

Janet Frame

LILICHERIE MCGREGOR (Aotearoa - New Zealand) is a lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Otago. Her research interests include inter-cultural and post-colonial theatre and the training of the actor. She has recently directed *The Tempest* (a Shakespeare adaptation, 1999), *Glass Beads* (a multimedia production, 1999), *Songs to the Judges* (a bi-cultural production based on Maori land rights, 1998), and *Taste* (a community documentary theatre production, 1997).



An Approach to Cross-cultural Dramaturgy

An invitation to Thespis 2000 - The Seventh International Festival of University Theatre, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem raised the question of what kind of performance my theatre group and I should prepare for this very special meeting at this very special place. The inspiration given by Jerusalem pointed towards a subject of religious plurality, while our spiritual reality gave us in addition a choice of a number of fashionable subjects among various religious concepts, such as syncretism, New Age and different shamanic techniques. On the theatrical and technical level the play needed to refer to a state of postdramatic theatre and its dramaturgical methods, as well as to interactive multimedia techniques including singing, music, dance and video.

An invitation for Germans to join a theatre festival in Israel also involves us in confronting the historic guilt and feelings concerning the relationship between Israelis and Germans. After the recent cases of neo-nazi riots in Germany, we wanted to show that there are other people in this country who try to look at the specific needs of those living in foreign cultures. We wanted to

show that we see their suffering and are aware of our responsibility, and also face the fact that, in trying to help, we often get lost in our postmodern jungle of a plurality of different beliefs and activities.

The culture of the Aborigines is the oldest in the world and therefore beyond any religious and political connection to the German-Israeli dialogue. The philosophy of the "dreamtime" contains such a sublime humanitarian message that it could concern Jews, Muslims and Christians without having a missionary agenda. By making reference to this philosophy, we thought we could dare to touch common ground, without showing too pessimistic a view of our contemporary society, one that longs for spirituality but seems to find no way out of materialism. The beautiful, allegorical and very dramatic stories of the Australian dreamtime heroes seemed to be ideal material for a play.

The play had to work not only as a demonstration of readings in interculturalism, but also to touch on something in our own personalities. To achieve this we remembered an old source of European theatre, the role of the oracle of Delphi in Greek tragedy, and we

combined this tool with a modification of a psycho-drama technique. For our experiment with Australian anthropological roots, we chose Donni Hakanson's dreamtime oracle. Every actor secretly put a personal question which the allegorical stories of the oracle would answer.

THUS WE GOT SIX STORIES

ACTRESS 1: The country is dry. The animals discuss how to get water. The frill-necked lizard offers its help as a magic rainmaker, but the help is not accepted. So the lizard provokes a flood in which all the animals drown.

ACTRESS 2: Three groups of animals - birds, fish and animals on land - ask the platypus to which animal family it belongs. The platypus does not know and prefers not to decide to belong only to one kind.

ACTRESS and DANCER 3: The master of fire and lightning lies by the sun-woman who warms him, until the rainy season starts. Then he throws his lightning onto the earth to punish those who have transgressed the spiritual laws.

ACTOR 1: The dreamtime hero comes to the earth to teach the spiritual rules to people and he promises to come back once all people on earth learn to live in peace. The place where he touched the ground was full of opals.

ACTOR 2: A huge lizard threatens a tribe until a dingo, faithful to the people of the tribe, kills it. Its blood becomes the sacred ochre with which people colour their skin for the corroboree.

SINGER: While hunting in the bush, a tribe has to seek shelter from sudden rainfalls in a cave. A rock rolls in front of the entrance and shuts the people inside. Only one of them can escape to hunt in order to feed his people until he is hurt and dies. A flower springs from his grave. The other people in the cave die too.

These stories were intermingled, transformed, interpreted, cut and adapted to fit into a dramaturgical course following the Aristotelian pattern of exhibition, development, turning point and catastrophe.

One of the actors told me that she wanted to go to Arnhelmland to learn more about Aboriginal culture. We took up this proposal as the beginning of the plot. This basic impulse coincided with a certain fascination for Marlo Morgan's novel *Message from Forever*. So our play began with a student of anthropology who, in her dream, receives a message from an Aborigine, reporting that his people decided to leave the earth because they suffer from the aggression of Western civilisation. The Aborigine asks the student to tell other people about the old wisdom of dreamtime. Trying to find companions, she tells her friends about the Aborigine's philosophy and culture, thus provoking a big argument on lifestyle, indolence, syncretism, luxury, magic and hope in a multicultural western society. Her boyfriend wants to marry her and start his career as a surgeon. Her female friend does not accept her giving up sampling different religions to follow only one particular culture. The martial arts student, whom she tries to seduce in an attempt to get a shamanic initiation and learn more about Aboriginal medicine, seems to be an adventurer greedy for whatever challenge will bring change to his life. The young man's fear of losing his love makes the quarrel escalate into a surreal, absurd game. The anthropologist remembers the dreaming of a frill-necked lizard that provoked a big flood when all the other animals did not believe in its power as the rainmaker who could help the dry country. In the dreaming, the animals drown in the flood. As for the Aborigines there is no death, but only transformation; at this point in the play the action becomes surreal. Like the magpies (of another dreaming) who could lift the sky to open a wider living space for their companions, the

group transforms and welcomes the sunrise of a new life. The anthropologist understands that following her vocation means leaving her friends, and that this will cause big changes in all their lives. Feeling imprisoned by her responsibility for these changes, she remembers the dreaming of a hunting tribe who fled into a cave in a thunderstorm and suddenly were trapped by a rock fall. Only one of them could escape to hunt and feed his people, until he was hurt and died with his tribe.

The verbal text of the play, which I wrote in collaboration with Emily Voelker (whose mother is Australian), was compiled by using some further Aboriginal dreamings. One level of the dramaturgy was the action on stage, which switched from verbal communication (in dramatic, epic, poetic and lyric patterns) to singing, dancing and ritual. At the narrative level the dramaturgy switched from realism to surrealism, fiction, to metaphysical contemplation, to absurd and grotesque intensity.

A film was projected onto a screen through the action so that the actors' shadows entered the visual dreaming. It showed a real, surreal, romantic, nostalgic, brutal and contemplative dreaming of Australia, the Aborigines and their heritage. As if running through the anthropologist's mind, the film showed her visions and fears and placed them in contrast to the action on stage. The film also transmitted a vision of the Aborigines leaving earth. The film gave a metaphysical view of the spiritual transformation by showing the Aborigines being removed from real life and transforming into light.

The different meanings of the Aboriginal "songlines" opened different ways of using music in the play. The idea of singing as the "real" purpose for which the human voice was made, the "song" as a creative assertion of human beings to produce vital vibrations, and the idea of creation through vibrations, sound, music, were some of the basic stimuli

for the play. The songs became the epic framework, lyric and philosophical deliberations, and a musical means to hold the diverse aspects, persons, mentalities, wishes and lifestyles together. Volker Hahm composed a musical framework of sounds, also using elements of Aboriginal instruments and music inserted into certain modal patterns. The dance in the play and the martial arts *kata* were accompanied by musical pieces with ethnic musical references.

The need to accompany the action in its slight changes of tempo and rhythm was fulfilled by improvised parts in the score. So the voice improvised the "songlines" realising, commenting, illustrating, fragmenting, transforming and fixing the verbal texts and their meanings according to the images, movements and tensions in the film and in the scenic action. The vocals also used technical transformations with vocoder and echo. The beauty of sounds and their subtle transformations, splitting the voice into a chord of five voices, creating a repetitive pattern with echoes, letting the harmony fall and emerge again from the sequences of echoes, gave a musical idea of the beauty found in the philosophy of the Aboriginal songlines. The MIDI-technique provided the vocal shapes to add a sound to the narrative structure which mirrors the state of mind of those who want to face other cultures without imitation and without losing their own identity, but playing with different media, on several levels of visual and musical arts.

The play *I Dreamed a Song* was produced and performed in Jerusalem in April 2000 in the Gérard Behar Performing Arts Centre and in May in the Samuel Rubin Israel Academy of Music in Tel Aviv. The audience was surprised, irritated, inspired and moved.

The eternal unity radiates light, spirit and love,

vibrations turn into music and the voice of the planet sings all the beings into life. Music flows through all things and every human body - stimulating, energising, healing, connecting it with the universe...

When you return to dreamtime, leave music and beauty behind.

SUSANNE VILL (Germany) studied Science of Music, Psychology and German; she collaborated in conceiving the *Enzyklopaedie des Musiktheaters* at the Institute for Research for Music and Theatre at the University of Bayreuth. Since 1988 she has been Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Bayreuth. As a singer she has given numerous concerts and is renowned for her solo improvisations of soundscapes. She founded the music theatre workshop at Munich University in co-operation with the Academy of Arts.



Collaborative Text Development for Non Text-Based Theatre

How do we experience the tension in the interstices of these desires - to be an artist, to be a reflective thinker, to perform, to write? Why is it that the analysts who attract me the most, Jung obviously, and Freud too, wanted to be artists or at least perceived as artists? "I have at last achieved my aim to be a man of science, but perceived as an artist..." Well, I wouldn't go precisely that route (no need to be seen as a man of science!) but I do want to see from an artistic point of view - and one that is embodied.

The nature of the work I get to do with the Archipelago Theatre Company is intuitive, imaginal (nothing new here), and collaborative (new for me), inspired by issues that crowd the heart, affect our body's movement and alter the breath. Ellen Hemphill (Archipelago's artistic director) and I, function like thieves in the night using dream plunder. And thieves in the day after the

example of Martha Graham who claimed it was all hers for the taking - text from her elders as well as her peers, the movements of a bird, a lighting technique from a dance theatre downtown. Yet the "authors" of such plundered work wouldn't recognise themselves as thieves because new pieces are always original. Each play comes, as Hemphill says, "from the netherlands" much like a dream, offering its unique and unpredictable burst of images trailing distorted bits of a familiar world.

We both have backgrounds in psychology and the philosophy of religion. We are both intense observers. Getting to cast characters after twenty-five years of working with psyches is a joy, and would be a natural for many psychotherapists. Archetypal psychology, especially, knows that it takes an artist to perceive the uniqueness in another human being. When James Hillman writes about the process of perceiving persons as