In the written text of the play, translations of the Japanese and Maori sections appear at the back of the playscript. In the performed text, the Maori is untranslated, but much of the Japanese is mediated by Adachi and by Tiny, the New Zealander translator. After a prisoner hangs himself, Adachi translates for the soldiers, and he incorporates much of what the spirit of the dead man communicates. A second, simultaneous translation is offered by Tiny, who tells the Commandant only selective elements of the exchange. Once again, the ambiguity is essential. Ironically, as the language barriers are overcome, both the Japanese and the New Zealanders discover that “understanding” is even more difficult:

Second Prisoner: Both sides feel that language, now that we understand a little of each other, may be more of a barrier than when we understood nothing at all.

First Prisoner: You see when we understood nothing it was easy to imagine that we understood a great deal.

Third Prisoner: Now that we do apprehend these Pacific Englishmen a little, there is great confusion. There is no scheme into which they fit.

Jacko: I've got no more inkling what this crowd's up to now than I did six months ago. (53)

The assumptions that each had of the other are continually subverted. Ironically, when the groups have a common language, the gap between them grows wider, since representation is not innate *or* tied to language. The cultural associations for each "side" in the play, while corroborated by language, are determined by seemingly immutable social rules. *Shuriken* demonstrates the folly of these determinants.

The end of the play mirrors the beginning. While all the prisoners and their warders are united at the opening by their collective desire to be elsewhere, at the end, they share in the sentiments of the hymn they sing. The soldiers sing "Abide with Me," and Tai contributes one verse in Maori. The Japanese, meanwhile, are also worshipping to *koto* music. "*The slow, ritualistic pattern of movements [of Adachi] balances the New Zealanders' singing of the hymn, each group in its own way recognising the existence of spiritual values and the possibility of death*" (77). Both groups—and Maori as well—are united, and not in hatred. The difference in language and/or song is glossed by the understanding that while none of these cultures can ever be completely contained by another, there are moments of respectful alterity, where points of contact and acknowledgements of difference are possible.

The play concludes with the deaths of several of the Japanese prisoners and of Jacko, who is caught in the crossfire. Rather than revolting against their jailers, the prisoners die ritualistically to demonstrate that they are not the worthless, dishonourable prisoners constructed by the Japanese code of ethics. The disturbing and startling conclusion to *Shuriken* further complicates racist stereotypes. By demonstrating a wide range of response to the Japanese soldiers' behaviours, the play insists upon the re-definition of Orientalist stereotypes, which may lead to audience re-evaluations of the operations and effects of racism.

While much contemporary culture is predicated on the Orientalist stereotype, the binary structure is, as Bhabha explains, much more fruitful than Said posits in *Orientalism*. *Norm and Ahmed* and *The Floating World* and, especially, *Shuriken* deploy strategies to experiment with both the binary and the racism it produces. A strict attention to binarism predetermines and

grounds Orientalist thought, but plays that experiment with this formation disrupt Orientalist constructions. The contradictions and ambiguities established by all the competing aspects of a dramatic performance cannot be comprehended by the cursory glance Said allows the literature he analyzes (20). Moreover, the double nature of Australasia's position in the postcolonial world does not correspond to the monolithic Western world that Said posits as Orientalism's necessary obverse. Re-oriented in terms of Bhabha's constructions (and deconstructions) of the binary, however, *Orientalism* produces new possibilities for approaching issues of race and difference, for counteracting racism, as well as for understanding the impact of theatrical metaphors and techniques on Orientalist stereotypes and audiences.

NOTES

- 1 This formulation, however, is fraught with inconsistencies: for instance, the basis of Prime Minister Keating's argument about Australia's place in Asia begins, ironically, with the fall of Singapore to the Japanese. The Liberal Party falls somewhere in between, with an economic-rationalist—hence ahistorical—view of Asia.
- 2 "The Challenge of *Orientalism*" critiques Said's "reading of Orientalism as a monolithic discourse [which] makes contradictory forces in the dialectical sense of the term hard to imagine or account for" (184). As well, Mani and Frankenberg emphasize the difficulties with geographic generalizations that use Middle Eastern examples as a paradigm for global colonialism.
- 3 Porter focusses on Said's failure to distinguish between recent history and comparatively ancient history. More importantly, Porter notes that the travel literature that dominates Said's consideration differs from more so-called "creative" texts.
- 4 See Lawson for further explanation of this term.
- 5 The instructions for the dippy birds are read by the waiter dressed as a Japanese Army officer who is playing here the Captain of the Dippy Birds. The instructions are not written in fluent English: "The cross piece does not be adjusted or bent. Three, Water in glass filled every time. . . . The contents is Not-Inflammable but if the high heat is touched then the pressure of contents are going up so please take care of above caution" (9). The objects and their awkwardly explained and translated instructions appear to corroborate Les's opinions about the foreignness and inscrutability of the Japanese.

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