

**Article No.2**

**VOICE, VERNACULAR AND VERVE IN *TROY'S HOUSE***

**By Roslyn Arnold (Australia)**

**Abstract**

In the nineteen seventies Australian theatre and drama experienced a renaissance with the work of playwrights such as David Williamson, Alex Buzo, Jack Hibberd and others. They captured non-indigenous Australian vernacular and life style in an inimitable way. It seemed that Australian playwrights of that period, and later, had covered the territory so effectively that newer talents might well be challenged to find scope for their own individual perspective.

It is argued in this paper that such a new talent might well be emerging. *Troy's House* is comic, confronting and sometimes poignant. Although Tommy Murphy is in his twenties, his work illustrates maturity beyond his years, without sacrificing anything of the raw edginess we associate with youthful talent. He takes risks with exposure to emotions such as disgust and surprise, confronting his audiences with the unexpected insight that apparently dysfunctional families can still offer their members comfort and solace, in amongst the disorder.

It is conventional for Australian plays to find their way on to school syllabus lists only when they attract some critical attention. Yet it is important that young audiences experience quality drama which echoes their vernacular and their contemporary perspectives. Murphy's skilful dialogue reveals something of the important difference between soap-opera television scripts and artful drama scripts. Youthful audiences might well appreciate the difference. *Troy's House* merits critical attention because it has depth and range in its subject matter and its insights, some of which are explored here.

**Biography**

Roslyn Arnold is Professor and Dean of Education at the University of Tasmania. She developed a particular interest in Australian drama, theatre and drama in education as a foundation member of the New South Wales Educational Drama Association in the seventies. She has published on aspects of Australian theatre and drama in education. She is a strong advocate for drama as a learning medium across the curriculum and believes we need to support creative new talents.

## VOICE, VERNACULAR AND VERVE IN *TROY'S HOUSE*

The main purpose of this paper is to reflect on the use of Australian vernacular and place in *Troy's House*, the work of a new Australian dramatist, Tommy Murphy. This paper was motivated by the excitement of witnessing the rise of a new, young dramatist on the theatre scene and by the tantalising quality of his work. *Troy's House* defies easy definition and it takes risks with its audience. The argument will be developed here is that the particular Australian voice and sense of place in the play creates important nuances which deserve to be identified and reflected upon. Those nuances live below the surface within the sub-texts of the play. One critic said of *Troy's House*,

Don't for a moment think this is a serious-minded message play. It's not. Murphy has an eye too idiosyncratic and whimsical to map a familiar or linear course, and while *Troy's House* is thin on plot and dramatic incident, it's a refreshingly candid and spirited work with no shortage of dysfunctional characters and domestic conflict (Hallett, 2000)

Equally, Murphy's ear is 'idiosyncratic and whimsical', I would suggest. Initially, the audience is invited to hear and see things which are fundamentally unattractive, then the pervasive verve of the play takes a hold on our attention. Murphy dares to confront his audiences with aspects of identifiably Australian life, albeit within the context of a primarily working class youth culture, and manages to make it seem important that he does so. Hallett (2000) is right to comment that this is not a 'message play', but it is more nuanced than it first appears to be. Beyond performance its text stands up to critical scrutiny and both performance and text will be commented upon here.

### Background

Since the remarkable era of the nineteen seventies when Australian drama itself took centre stage in our cultural life, there is an alertness to the rise of new and talented dramatists to continue that tradition. That's the value in developing a tradition, we believe it can continue. Running parallel to the rise in Australian drama thirty years ago was the rise of Australian drama in education in schools. These parallel movements are, by definition, mutually dependent. By educating young audiences and readers through the media of Australian education and Australian literature we encourage the long term viability of our theatre, our drama and our literary culture. For these reasons, Tommy Murphy's *Troy's House* merits the attention of those interested in supporting and teaching Australian drama and theatre. The play was commissioned by the Cultural Centre of Queanbeyan, staged by the Sydney University Dramatic Society and then moved in early 2000 to the Old Fitzroy Hotel in Darlinghurst. The dramatist is an Arts student at the University of Sydney.

### Framing the experience

A visit to the theatre has its own framing which often extends beyond the stage and theatre itself. The journey to the theatre, the form of transport used, the company kept and the expectations created before the event, all exert their own influence on audience responsiveness. My first visit to the play had interesting and personal precursors. To disclose a personal interest, my niece Emily Gregory-Roberts had a role in the play during its Sydney season in 2000. *Troy's House* ran first at the Wharf Theatre under the Sydney Harbour Bridge - a backdrop of particular symbolic power, not least to those who love it as I do. In its own way the Bridge is an important national and international stage for celebratory fireworks so it has its own dramatic role in cultural life, *transporting* people in practical and metaphoric ways. Grace Cossington Smith's painting of the Harbour Bridge, (*The Curve of the Bridge*, 1928-1929) is seemingly painted from the angle you might imagine from the wharf harbouring this theatre.

When I went to the production of *Troy's House* the evening was balmy and tantalisingly promising in a peculiarly Sydney way. I went with a family and extended family group which included young and not - so - young enthusiasts. The seats in the theatre, a hotch-potch collection of chairs and stools, reminded me of the spirit of the early Nimrod performances in the stables in Darlinghurst. Exciting but not glamorous occasions. The March heat was as persistent as the sense of anticipation. You could not be indifferent to the ambience. I'd been told by drama and theatre lovers John Hughes and Hugh O'Keefe that I just *had* to see this play, not only in my role as fond aunt of one of the performers, but as a drama educator. That kind of urging can be a risk in that it often invites perverse resistance.

I went along with mixed feelings of resignation and hope. At least I'd be doing my duty by attending and perhaps it would be good. Besides, imagine what a loser you'd feel if you were a Melburnite [inhabitant of Melbourne] in the seventies who missed the heady days of Australian drama in the Pram Factory in Carlton. As it turned out, the performance was memorable and I wanted to write about it. I later went to a second performance at the Old Fitzroy theatre in a back street of King's Cross. On reflection, I enjoyed the performance at the Wharf Theatre under the pervasive image of the Harbour Bridge more than second performance. I think this had much to do with the different aesthetics of the two playhouses.

### **The opening: Placing the house**

You could say *Troy's House* opens with a focus on the products of the alimentary canal. The eponymous house of Troy is a rather unpleasant place, to a visitor, or an audience. Murphy takes risks with the setting but he has to do so to put his message across, and there is a message, notwithstanding Hallett's remarks above. It is just that the message is far more subtle than the stage setting. Murphy is taking a risk with his setting because feelings of disgust can stir black humour or depression in an audience and the occupants of a place. Which is part of Murphy's point, I believe. How does one rise above disgusting places? Disgust rarely has the power to stir rage. It usually flattens feelings. Is it possible to develop the resilience or denial to live with disgust? Think of the medicos, bathroom cleaners, morticians and fond parents who manage to live through disgusting experiences. Disgust is usually a turn-off and in the theatre it does not necessarily glue people to their seats. So how does Murphy get away with a risk of this nature? Who wants to come to the theatre to engage with the occupants of a dirty house with a toilet as dysfunctional as the occupants? And Canberra as a setting for an Australian drama? A house with 'a river of turds floating up the hallway'? Everything would tell you to find a better place. Somewhere where things happen, for instance. Not parliamentary things- real things like excitement, romance, work and fun. Canberra is an unlikely setting for a play about a working class family. It is to Murphy's credit that he manages to make this designer city work as an evocative and relevant setting. Perhaps you need to know how Canberra is regarded in the Australian psyche to appreciate his choice. My guess is that few people would think of Canberra as housing working class families. We tend to think of it as a sanitised, middle class bastion of respectability housing the Federal Parliament during its sittings and deserted by parliamentarians at the first opportunity; a point which might escape audiences outside Australia.

### **The voice**

Throughout *Troy's House*, a droll Australian voice pervades the play, albeit each character plays variations of that drollness. Why? Arguably, because there is something robust and engaging in the rhythms and complex emotions which the versatile Australian voice can both mask and expose, sometimes nearly simultaneously. It is often the pervading star in a play. The dramatist who knows that drollness marks an earthy wit and self deprecation, traits beloved by real Aussies, and can exploit that, is likely to gain and hold the attention of Australian audiences, at least. Consider how well laconic humour democratises everyone with an alimentary canal. It is not to say that the audience has to share the same preoccupations, or lack of them, as the characters in the play. Rather it is to say that when the vernacular is recognised by the audience, unconscious identifications, restrained rhythms and emotional resonances work below the surface to engage attention. The overt message of the play, conveyed by the setting and the characters is 'nothing happens here' while the covert message suggests otherwise.

It suggests that even if nothing much happens here, life itself, and relationships, have a habit of enduring even in unpromising settings. For example, when Tania and Felicity talk in a cafe about sex, in particular Troy's speedy performance timed by the length of a television commercial, the ribald humour nearly masks the intimacy between the two girls. Unexpectedly, that intimacy is possible and credible because the comedy is not strained. Even though the girls can be overheard by others in the caf  , the mutuality of their relationship shines through the ribaldry. Their conversation is not only for *girls-only* since Ben is invited to join in, and in particular to give his views on premature ejaculation. There is a serious point coming through this scene. Whether it's 'getting off at Redfern' or 'going to kick the final goal' there is no doubting the risky nature of both sex and intimacy. You have to be game to play. The girls are working out through their conversation, the extent of their courage. They are both socially brave and funny.

Australian drama has never avoided the confronting nature of its vernacular. In the early days of Williamson's and Buzo's writing, the vernacular functioned in ways which were recognisably Australian

(Arnold, 1975). Any search to understand how the Australian character is portrayed on screen and stage, has to take account of the ways in which speech patterns and dynamics engage audiences and reflect mores. Australia is a country with a real and mythical 'outback', and 'out-houses' which are recognised as part of both urban and outback history. Remember that there was an iconic 'dunny' in the Tin Sheds section of the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games. Arguably, if you can develop resilience to disgust, you can survive much. Maybe there is something distinctly Australian in our tendency to abhor 'bullshit' or pretence, or self-aggrandisement in any guise. The characters in *Troy's House* are engaging because they enjoy a measure of self-acceptance which could never be interpreted as smugness. They are neither winners nor losers because they simply play for fun or diversion. They are commonplace 'salt of the earth' or survivors of banality; one rung below the meek who shall inherit the earth.

So what happens in the play? Not much. A bunch of kids hang out in a filthy house while a chorus in the shape of two thought-fairies explains the sub-texts of their desultory conversations. The thought-fairies are a neat dramatic touch suggesting an emotional underworld of hope and joy which can only break through like an eruption. That hope or joy doesn't seep through the walls, it just erupts. Just as boy meet girl and sex happens. But if that's all the play is about, why would you leave home and so called *reality* television to come to the theatre? Possibly for the same reason that British theatre-goers flocked to see Pinter's and Beckett's plays in the sixties and beyond. Just as the allure of a still-life painting derives much of its impact from the placing and shading of everyday objects, when painted by a discerning artist, so too with the theatre of domestic life. The drama and allure is revealed in the placing and shading of everyday events.

When the vernacular and silences of mundane existence are structured as an art form, we are beguiled. A voyeuristic element can come in here. It can be engaging to eavesdrop on a conversation in a train, provided the story overhead has some drama and focus. As the eavesdropping audience nothing is required but attention. It can be intrinsically enjoyable to find meaning in the banal when it is framed with feeling and subtlety. In *Troy's House* we are engaging with a bunch of very average young adults whose lives don't exactly lack purpose, they simply move to a fixed beat. Not up-beat, not down-beat, just somewhere in the middle. Like Canberra, just plonked in the middle of no-where.

### **The setting: drum-roll-Canberra**

In spite of its being the seat of Federal government and the political capital of Australia, Canberra is rarely the setting for Australian plays. Even in *Troy's House*, the city is alluded to, only providing a real backdrop for one romantic interlude. Mind you, the fact that the public can gain easy access to the public areas of the building and its surroundings says something about Australian egalitarian attitudes to authority and government.

In fact there is a risk that the star of *Troy's House* will be Canberra itself. After all, it does some elevation with its post-modern phallic structure at the top of Parliament House. There is promise there. You can see through that structure on top of the hill, just as Murphy sees through the image and the reality of Canberra. It is part of the Australian cultural psyche to think that those living beyond the smell of the sea need to be resilient. While Troy's house is not in the outback, it has to build some resilience in its occupants because it is smelly and unpleasant. As well, it is situated in Canberra which suffers for being beyond the coastal belt and prone to losing its high profile population every Friday evening as the politicians and their entourage exit for civilisation elsewhere. Australians regard a weekend in Canberra as the booby prize in the kindergarten raffle. Exaggerated? Not if you know that in the Australian culture, Canberra 'as severely purpose focused as a spoon' (*Troy's House*, p.6) stands for authority, futility and the inflated egos of the politicians and public servants who work there.

At the time of writing this paper, a couple of anecdotes about Canberra were reported in the travel section of the Sydney Morning Herald:

Percy Deane, secretary to the Prime Minister's Department under Billy Hughes, declared that the best view of Canberra was 'from the back of a departing train' and Don Dunstan, a colourful premier of South Australia, described the city as being 'like a woman expensively coiffured, dressed, and made-up, well educated, courteous - and frigid' (Elder, 2000)

Note that the city doesn't even inspire particularly witty comments about it. They are wry and moderately funny but not cutting or thought-provoking. It is not that kind of place to stimulate great wit but it does continue to attract attention. *The Herald's* travel writer, Bruce Elder remarked '... as a place to visit Canberra is exceptional. It is a city of great aesthetic beauty with broad roads, superb

parklands and many elegant buildings'. (Elder, 2000)

A sub-text of these reflections upon Canberra is that beauty without heart can only sustain life for a limited time. So what is the heart of this play, the city or the characters?

### The heart of the capital

Troy's house has an advantage over Canberra the capital. Notwithstanding the grot and shambles of the house, its desultory occupants and stream of visitors, it has a heart and her name is Mum. Fag-sucking, pot-growing, Nintendo-playing, cat-baiting Diana could never front up to a school prize-giving but she'd fight for her son Troy, and most likely his friends. She'd even get off the lounge to do so. You've got to admire a heart like that, haven't you? It is a brave dramatist in a post-modern era who writes a female character as an un-reconstructed slob. You could never own up to working from a role-model in developing Diane's role.

She is so genuinely embarrassing she is not even a cliché. You want to think you'd never meet her face to face, yet suburban shopping centres offer no such reassurance. She might seem to be a stereotype but like the figures in the shopping centres, that changes if you get acquainted. Diane is an original like Muriel in *Muriel's Wedding*, memorable because we come to understand something of her vulnerability.

Murphy could well develop Diane's character further by giving her some sly wisdom. She has to be a creation of Murphy's imagination to be really interesting. This allows him some licence to create a paradoxical character - a woman who seems dismissible but who actually conveys the comic intelligence of the dramatist. There is scope in Australian drama for complex female characters whose self-effacement belies their power in family, social and professional life. Diane does not quite function as effectively as she could do. For example, she might well have conned a series of constables to believe her tomato-plant story, not because she is straightforwardly clever, but because her irrationality and sly deflections of the conversation become too exhausting for them to engage with. She could well be the female version of the larrikin so loved in Australian theatre and culture like Roo in Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* or Muriel. Diane loves her son Troy. We know that right from the start because she calls him a *bastard*. How else can she demonstrate her affection without embarrassing him? As is the habit of grown-up men in a pub, she pretends to knock the hell out of him to boost his self-esteem. In a perverse form of reverse logic, if you can survive the *knocking* you'll manage anything in life. Well, so the theory goes.

Perhaps part of the answer to the questions posed about the play lies in the particular nature of Australian vernacular and voice. Particular terms such as my *pozzie*, *daggy*, *bit of a no no* or Diane's cringingly unself-conscious pleading *Will yous kids stop playing the spinning game? Yous will spew or fall and hurt yourselves* (p.8) have an authenticity as Australian as a backyard with a Hills Hoist doubling as play equipment. That Australian voice is equally about the attitudes sometimes revealed and other times masked. As when Diane's makes a particularly witty remark in the play, addressed to the police constable sniffing around the pot-plants (my pun intended), *Good day, cuntsdouble* (p.22). The line is set up with the formality of the *Good day* - a phrase which should act as a warning. A character like Diane would only be polite in order to be ironic; the way sassy school kids signal their contempt for uncaring teachers. You wouldn't know whether Diane's slip of the tongue was an accident of lazy articulation or evidence of some unexpected sensitivity to the vulgar possibilities of the language. It is to Murphy's credit that the wit holds, even though Diane, at first glance, is an unlikely vehicle for it. With Murphy's comic intelligence he could ask more of a character like Diane. Give her a bit of energy to balance her insouciance and she could become a comic archetype; an Aussie mum who thinks Target is upmarket. Everyone could laugh at her then because no one in the audience would really be game to admit to identifying with her.

What could you learn about life growing up in Canberra? To include a biographical note:

Tommy Murphy grew up in Queanbeyan, a small town near Canberra which lacks the restrained and planned sophistication of the capital. Perhaps that background teaches a sensitive and talented young man that resilience and verve are not about place; they are about psychological strength, relationships built upon affection and the capacity to grasp meaning in poignant moments. Diane's run-in with the nosy cop providing such a moment. Diane knows that you never do in your mate or a member of the family. You use comic energy to deflect intrusive questions. Similarly, as in Diane's tacit philosophy, you don't ask too much of life. So what if relaxing with computer games is your idea of good entertainment? As Diane demonstrates, if you look after your kids, you're fulfilling your potential as

well as can be expected.

It is not that Tommy Murphy explicates such interpretations through his play. It doesn't have the kind of dramatic incidents which support such interpretations. Rather they arise when one tries to explain the power of laconic dialogue and the power of silence, the reverberations of sub-text and the distinctive Australian voice heard in the play. It is the omnipresence of that voice with its informing attitudes which merit the attention of audiences and drama educators. In trying to analyse what is distinctive about the Australian voice, I am reminded of a brief anecdote an Australian grazier shared with me as we killed time, to use the Aussie vernacular, before a meeting. He'd come down from the country for the meeting, staying overnight with his mother. She had asked him to go to a local post office to send 57 letters she'd written in some letter writing marathon. As he handed the letters over he told the foreign-looking attendant behind the counter that he wanted to send 57 letters, informing him that his mother had given him the correct amount to speed things up. Knowing that, the attendant carefully counted the letters - one...ten...twenty...thirty...fifty five, fifty six, fifty seven, FIFTY EIGHT. Bingo..... 'Fifty eight letters, sir, not fifty seven!' the attendant declared, smugly. My dinky-di Australian farmer grinned as he recounted the finale to the incident: 'I looked him square in the eye and said 'You don't say!'

If you can visualise that encounter and imagine laughing at it, chances are you understand Australian laconic humour. It functions to *take the mickey* out of those who take themselves too seriously. It is hard to explain to someone outside the culture just how it functions. When I told that anecdote to two French women, they failed to see the point. It is an insider joke like this anecdote reported by Peter Fitzsimons in *The Sydney Morning Herald* during the Olympic Games:

There are plenty of heavy-weight champion television anchors from overseas around at the moment, of course, and there is a lovely anecdote going around about one of them from America...It concerns his interaction late last week with a good ol' aussie bloke, on this occasion one of the operatives at the International Broadcast Centre out at Homebush.

So the story goes, 'Mr Lantern Jaw' was demanding some special dispensations from our hero that had not been afforded other visiting TV people, and failing.

'Do you realise,' the staggered fellow is said to have burst out, reaching for something to impress the bloke with just how important he was, 'that I earn (several) million dollars a year for what I do?'

'Yeah,' replied the laconic Australian, entirely unimpressed, 'but not in this country you don't.' (Fitzsimons, 2000)

There are any number of ways you could deconstruct this story. You could try a Marxist interpretation about power, money and the expectations of privilege. You could try a Freudian interpretation about envy, money as sexual sublimation and humour as deflected anger. You could even try a feminist interpretation which focuses on male desire for competition over co-operation. You could also apply a post-structuralist lens to the encounter and wonder about the personal histories of the participants. Or you could just laugh at the easy way the laconic Australian uses language to deflect pomposity and hold power on territorial and knowledge grounds. The laconic Australian knows that the agitator is powerless if the Australian refuses to buy into his/her value system. It is clever, often unconscious, but well embodied knowledge about human dynamics which Australians enjoy in abundance. The occupants of Troy's house will learn about that power just by virtue of appropriating the rhythms and nuances of the language. There is a sub-text there which warns: never under-estimate the silent observer of the human condition. That observer saves energy for the few big moments. Try to prove I am a liar for mistakenly claiming there are 57 letters to post when there turn out to be 58 (*blame my old Mum, I trusted her*) and your victory will be Pyrrhic. I'll make you feel embarrassed for caring about such trivialities. But I won't do it with arrogance. It will be done with resigned inevitability. The rapport between us dictated in Aussie terms, that you should preserve others' self esteem in unimportant encounters, not show them up. That's where the laconic bit comes from: a recognition that you don't waste energy on the unimportant things, like breaking a tacit bond for the sake of accuracy.

If you can relate to the ideas generated from reflections on this play, *Troy's House*, you might understand why I believe we should study Australian plays in Australian classrooms. They reflect more than place, gender and class. They reflect the kinds of relationships shaped by the feelings and values embedded and expressed in the language of Australians. David Williamson excited us in the seventies

with his sensitive ear for the robust language of mainly educated, middle-class characters. In Tommy Murphy we have a new generation of dramatist. One who was educated in the past decade in an Australian school and university where different interrogations to those of the post Vietnam era are applied to people and places.

Subjectivities identified and symbolised through robust dance and celebration, and relationships built on shared experiences, however apparently uninspiring they might seem to outsiders, are as valuable a source for meaning as causes generated by external events. More than that, we should take every opportunity to understand the cultural norms reflected in the language of Australian drama because it both reflects and preserves such norms.

David Williamson had an uncannily discerning ear for the nuances in the conversations of the men and women of his era. He captured the edginess and emotional undercurrents of men and women aspiring to live out the promises of an emerging and easily-moneyed middle class. The problem was, when we came to predict what we'd hear in his plays, we laughed at his wit then forgot the detail because we didn't care about the characters' lives, except, perhaps, the retired couple in *Travelling North*. Nonetheless, we learned from Williamson that the Australian voice can be an art form worth putting centrally on stage. That's what Tommy Murphy does in *Troy's House*. He has a gift for dramatic discernment and creativity which needs to be mentored. Hallett also commented, 'Murphy's skill lies in the humour and insight he manages to extract from characters and their circumstances without passing judgement or overstating the case' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, April, 2000). That is a very fair comment which suggests that this play has sufficient depth and meaning to merit public and classroom attention. Plenty of Australian school students will relate to this play, including the disaffected ones who'll see Troy as their hero. The enticing verve and energy of the play is not to be overlooked. Fun and frivolity can erupt from a house like Troy's. It can just happen, like romance, sex and dreams. It is not a function of class, gender or privilege. It is a function of emotional responsiveness, particularly responsiveness to joy and uninhibited expressiveness. Troy's house clearly allows its occupants, guests, or 'blow-ins', to feel whatever and however they wish. Such a liberating environment is naturally attractive to young people seeking unconditional acceptance, if not love. The complications of an inner life are soothed by such acceptance.

A secondary purpose informed the writing of this paper, namely, a patriotic belief that every encouragement should be given to the study of Australian drama in our schools. Critical commentary on recent Australian drama scripts can encourage their use in schools. The nuances, idioms and subtleties of the vernacular in everyday conversations are sometimes best appreciated and understood when encapsulated in artistic form. Through the study of Australian drama students have opportunities to learn how to listen sensitively and attentively to the language of their culture, and to read with focused, critical attention. This means hearing and reading the silences and sub-texts as much as the dialogues, but so it is in real-life and time. Many years ago I developed an interest in Australian vernacular in drama (Arnold, 1975) and that has been revived by both this play, and the ongoing work of Melissa Agnew (1995, 1999). Agnew argues strongly for the importance of a powerfully expressive Australian voice in the theatre: 'a voice that sounds like we sound- a voice consonant with our dramatic texts, our heritage, our culture and our diversity.' (1995, p.97).

One way to encourage that Australian voice is to allow it to express the Australian vernacular. Provided tenderness has a role alongside aggression, that vernacular can express an emotional range which asserts our trademark egalitarianism. That cultural trait is at its most sophisticated when it knows how emotion democratises humanity. Charles Darwin's research (1975) on the universality of emotional expressions in human faces suggests that emotions know no cultural, class or gender boundaries, albeit we often learn to mask our feelings for various reasons. Those who develop the emotional and empathic literacy to respond to even subtle expressions of feelings, are empowered by their knowledge and skill. Arguably, the study of Australian vernacular invites students to recognise what is particular and what is universal about its expression on stage.

It has been clearly demonstrated with the Opening and Closing ceremonies and throughout the Olympic Games in Sydney that joy is a spontaneous and infectious emotion. While joy rarely invites deep reflection or speculation, it provides a welcome contrast to the more challenging emotions of guilt, anxiety and shame. Exhilaration reflects the human condition as importantly as does grief. It is just that we expect the painful emotions to have more moral worth. We can be thankful that the ancient Greeks gave us both the Games and drama as sites for different kinds of play, a different range of feelings and different forms of reflection.

Even though the mood of *Troy's House* does not range widely, both the verve in the play and the hints of stoicism, in Murphy's characters suggest that the dramatist is hearing, seeing and reflecting important aspects of Australian youth culture and suburban life. He has the potential to develop as an important Australian dramatist. It is to be hoped that he is mentored and supported in his work. Finally, the riot of energetic dancing at key points in *Troy's House* reminds us that there is much to celebrate when a star is born. Here that star might well have struck gold in discovering new and unlikely resonances in the Australian voice in its vernacular.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to thank John A. Hughes for his helpful comments on an early draft of this paper and the anonymous reviewers whose responses I have attempted to incorporate.

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