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Abstract

The year 1983 saw the premiere of three Australian plays dealing with apocalyptic themes. All use extensive and deliberate intertextual allusion, gaining ironic effect by their juxtaposition of Australian history with past European consensual certainties, be they theatrical classics, high bourgeois art-forms like opera, or the Christian myth. These plays are *The Kid* by Michael Gow, *Sunrise* by Louis Nowra and *The Blind Giant is Dancing* by Stephen Sewell. The work of these writers, along with Dorothy Hewett's and Patrick White's drama and David Malouf's *Blood Relations* (1987), represent the main achievements of what can be distinguished as a major mythopoeic tradition of theatre writing which has come to prominence in the last half-decade.

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The year 1983 saw the premiere of three Australian plays dealing with apocalyptic themes. All use extensive and deliberate intertextual allusion, gaining ironic effect by their juxtaposition of Australian history with past European consensual certainties, be they theatrical classics, high bourgeois art-forms like opera, or the Christian myth. These plays are *The Kid* by Michael Gow, *Sunrise* by Louis Nowra and *The Blind Giant is Dancing* by Stephen Sewell. The work of these writers, along with Dorothy Hewett's and Patrick White's drama and David Malouf's *Blood Relations* (1987), represent the main achievements of what can be distinguished as a major mythopoeic tradition of theatre writing which has come to prominence in the last half-decade.

The perception of Sewell and Nowra as addressing the vital concerns of Australian theatre, or at least the mainstage, subsidised part, has been endorsed by the selection of two of their more recent plays for London production during Australia's Bicentenary year of 1988; *Dreams in an Empty City* (1986) and *The Golden Age* (1985).¹ As part of the 'New Wave' of writers who emerged in the mid-1970s, Sewell and Nowra are frequently linked since they deal with more 'international' themes than box-set bourgeois drama allows.² The recent plays of these writers show that they have a right to be called 'international', not only within the framework of nationalist discourses which have tended to privilege some dramatic styles as 'Australian', but in the sense that what they write about has applicability to any society touched by the economic crises of the late 1980s. Their interest in 'The Past [which] has become a form of the Present',³ as John McCallum discerns, can be seen as a development to greater conceptual sophistication of the fascination with our history displayed by Australian playwrights during the last fifteen years; itself a reflection of general cultural self-examination focussed by the Bicen-

tenary. But this 'history' is not self-evidently or unproblematically accessible. John Frow argues for history as having 'potential productivity' when an act of interpretation seizes its 'unique and momentary fragments' for progressive use:

Rather than historical continuities, the ever-present availability of tradition, we have access only to a past which is radically discontinuous with the present; and this discontinuity is directly bound up with radical inequalities of power in the present. The possibility of redeeming the past depends entirely on the interests and energies, the play of forces mobilized by political struggle.⁴

The plays discussed here, while remaining vitally aware of the past of conflict and oppression, move partially into the realm of prophecy: Utopia and Dystopia become their dominant modes of utterance. These fantasies upon historical themes are not, however, retreats into the personal or subjective worlds, but are potent interventions in ideological struggle.

This returns us to the three plays of 1983 mentioned above, and to their striking similarities in theme and dramaturgy. *The Kid*, Gow's first play workshopped in April 1982 and produced the next year, owes something to Sam Shepard in its mood. A teenage family — Snake and her brothers Dean and Aspro (the 'kid'), along with the gentle Donald, picked up and later discarded by the sexy Dean — undertake the mythic Australian journey from country to city: here Sydney, glowing with decaying magnificence and ringed by menacing bushfires. Their purpose is to claim compensation for Aspro's head accident, a species of quest echoing the Wagnerian quest for the Rhinegold which is alluded to through the *Ring* excerpts linking the scenes. In Sydney they encounter alienation and failure; the compo is refused, Aspro dies, Donald leaves and the tenuous family disintegrates. This cryptic narrative of modern urban alienation is lifted above deadpan documentary realism by street-wise comedy and by the mythic background with which Gow endows the action, illuminating its significance and implying a cultural grid against which the kids' quest can be understood. The fulsome certainties of European high romanticism both 'place' the contemporary action and are questioned by it; and the irony is by no means conservative, directed merely at a shrunken present, presumed fallen from some implied height of inherited immanent significance. The provisional and ideological nature of all culture is foregrounded, and the European Faustian heritage interrogated through the use of operatic music to frame scenes of individualistic self-indulgence or self-aggrandisement as well as alluding to heroic ideals. The mythology of the Australian colonial past also receives

sardonic treatment, in a scene where a decrepit bookseller plies the bemused youngsters with coffee-table Australian clichés, which fortuitously sound like an accurate parody of much commercial Bicentennial mythologising.⁵

The myths which actually operate effectively in the kids' lives are, significantly, American ones. Dean's model of heroism — 'Born to Die' is his motto (p. 13) — is clearly from the fifties Beat Generation as perceived through late-night movie repeats, and his death-infatuated existential worldliness, fragile though it proves to be, a style modelled on his famous movie namesake. But the truly apocalyptic mythology of the play is delivered to Sydney, like a cargo cult, in the form of boxes sent through the post: 'Just think, these were packed in America' (p. 15). The boxes contain bible-belt fundamentalist literature issued by the 'International Church of the Lord'. Its show-piece is 'Gard's' Survival Kit, whereby the elect are entitled to survive the nuclear holocaust in gun-protected shelters — at the price of 'fifty dollars for the basic kit and fifteen dollars for a bi-monthly update' (p. 23). These emissions are received with religious awe by the waif Desiree (the Brunnhilde figure), whose charismatic certainty of the imminent apocalypse infatuates the would-be cool Dean. Eventually, all the packaged faiths which are offered to the characters as ultimate meanings — the opera collections, 'historical' Australian books, the slide-and-tape 'Survival Kit' — are seen as failures proffered by a despairing adult world, and the kids' disenchanting scepticism thus seems justified. However, the withdrawal of values leaves them hideously vulnerable, and their attempts to dream a future and to pull together their fragmented world — shattered like Aspro's mind — fall victim to defeat. *The Kid* is an ambitious first play, confidently announcing big themes and large cultural enquiries through its examination of the post-modernist alienation and destruction of the youthful Australian 'inheritors'.⁶

Nuclear apocalypse and the failure of inherited culture to nurture the young are the concerns also of Nowra's *Sunrise*, which, like *The Kid*, uses as metaphor the Ash Wednesday bushfires of summer 1983 which destroyed huge areas of land and many lives in infernos of firestorm proportions. *Sunrise* has been seen as one of the writer's more pessimistic plays, since even though 'this time' the bushfires are turned back at the edge of the 'island' property, the fourteen-year-old Venice, in a confused gesture of love, kills her grandfather Clarrie to release him from his despair and anger.⁷ The characters of *Sunrise* are not the marginalised of society but an upper middle-class family on their country estate. The play is more overtly aware of the impact of the past on the present, concen-

trating on the two colonial moments of the displacement of Aboriginals and of Australian subservient complicity in the British bomb tests at Maralinga in the 1950s. The grand European heritage suggested through Wagnerian music and references is shown as imposing but inoperative, except in the dreams of the nuclear scientists such as Clarrie who have bequeathed the world as its new *Götterdämmerung* the spectre of a nuclear 'sunrise'. The fetishistic ritual of an African people, where Venice learnt her place in the world, is actually more significant to the play's action than the European resonances of her name, since her experience there taught her that the world of myth, of the collective mind, is as decisive in human affairs as the external events privileged as 'history'. It is upon this certitude that she is enabled to act to save, as she sees it, her grandfather from his inner demons. The character Venice resembles Desiree — alienated, neglected and confused by the cultures inherited from her elders, and prey to charismatic certainties and solutions. The persistent theme of dead or dying children in this writer's work has been commented upon elsewhere, suggesting a vision of a culture which destroys or cannot save its young.⁸

Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing* draws its energies from two of the sustaining ideologies which have shaped Australian thinking: Marxism and Jansenist Catholicism. Its canvas is Australian public life in all its turmoil and corruption, where the fate of a state Labor Party, and of Australia itself, is played out through a Morality structure concerning the choice between faith and despair of its central character Allen, a democratic socialist. Allen is appalled and fascinated by the vileness and cynicism of capitalism: electing to fight it with its own dirty weapons, he ends as the very embodiment of that which he claims to detest:

The appalling beauty of capitalism is that it creates the illusion of our freedom; that it makes us think we can change it or alter it — that we create it. But that's not true. It creates us. It makes our desires and our thoughts ... it employs us to maintain and expand itself.... That all we are, are momentary carriers of its power and what's finally real is capitalism; draining living things of their substance; a rapacious horror that'll never end until it's finally eliminated human life completely and replaced it with its own self-reproducing machines.⁹

Like Satan he embraces his icy despair, becoming a 'monster of pragmatism',¹⁰ and as he calmly sells out the Australian manufacturing sector to the Americans he can sneer: 'That's capitalism' (p. 112). His path to the inferno is foreshadowed by an already spiritually dead character, the journalist Rose Draper, who functions as his Mephistophilis, probing and tempting him to know the bitter fruits of power. Like Everyman,

Allen is placed between the commanding Rose and his socialist feminist wife Louise, the latter humanly vulnerable through her principled refusal of Rose's steely certainties. *Blind Giant* is Sewell's *Inferno*, and the most brilliant dramatic Dystopia of modern theatre. The use of traditional Catholic ethical patterns focusses through myth his Marxist analysis of political and moral corruption. As capitalism recreates the complicit Allen in its own image he becomes in religious terms the Anti-Christ, and the play thus projects a secular Apocalypse: Australia betrayed from within. The play foreshadows the later *Dreams* in that even in this moment of horror Allen's brother and ex-comrades oppose him and take up the principles he has abandoned: the play is appropriately dedicated to Salvador Allende.

It is fascinating to so discern three mythological tragedies dealing with large political and cultural concerns — on various levels of ambition — emerging in Australian theatre in such a short time-span. It would appear that a crisis point in national affairs is being signalled or prophesied. Perhaps Sewell's fable of socialist idealism transforming itself into pragmatic neo-conservatism makes sense against the background of the most notable events in federal politics of 1983: Bob Hawke's replacement of Bill Hayden as Labor leader and the subsequent Labor electoral victory in March. The ensuing five years of recession have seen the dismantling of almost every traditional social or foreign policy of a protectionist or welfare nature, and multinational finance and its concomitant political hegemony enthusiastically embraced. Given this *danse macabre* into Reaganomics and neo-colonialism, one would expect the recent plays of Nowra and Sewell to be even blacker than their 1983 predecessors. Interestingly, however, both *The Golden Age* and *Dreams in an Empty City*, while dealing in dark and bitter fables drawn from Australia's past and present, opt for formal conclusions privileging the decision to hope and trust in a future, however obscure or problematic that future may seem from the vantage point of an increasingly foreboding present.

The Golden Age presents a powerful if elliptical summary of the author's consistent concerns; with isolation, and with cultural impositions and their concomitant projections of alterity onto submerged groups. In dubbing the play 'a cup of black romance'¹¹ Leslie Rees puts his finger on the play's central generic project: the recuperation of the romance mode from the very heart of tragedy. Like the tragi-comedies of Euripides or Shakespeare — *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *King Lear* are incorporated as internal playlets — the play pushes its characters to extremes of suffering and loss but finally unites at least two of them, Francis and Betsheb, in an ambiguous final tableau where possibilities of a potential future may be

read. Some critics, however, discern that the dominant mythic patterns of cultural decay and collapse overshadow those narrative moments of conciliation or insight which are located in the personal or imaginative spheres, no matter how powerfully placed dramatically these epiphanies may be.¹² The question thus remains open whether a play's generic or narrative strategies can successfully transcend their historic moment and project Utopian visions from within ideologies fractured by historical alienations; in either their capitalist or colonial inflections. *The Golden Age* presses upon the conceptual limits of these contradictions more urgently than any other Australian play.

As drama, *The Golden Age* is immediately striking and accessible because of its dynamic theatricality and its bold allegorical dealings with problems of Western history and culture. The insistent presence-through-absence of the Aboriginal experience within white Australian discourses is clear, as it is in the author's previous plays *Visions* (1978), *Inside the Island* (1980) and *Sunrise*. The pressure of this submerged history upon the dominant conceptual space is exemplified in parable-like plots where white colonised experiences stand metonymically for Aboriginal ones. In *Visions* the Paraguayan people have their speech stolen from them by military and cultural imperialism; *Inside the Island* shows the eruption of a suppressed past as a species of haunting, as — three years before Gallipoli — young Australian soldiers isolated on an outback wheat property run mad from the effects of poisoned flour: that quintessentially Australian colonial method of land clearance.¹³ In *The Golden Age* complex layers of historical 'outcastin''¹⁴ are enfolded within a minor factual incident, the discovery in the forests of the Tasmanian south-west in the late 1930s of an isolated white group, descendents of runaway convicts and gold-seekers, who speak a syncretic patois descended from nineteenth-century British regional dialects. The voluntary return of these historical exiles to 'civilisation' fatefully coincides with the propaganda war against Nazi eugenicism, itself the historical descendent of the Social Darwinism which formerly sanctified the dispossession of the poor and the colonised. The group's physical deterioration provides justification for their incarceration in a lunatic asylum, where all but the heroine Betsheb die in double alienation.

While suggesting the convict experience, and that of many other displaced refugees of a ruthlessly expanding industrial capitalism, the lost people's story also incorporates Aboriginal history. The clan's matriarch Ayre and its daughter Betsheb allude through their dignity and resilience to our images of Truganini, the last Tasmanian fullblood whose death in 1876 supposedly ended their race. The 'invisible' yet compelling Abor-

iginal presence in Nowra's work articulates this history's paradoxical position within white Australian discourses: as the Other to these discourses it cannot with justification be totally appropriated by our modes of understanding, nor with justice can it be relegated to silence and invisibility. The solution Nowra seeks is to foreground the shapes which their story has stamped upon the European-derived consciousness, by exploiting fruitful ambiguities latent in tragi-comic generic explorations.¹⁵

The internal pressures of a fragmentary and alienating white history work like a centrifugal force upon the structures of Sewell's drama, such that these forces threaten to shatter the plays' internal coherence. This explosive dynamism is considered a fault according to the strictures of a narrowly realist dramaturgy which seeks to privilege neatness and closure over dynamism and process. Yet Sewell's theatre daringly operates at the farthest edges of the form's resources. *Welcome the Bright World* (1982) foregrounds fragmentation structurally and stylistically via short expressionistic scenes where personal pain and isolation explode in screams of agony; by cinematic cross-cutting between past and present, inner and outer worlds; by accelerating tempi and insistent use of an abstract sound-track to articulate, in the mode of melodrama, extra-verbal significations. Its theme is late monopoly capitalism in paroxysms of self-destructive crisis, tearing apart the characters' minds and souls until moral pain and alienation splinter society, family and the individuals who are microcosms of the over-riding disjunctions of history. These powerful, even paranoid scenic rhythms are mobilised within the forward drive of the thriller plots which Sewell favours, and which aptly express his themes of past historical guilts (Stalin, the Nazis, Chile) problematically intersecting with and contaminating the present. The suspense genre is used to good effect also in *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, where, rather than evil being brought to light and so rendered harmless, the investigating character himself moves into the villain role and absorbs all the evil of a corrupt system.¹⁶ The actual 'villain' is the despair inherent in totalising capitalism: the necessary and mutilating ideological blindnesses caused by living within the belly of the beast.

Dreams uses all these disruptive energies, plus the suspense plot and the whodunnit quest, yet partially detaches its hero Chris from total complicity in the evil he seeks to combat. The mystic paradigm Sewell seeks to appropriate is signalled, Nowra-fashion, by a play within the play. It is called 'The Conversion of Father Romero', set in a South American dictatorship — Chile and Central America are for Sewell potent dystopian images of Australia's fate as a too-willing client nation. Christ,

an ex-priest actor playing Romerez, demands to know to what extent mythic parables can be read as carriers of modern historical experience: 'Is Romerez Christ or not? Because if he is, the play's bullshit, and if he's not, it doesn't make any sense!'¹⁷ He further voices scepticism that Christ imagery can remain a valid symbol of resistance to brutal political oppression:

You know what really gives me the shits about this play? Under the guise of telling a contemporary story it tries to re-tell the story of Christ's suffering and death as if it was completely normal for human beings to transcend themselves when someone else is torturing the living shit out of them. (p. 11)

This is a deliberate rhetorical move on Sewell's part to foreground his play's own mythic project. For the Chris character, though himself shown as having journeyed to the end of his own moral night, is clearly flagged as just such a Christ figure: betrayed, tortured and eventually 'crucified'. His Christ status is not shown through exhibitions of meekness, passivity or forgiveness of his enemies, whom he cordially loathes and seeks to destroy, but through his refusal of absolute power. The contrast with the fate of the earlier Allen is clear. So Chris dies, at Easter, refusing the temptations of despair, his last injunction being 'This is the only life we have! ... Live!' (p. 88).

The diseased evil at the heart of a bankrupt capitalism is split between the characters of two warring property magnates, Wilson and Wiesland. Wilson embodies the cold despair of damnation, Wiesland its vulgar and vacuous energy. (Disappointingly, the female presence in *Dreams* is much reduced, and Wilson takes over Rose Draper's function as demonic tempter and would-be destroyer.) The manoeuvres, fuelled by deceit and hatred, between these two monsters bring down not only the Australian economy, but tip over the precarious interlocked structure of international banking and finance. The play ends in expressionistic scenes of hallucinatory force: the stock market crashes, currencies plummet, and the world is plunged into the next Depression — Sewell's articulation of the apocalypse of finance capital. The Wall Street plunges of late 1987, however, indicate that the play's vision of Armageddon is far from eccentric and in fact all too convincing.¹⁸ From the narrower viewpoint of Sewell's own writing, it is significant that the *Inferno* of *Blind Giant* has given way to a *Purgatorio*. Refusal to despair can survive the end even of this world, as Chris and his lover Karen variously refuse to succumb to, or to become, that which tortures them. Like *Golden Age*, *Dreams* tests its way ahead beyond the fall of 'civilisations' to discern what Utopian meanings can be recovered with which to make an imaginative future —

a future which of necessity cannot be realistically depicted but which must be gestured towards through use of myth and parable.

In the Australian theatre, frequently judged by criteria of *vraisemblance*, the strong myth-centred dramas of recent writers risk being dismissed as ambitious failures rather than being seen as attempts to conceptualise, through deployment of gothic, fantastic and popular generic motifs, the broad movements of modern history.¹⁹ Michael Gow, for his part, moves between black satire and comedy of manners. These elements have been successfully combined in his 1986 hit *Away*, whose incorporation of Shakespearean quotations (from *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear*) attests his continued interest in proffering mythic contexts by which ordinary lives may be reclaimed for the kind of transcendental significance denied to individuals in modern society. It is early days yet in Gow's career as writer to prejudge his future path, although his recent hailing as David Williamson's successor indicates that a powerful theatre-going fraction wishes to 'edit out' any of the broader, transpersonal themes of his work and constitute its engaging suburban realism as the paradigm of 'successful drama'.

Clearly, however, the powerful examples of Nowra and Sewell have reclaimed an authoritative space within modern dramaturgy for theatre dealing with past and present, history as Dystopia or as Utopia, and its pressures on the fragile psychic world. In a culture which carries out much of its mythic self-imaging through the largely realistic styles of cinema and television mini-series, the very theatricality and bold intertextuality of these plays provides opportunities to expand on the contemporary significance of legends from the past beyond a mere reclaiming of lost history, however vital the latter is for the growth of a self-aware society. On a wider level, the plays are unique in world theatre in strikingly articulating the perspective of one particular colonising and colonised society, neither wholly of the Second nor of the Third Worlds, which is the pressured locus of much of the forces shaping and destroying the world we live in.

NOTES

1. At time of writing the third play scheduled for production at the Donmar Warehouse is a popular comedy by Melbourne writer Hannie Rayson, *Room to Move* (1985), a confident incursion into the 'Williamson' territory of changing urban mores, with their class, gender and generation conflicts.

2. See e.g. John McCallum, 'The World Outside: Cosmopolitanism in the Plays of Nowra and Sewell', in Peter Holloway, ed., *Contemporary Australian Drama*, rev. ed. (Sydney: Currency, 1987), pp. 567-580.
3. John McCallum, 'The Development of a Sense of History in Contemporary Australian Drama', in Holloway, p. 157.
4. John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 230.
5. 'Mmm. The smell of a fresh masterpiece. My God. And look. Over the page. The Henty-Jones property. Isn't it a fine building? Look at the verandahs. How'd you like to sit there at sunset, eh? Eh? With a whisky, watching your cows come home, building a new society? Eh? We get three and a half pages. They start with Oxley, then the squatters. That's when the Henty-Jones place went up. Apparently his wife was First Fleet. They've got a coat of arms over the fireplace. There's the clearing of the land. How'd you like to chop one of them down before breakfast, eh? Eh? There's Danny McReady, after they tracked him down. No white man was a match for those black trackers. Oh, and there's the convict gangs building the road. And then the railway coming. Those wild Irish navvies. Marvellous times. Aren't you proud? You should memorise every line of this. It took four years to produce. This is your past. You wait till we build our historic village.' Michael Gow, *The Kid* (Sydney: Currency Press and Nimrod Theatre Company, 1983), pp. 8-9. Further references cited in the text.
6. See Nadia Fletcher, review of *The Kid*, *Australasian Drama Studies*, 2 (2), April 1984, pp. 115-118, for comment on the Wagnerian echoes in the play's action.
7. For surveys of this play see John McCallum, 'The World Outside' and 'The Development of a Sense of History in Contemporary Australian Drama'; Veronica Kelly, 'Sunrise', in her ed., *Louis Nowra* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 124-126; Gerry Turcotte, '«The Circle is Burst»: Eschatological Discourse in Louis Nowra's *Sunrise* and *The Golden Age*', *Australasian Drama Studies* 11 (October 1987), pp. 65-77.
8. Veronica Kelly, '«Lest We Forget»: *Inside the Island*', in *Louis Nowra*, p. 106.
9. Stephen Sewell, *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, rev. ed. (Sydney: Currency, 1985), p. 122. Further references cited in text.
10. Peter Fitzpatrick, 'Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing*', in Holloway, ed., *Contemporary Australian Drama*, p. 583.
11. Leslie Rees, *Australian Drama 1970-1985: A Historical and Critical Survey*, rev. ed. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1987), p. 297.
12. See Turcotte, '«The Circle is Burst»'; and Peter Fitzpatrick, 'The Golden Age', in Kelly, ed., *Louis Nowra*, pp. 127-133.
13. Veronica Kelly, '«Lest We Forget»', in Kelly, ed., *Louis Nowra*, pp. 99-113.
14. 'Outcastin'' is the lost people's word for exile; the play's final line is 'Nowt more outcastin''. Louis Nowra, *The Golden Age* (Sydney: Currency and Playbox Theatre Company, 1985), p. 54.
15. This theme has been explored in the author's paper '«Nowt More Outcastin»': Utopian Myth in *The Golden Age* given at the Centre for the Study of Australian Literature, University of Western Australia, December 1987.
16. Unlike the classic thriller, Sewell's plays refuse the closure whereby the enigma is solved and the threat banished: the disequilibrium set up by the irruption of concealed menace is left to spin its way to a catastrophic conclusion. See Stephen Neale, 'Genre and Cinema', in Tony Bennett et al., eds., *Popular Television and Film* (London: British Film Institute and Open University, 1981), pp. 12-18.

17. Stephen Sewell, *Dreams in an Empty City* (Sydney: Currency and State Theatre Company of South Australia, 1986), p. 10. Further references cited in text.
18. Peter Fitzpatrick, 'Sewell's *Dreams* at the Adelaide Festival', *Australasian Drama Studies* 9 (October 1986), pp. 35-51, makes the point that *Götterdämmerung* can occur as well in Australia as anywhere else: it being part of multinational capitalism (indeed since the deregulation of Australian banking by the Labor federal government it is more than ever vulnerable to the instabilities of the world system): 'It is neither naivety nor presumptuous nationalism which lead Sewell to locate the downfall of international finance in the suburbs of Sydney. The oddity of the idea is precisely the point. Sewell quite deliberately appeals to the legendary cultural cringe which persuades Australians that nothing of any consequence could ever happen here in order to demonstrate the vulnerability of a fabric which can be unravelled by a little tug on a seemingly insignificant thread. To deny that possibility is in Sewell's terms to accept a sense of powerlessness which is among the breeding-grounds of despair; and might be, in its way, as conducive to destructiveness as the corrupt egoism of a Wilson or a Wiesland' (p. 39).
19. James Leverett, in his 'Old Forms Enter the New American Theatre: Shepard, Foreman, Kirby and Ludham', discerns deconstructed melodrama at work in late 1960s and 70s American theatre, impulses which borrow the power of melodrama-derived popular forms like the thriller, the Gothic tale, the detective story and the western. He claims 'the result of the breaking up of forms is almost axiomatic: when the moral shell is fragmented and removed, an aggressive, erotic, even fetishistic force is released — an energy that we could well call the soul of melodrama' (p. 117). The 'Gothic' plays of Sewell and Nowra, for their part, appear to seek to constitute a new version of nineteenth-century moral structures, using the 'released' energies as motors of political and cultural questioning, or as prefigurations of Utopian alternatives. Daniel Gerould, ed., *Melodrama* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), pp. 107-122. See also Veronic Kelly, 'Introduction' to Kelly, ed., *Louis Nowra*, pp. 20-22.