

**WILLIAMSON'S AUSTRALIA — A STUDY OF TWO
PLAYS, *THE PERFECTIONIST* AND
*THE DEPARTMENT***

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY*

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled Williamson's Australia - A study of two plays, The Perfectionist and The Department, submitted by Shalini Rachel Varghese in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this university is her original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

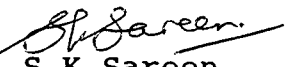
This dissertation has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this university or any other university to the best of our knowledge.


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SHALINI RACHEL VARGHESE

CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION

Given the colonial history of Australia, it took a painstakingly long time before theater in Australia could lay claim to a tradition in local drama that could hold the attention of its audience, be distinctive, and enduring¹. My attempt in this introduction is not to trace this long process of self-definition and thus give the history of Australian Drama but to locate the author I have chosen for my study, David Williamson, in the crucial period of this process, now called the "New Wave"². Before I come to an examination of this movement, it would be appropriate to attempt a brief narration of the history of colonial Australia for the obvious concerns here circambulate questions of cultural redefinition and nationality.

Called the 'newest of the continents', Australia was discovered as late as 1606 by the Dutch. Later still, in 1788 came the actual European settlement in the form of Captain Cook and his men in the fertile East Coast. Did Australia owe its founda-

tion to the vast imperial plan of a latter-day Rome, to an ambition to carry the English-language and the English law to the undisciplined ends of the barbarian earth ? In fact no. The case of Australia has been a little different from other colonies of Britain in that its colonization was merely a shift to dispose off the superfluity of criminals who could longer be sent to the American colonies which had seceded, nor accommodated in the English prison buildings and hulks because the crowding threatened pestilence. The populace of the founding years thus consisted of convicts , emancipists or ex-convicts and the free-immigrants. Of the lot, the free immigrants were considered the most respectable. To all of them, the parent culture was the model to be looked up to. However, pride in the nation became a reality with each passing generation .³

The unselfconscious acceptance of this developing nationalism came to be reflected in drama in the later half of the C20th, when the tradition of putting up plays by English playwrights or imitations of them came to be replaced by a mature, nationalist one. The Australian spirit was found to be in the

ideas of the 'Bush' and the 'outback' both being symbols of early settlement. If these were constituted and then debunked in Ray Lawler's The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll in the 50's, we see the 'typical Australian' or the 'ocker' making a noisy arrival, lending strength and momentum to a promising movement, especially in Sydney and Melbourne in the seventies, quickly dubbed the "New Wave" of Australian theater. Opportunity for writers to work closely with a performance company, which the playwrights of previous decades had mostly lacked and a radical political commitment characterised this movement.

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David Williamson is perhaps the loudest voice of the "New Wave" for he set the pace in the development of the 'ocker' figure as he did in the progress of Australian theater satire from the anti-establishment alternatives into the theatrical mainstream. "The 'ocker' was brash, crude and a violator of all decorums, big in his talk and his drinking and (by his own graphic but questionable account) an accomplished sexual performer as well. He was mostly young and middle class and he was always self-advertisingly male"⁵. A stereotype was found which represented cultural distinctiveness in a form that urban

audience could recognise as corresponding to aspects of their own experience.

Though the other voices of this movement like Barry Oakley, Alex Buzo, John Romeril and Stephen Sewell problematised and increased the scope of this theatrical bid for cultural definition, David Williamson's preoccupation with the 'ocker' and his manner of satiric caricature won a singular, resounding acclaim with an audience that might not have wanted to be identified with the figure of the 'ocker' but seemed to know somebody a bit like him for he came from the suburbs as they did. Ever since, his popularity has never quite faded. Peter Fitzpatrick and Helen Thomson observe in their record on the recent developments in Australian Drama, "David Williamson and Stephen Sewell, in very different ways, are the dominant playwrights in contemporary Australian theater. Williamson has enjoyed an astonishing popularity "⁶

The "beer-swilling slob", Kenny Carter of The Removalist(1971), the affluent graduates of Don's party (1971) are all representations of the 'ocker' characterised both by his uncouthness and comic vigour and his complexity as a speaker. Erik, the

feminist theorist of the play in this thesis, The Perfectionist (1983), minus his protestations against 'male machoness' comes dangerously close to this familiar figure. The project of cultural distinctiveness with its socio-realistic frame constantly critiques the moves of contemporary Australian society adapting to changes in the world outside. In Williamson this involves a tension between satiric exposure and celebration which I have sought to expatiate in my reading of two of his extremely successful plays, The Perfectionist (1983) and The Department (1975). The carping criticism of bureaucracy and administration does not diminish the dream of Australia as a laboratory of high technology in The Department just as the apparent support of a feminist protest of marital oppression does not dispute biological givens, leaving them as components of an elusive category in The Perfectionist. A break with a colonial past carries with it the vision of a national identity filled with colonial constructions of a different kind.

The period of 1960's and 70's has been termed as the era of intellectual revival in Australia. As a mainstream political playwright of the time William-

son has had tremendous influence on an audience that continues to be receptive to his plays. My attempt to deconstruct his plays remains the exploration of some of the myths dispelled and created there.

CHAPTER - 2

THE MYTH OF MARXIST-FEMINISM AND
THE DEFINITION OF WOMAN

The Perfectionist (1983) is a fairly late play of David Williamson where the obvious intention of the playwright is to tackle the sexual revolution of the 70's and the plethora of conflicting theories surrounding it. Barbara the middle class wife of the perfectionist academician Stuart, tries to bring more 'openness'¹ into her marriage thereby becoming a spokesperson for the feminist protest against patriarchal ideology and a mirror reflecting the social chaos of her time. Set against the background of Denmark, Barbara's confrontation with Stuart gains momentum with the support of Erik, the young Marxist idealist who comes to babysit her children. Stuart's parents, the older Jack-Shirley couple in Australia offer a foil to the Stuart-Barbara marriage, thus furthering the debate of male-female balance in marriage.

Barbara and Erik seem engaged in the common

task of combating authoritarianism. However, the conflict in their goals becomes evident as Erik toes the Marxist-Party line that sex is against revolution, when Barbara seeks a relationship with him outside her marriage. The introduction of this point of conflict in Williamson is a brilliant exposition of the possibility of a genuine synthesis of Marxist and feminist perspectives in the societies being referred to. Williamson shows how a reconciliation between the two confronts serious theoretical and political issues and is thus near impossible.

Barbara's struggle against male domination comprises the central thrust of the play and Erik seems more than a willing participant in this crusade at the beginning. He seems to offer possibilities in a male-female relationship that Barbara's marriage fails to give. However, this union is deflated as soon as Erik turns down Barbara's desire to 'explore her own sensuality without guilt' (Play, p.19). Erik's defense is along the Marxist party lines. Erik's arguments, "..... Because if everyone is making love they forget about injustice and the class struggle and revolution" and further, "But to put it real flatly, to have sex for fun in a world full of pover-

ty and need is not really such a smart thing"(play,p.19), effectively silence Barbara's protest initially, but his subsequent return to Barbara having realised that his earlier superimposition of economic disparity on Barbara's feminist impulses was not quite right, highlights Williamson's startling critique of the crisis of Marxism.

Erik is seen confessing in the concluding scene of the play , "Barbara, socialism is something I believe in still very much, but to say that us making love is, let's say, advancing the cause of capitalism is real dumb" (play,p.69). His relationship with his girlfriend in Denmark, Kirsten suffers a setback despite the fact that she is a dentist, is the breadwinner between them and hence has the economic power. Williamson's exposition here is that of the overwhelming problems that prove a stumbling block to any alliance between the women's liberation movement and the left. Williamson attempts to confront these to show how they demand compromises on both sides if they are to be resolved. Hence, the 'Marxist-feminist seminary' (play,p.10) of Stuart's accusations is proved a utopia, the perspective generated by such a synthesis fragmentary and contra-

dictory.

Erik's inclination towards Marxism is seen in his refusal to do a steady job in a "system that buys us off", as well as in his hope of a revolution that would replace poverty and injustice. His easy inclusion of Barbara's feministic motif in this discourse is critiqued appropriately in Williamson in two ways—first, by his refusal to continue a relationship with Barbara in the name of commitment to the revolution and second, by the subtle reference to his 'steady' relationship to his girl friend Kirsten, the equations of which are not made known. Erik's Marxism, constituted as it is around relations of appropriation and exploitation, is grounded in concepts that do not and could not address directly the gender of the exploiters and those whose labour is appropriated.

The Marxist analysis of capitalism that Erik stands for, is thus conceived around a primary contradiction between labour and capital and operates with categories that can be termed *as* 'sex blind'². Barbara's feminism, however, points in a different direction, emphasizing precisely the rela-

tions of gender - largely speaking, of the oppression of women by men in her society that Marxism has tended to pass over in silence. The specificity of her mission, seen as a necessary clash with Erik's, is a reminder of the fact that any awareness of the specific oppression of women in capitalist relations of production must be seen in the light of gender divisions which preceded the transition to capitalism and which, as the play shows, a socialist revolution would not by itself abolish.

The Erik-Barbara debate seeks to awaken the audience to the fact that Barbara is not included in Erik's project of fighting poverty and injustice and the Revolution. In insisting on the primacy of the labour -- Capital contradiction, it renders women like Barbara irrelevant in the designs of the revolution for they are not engaged in productive wage. In insisting on economic determination, it sees women's oppression as merely an (unimportant) ideological effect.

Williamson is therefore seen using 'Patriarchy' as seen in the representative characters of Jack and to

a lesser extent, Stuart as fathers dominating the household, as a means of disproving any valid Marxist participation in the cause of feminism. Williamson resorts to Milletian idea that " Our society, like all other civilizations is a patriarchy in which the rule of women by men is more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring"³ . Millet critiques, " What ever the class of your birth and education, the female has fewer permanent class association than does the male. Economic dependency renders her affiliations with any class a tangential, vicarious and temporary matter"⁴ . In a similar vein, Williamson is seen establishing a fundamental system of domination - Patriarchy, that is analytically indendependent of the capitalist or any other mode of production.

Barbara as a counsellor claims to have negotiated the cases of women of all kinds who have faced inequalities within marriage. She is seen invoking an apparently universal and trans-historical category of male dominance, thus leading her discourse into an inevitable reductionism .The category of male dominance here is grounded in a supposed logic of biological determinism, thus leaving us with little hope of

change. Thus, Williamson's exposition of the discord of Marxist-Feminist synthesis does effectively critique the validity of the former in tackling the subordination of women, but simultaneously trivialises the concerns of the latter. The rejection of economic determinism is seen giving way to biological determinism.

In the discourse of the Marxist-Feminist discord, a crucial point of conflict is introduced when Erik expresses his desire to have children by Barbara while Barbara insists that she does not want any more children. Williamson sites another thorny example of the conflicting ideologies of Marxism and Feminism - that of biological reproduction. Erik expresses a desire, where under his Marxist scheme of things, collective responsibility would take care of the question of reproduction. Barbara on the other hand is seen making a choice where each individual woman has the right to decide when and whether she will have a child. While these statements of the irrelevance of the apparent Marxist support of feminism is well founded within the developments of the play, the central thrust of The Perfectionist,

namely, the feminist voice against societal attitudes takes a back seat in the kind of biologic determinism suggested in the play for, in the last instance, the resolution of The Perfectionist emerges as an assertion of the familial ideology. The critique of Stuart's perfectionism, the idea around which the title of the play is based, implies the dangers inherent in attempting to create perfection in human relationships, and therefore Barbara's dream of an ideal man-woman relationship is a subtle irony suggested at the very beginning of the play.

The episode highlighting the conflict of interests between Erik's Marxism and Barbara's aspirations, namely her desire to explore her own sensuality without guilt stands as a simultaneous critique of Barbara's feminism too, for her ambition turns out to be just what Stuart's accusations point at-"That's what that book says, isn't it? open marriage is jumping into bed with anyone"(play, p.17). Stuart's accusations further suggest "paranoia"(play, p.6) and self-doubt in Barbara's discourse. Her thesis, the resumption of which is her most critical statement of protest against Stuart's authority is appropriated into the domain of 'care' as firstly, it is about

breast feeding and secondly, about its ramifications in the suburbs. Barbara appreciates Erik's willingness to babysit and compliments him for his "nice hands"(play,p.14), as these are refreshingly different from the traditional givens of male machoness. While the apparent attempt is to break categories of masculinity and femininity, Williamson is seen appropriating Barbara into the realm of the female principle. Her selfdoubt/paranoia as against male rationality, and, instincts of nurture only aims at a valourisation of the so called female principle. Thus the reductionism of letting masculinity and femininity develop as categories of meaning (in themselves) is kept intact in Williamson.

Shirley, Stuart's mother is tinged with a heightened sense of ambiguity in her outburst against Jack that acts as a foil to Barbara's seemingly consistent discourse in the play. Shirley accuses Jack of having thwarted her promising career as a theater actress and protests against having been reduced to a socialite wife. However, Stuart breaks the myth of Shirley's brilliant acting career by suggesting the possibility of Shirley's marriage to Jack as a willful avoidance of "ever having to go to

London and test herself out"(play,p.38). Stuart reveals that Shirley loved playing the socialite wife. It is even suggested that Stuart has turned out to be the 'unemotional' person that he is only because Shirley failed to give him the attention he needed as a child. Shirley is seen confessing at the end of this debate that she has had her moments of enjoyment in her marriage. This inconsistency of intention, the tinge of hysteria lent to Shirley's discourse is transferred to Barbara as well, as she asserts. "But I was far from objective. I'd thrown down the gauntlet and as far as I was concerned it was a battle to death".(play,p.41)

When Stuart substitutes Erik to become the babysitter while Barbara resumes work on her thesis, Barbara's ideal of marriage as an institution of equality is technically achieved. However, this situation does not quite salvage their marriage for Barbara is as dissatisfied with this arrangement as her Danish sisters who are dissatisfied with "warm, loving and nurturing" men such as Erik. Stuart's conversation with Barbara and Jack goes on to inform that Danish women call their men "cotton wool pricks"(play, p.40).As Stuart takes over the house-

hold, exuberant anarchy gives way to regimental precision and ironically, Barbara discloses, "The most puzzling thing was that the boys, lining up for their uniform inspection every morning clearly liked it"(play,p.53). Barbara's inference of such an instinctive participation of her young sons in the "efficient killer force for some secret mission"(play,p.53) confirms Jack's statement, "the hunter-warrior is in our genes"(play,p.36), further supported by Stuart's thesis that "there is some evidence that men, on average, could be biologically more competitive and aggressive"(play,p.37). Even the apparent centrality of the critique of perfectionism is subverted in this instance of the role-reversal in the family for if Stuart has books guiding him even while "empathising and communicating", Barbara's whole protest against inequality in marriage is initiated by an American book. Barbara's struggle therefore, is as 'unnatural' as Stuart's perfectionism.

Barbara confirms her love for Erik in the concluding scene of the play in her conversation with Stuart. However, she refuses Erik's invitation to Denmark as she sees the inevitable consequence of

this love as an impending marriage to him and bearing his children, a situation no different from her present one. Erik's unexplained deviation from his socialist motif and his newfound desire for a family seem to fit into the realm of psychology, of "deep-seated desires"(play,p.21) that get highlighted in the exposition of Barbara's character. Williamson is clearly drawing a parallel between this desire and his earlier gesture of playing romantic tunes to Barbara on the piano and encouraging their intimacy against his professed Marxist rationale.

Barbara's decision to continue her marriage with Stuart is seen as the ultimate act of compromise in a series of negotiations that have been set off on Stuart's initiative, based on a hope that "there are enough good moments to make the whole hassle worthwhile". Her final confession of a secret dream,

"I conjure up a vision of the man who 'll eventually enter my life. We'll live separately of course, and he'll be spontaneous, witty, warm, affectionate, caring and independent and he'll think I'm the most stunning woman in the world and he'll be a fantastic lover and a consummate cook. Maybe, I am the perfectionist" (play,p.79), on the one hand

voices a protest against institutionalized marriage, while on the other reduces her to the stereotypical notion of the 'unreasonable' woman lacking confidence but for the constant appraisal of her male-counterpart, eternally looking for means to nurture her own vanity. Barbara is seen objectifying the ideal male of her conception and once again falling prey to the dictates of the female principle.

Williamson's introduction of the psychological realm in relating Barbara's profession attempts a feminist appropriation of the psychoanalytic theory that seeks to cast the principle of male domination expressed through the power of the father over women and over younger men (seen in the Jack-Shirley-Stuart relation) as a primary psychic dynamic of contemporary gender construction. Thus the rejection of economic determination takes the shape of a shift from patriarchal absolutism to biologism. Barbara is therefore seen falling very much within the dominant meaning of femininity and her discourse valorising the female principle.

Williamson is thus seen thwarting the idea of women's emancipation within the given capitalistic background of the play. One of the major allegations

against capitalism has been that it constructed a wage labour system in which the relationship of women to the class structure came to be partially mediated by an assumed or actual dependence on a male wage and hence liberationists' demand that the liberation of women would require first, a redivision of the labour and responsibilities of child care, that this be shared between men and women. Second, the actual or assumed dependence of women on a male wage (or capital) would need to be transformed. Since both these happen in the role reversal stage of The Perfectionist, while the ideology of gender still exists, Williamson has clouded this situation in suggestive biologism offering no way out of it. Barbara is seen instilling a sense of longevity into the case of women's subordination. This appeal to longevity deprives her discourse of an adequate grasp of historical change.

The Perfectionist ends on an apparent note of compromise where not much has changed for Barbara, for she is seen craving for solitude. "I just want to pretend I am living alone" (play, p.80), Barbara says. This solution of 'solitude' seems to suggest that needs of intimacy, sexual relations, emotional ful-

fillment, parenthood and so on (highlighted throughout the play) are in themselves oppressive for they breed inevitable power structures that stem from biological differences. In this deterministic perspective, the logic of Barbara's feminism is reduced to an ambiguous desire for "spontaneity and fun"(play,p.77). Thus, even Barbara's attraction towards Erik is critiqued as an 'immense lyrical illusion'⁵ of a counter culture movement interested in being sporty and up to date. The critique of Marxism, fails to problematise the issue of feminism, but rather expresses a curious confidence in the capitalist system to deliver both spiritual and material goods best expressed in Barbara's final plea to Erik to "call a temporary truce with capitalism"(play,p.75). This is further highlighted in my reading of The Department (1975) in Chapter-4.

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CHAPTER-3

WRITING THE NATION- IMPERIAL MISSION IN THE PERFECTIONIST

Williamson's ostensible discussion of "marriage and the chances of its survival in modern society"¹ goes beyond the universalizing design of The Perfectionist, as the play evolves as a complex interlinkage of the discourses of Marxism and feminism. A somewhat awkward and tense relationship between the two is theorised in the denouement of the play. The concerns of these discourses in finding the lost subject is inevitably linked with the question of nationalism - finding the identity of the nation in question, namely Australia in a post-colonial context. While the initial chapters of this dissertation has attempted to problematise the former, the latter shall be the thrust of this paper.

Rodney Fischer's reading of a generalized "modern society"² emerges out of the cinematic technique of the play consisting of a succession of short scenes between different characters in a variety of

locations. The debate in the play is set against Denmark, the 'Polish Purgatory' that the academic couple Stuart and Barbara have come to; it further shifts to Australia and finally to "the third world", an impending India that Erik is hankering after. Erik's Denmark and even the 'India' of Erik's and Barbara's conversations are discussed as national realities without a picture of their National history, and cultural aspirations. The socio-historical reality of Australia too remains an indistinct aside in this dialogue of 'isms' (Capitalism vs Marxism) and worlds (First world vs third world). Infact, it is not even known as to which state in the country it is that Stuart and Barbara return to.

In discussions of migrant lives in Denmark, the vast area of Australia's own migrant population remains unexplored. The characters of the play are Australians predominantly, but the Australia that should have emerged out of their concerns is never really there. However, this is precisely where I see Williamson's first statement of Australianness emerge. It is the conscious avoidance of a space of tremendous potential, a silence that critics like A. Couani would call the "real Australian attitude",³

Australianness being the cynicism of silence.

Couani observes,

"You know I have traveled all over the world- any place you can name well, I'll tell you this- Australia is a great place for a holiday, but I wouldn't want to live there. It's unique I'll say that anyone can feel at home there because it has a strange character or atmosphere which is like an absence of character, a kind of neutrality. I think it is very tolerant or maybe just very anonymous. No really , I do like Australia. When I lived there I liked it . But I realize coming away again that there is some strange pressure there. It is subliminal, very subtle. I don't think I could describe it exactly because it is an abstruse quality which pervades everything there, the work situation, the politics, the social life. It is a place that gets you down. The amount of drinking the people do is phenomenal. And it is as though everyone's bitten by the same bug- some kind of desperation or hysteria which is never expressed. They are stoics, the Aussies. The most cynical people in the world, beyond morality- like the English but more sophisticated because they never say anything. The English talk and

talk and talk, endlessly trying to reason out, playing with words really but they are expressing attitudes. The real Australian attitude is never expressed.⁴ (My emphasis).

Couani's statement on the general national character is significant as Williamson's nationalistic discourse works through a motif of avoidance and anonymity. However, this silence is not mere complacency for it is simultaneously transformed into the power of Erik's voice. Erik, the employee, the babysitter protesting against absolutist societies, talks on Barbara's crusade against patriarchal impositions in marriage, voices his displeasure against the archetypal 'swearing macho-man'⁵ of Australia. In his complete identification with Barbara's voice of protest, and his pursuit of Barbara to Australia, he becomes the voice of the nation in question, the centre stage of the nationalist discourse. Erik is outraged by the way the system in Denmark has bought the citizens off- "Oh yeah, the system buys us off, but it is still the employer who has the power, and the worker who does let us say, what he is told"⁶. On the other hand Erik declares, "I would rather be living in Capitalist Denmark than in socialist Rus-

sia"⁷ . Erik's spoken English is a manifestation of "too many hours of watching American TV"⁸ . His socialist mind mediated by conventions of American serials is a lot like the precarious status of Australia in the 'worlds' that he is trying to forge.

Erik's melodic, modulated voice with its sympathies tilting towards Barbara's pleas of feminist freedom has none of the "American aggression"⁹ , but his single-minded devotion towards the party that dissolves his relationship with Barbara spells something of the aggression in the character of Barbara's husband, Stuart, the perfectionist par-excellence. Erik's refusal to do a steady job symbolizing a refusal to be a cog in the profit oriented economic circuit of the system, his empathy with Barbara's feminist articulations questioning the conventions of patriarchy, his knowledge of several languages, his refusal to take on the institutionalization of education ("I studied once to become a teacher..... and a steady job-yeah, well that's not so interesting to me")¹⁰ , his hesitation to accept Stuart's university medal as a test of genius, are all manifestations of what Edward Said calls alternative¹¹ practices of independence and liberation. Erik and

Barbara are dissenting voices against a system of ideology epitomised in Stuart's character carrying with it a sense of historical commitment, a traditional commitment that views the level of prosperity of a nation as a measure of the values of human dignity, liberty and self-determination¹² Erik's language is a powerful trope of the protest against authoritarianism that Stuart stands for.

ERIK : Stuart, to put it real flatly

STUART : Bluntly for chrissakes

ERIK : If I want to say flatly, I'll say
¹³
flatly.

Erik's insistence on saying 'flatly' instead of 'bluntly' does more than providing Erik with the voice of protest of Australia against the language of its English coloniser. As Paul Virilio suggests, here is seen a modernist project of liberating language/speech ("la liberation de la Parole")¹⁴, that has a parallel in the liberation of critical spaces-hospitals, universities, theaters, factories, churches, empty buildings; in both, the fundamental transgressive act is to inhabit the normally uninhab-

ited-constituting a real alternative to the authority of the state. Erik's language embodies the same linguistic audacity by which A. Walwicz has described Australia in his essay by that name:

" You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing, nothing. You scorched sun tanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs watching the telly. You bore me. Freckle silly children. You nothing much with your big sea. Beach, beach beach. I've seen enough already. You dumb dirty city with bar stools. You are ugly. You silly shopping town. You copy. You too far every where ¹⁵ ."

The emphasis on 'flatness', ("To put it flatly"), is at once suggestive of the barrenness, the flatness of the terrain, the locale and the life that the early settlers had braved. Barbara is to refer to this flatness of space later in the play, when Erik comes to Australia, "I am told it's quite ¹⁶ spectacular. All that flatness" (play, p.68). This metaphor reiterates the Australian garb that Erik has taken upon himself. This is a protest against that dominant definition of 'the English language' representing ratifications of a selective sense of culture and history, comfortable affirmations of a certain

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structure and forms of cultural authority .

Erik's knowledge of various languages, his love for Barbara and subsequent pursuit of her to Australia, his ability to critique the practices of his own country and finally, even his desire to go to India seem in themselves aspects of a multiculturalistic programme that he is indulging in. Erik's defiant use of the English language is reminiscent of Donald Horne's agenda of multiculturalism in Australia: ".... all multiculturalists in Australia should be as it were 'anti-British'. Failing this, there is a danger that multiculturalism becomes a way of keeping 'the ethics' quiet while the 'anglos' can go on running things, as destiny demanded they should."¹⁸ Erik's involvement with the class-struggle and his identification with the marginals of his society follow a language of defiance, a logic of daring.¹⁹ The very idea of making Erik the spokesperson for Australia could be seen as a spirit of internationalism that runs throughout Erik's subversive rhetoric. This transference and the logic of daring, however, betrays a simultaneous discourse of nationalism, very European in nature: "I would rather be²⁰ living in communist Denmark than socialist Russia",

emphasises Erik in an argument with Stuart.

Erik's statement and Barbara's own penchant²¹ for Europe ("That's what is so good about Europe") is a revelation of the brand of nationalism woven into the motif of the play, enmeshed in a long history of European colonisation. European colonisation since the C16, and especially during the past hundred years introduced many new features. The Europeans brought Christianity with its claim of universalism; their new science, technology and economics certainly had universal application; even European political and social ideals could possibly be transplanted. "But more striking have been the nationalistic rivalries, the way the Europeans fought one another under different flags, and were greedy, ambitious, cruel, generous and highminded each in their own way. Even as they came to emphasise their superiority over the Asians, each group of European-^{"22} emphasised its own superiority over the others, Wang Gungwu's analysis of nationalism in the colonies is significant here, for Barbara's awe of Europe is a further appropriation of the European idea of nationhood.

Barbara's overt intentions seem an acknowl-

edgement of cultural variety- a follow up of Erik's multiculturalistic impulse, "What Australian do we know speaks six languages Stuart ? " ²³ but the kind of languages alluded to here show a clear collusion with the colonial ideology as she speaks of six 'important', internationally acceptable, European languages. Australia's own cultural/linguistic history is a matter of silence here. In keeping with the strategy of omission that Williamson has taken up right through, mentioned earlier in this chapter, Australia's legacy of the divergent aboriginal languages ²⁴ , and languages of the immigrants ²⁵ , is glossed over. To look back at history, the Europeans arrived in Asia and its colonies when the major Asian races were living in empires with neighboring tributary kingdoms and tribes. There were ideas of lineage, linguistic and religious homogeneity in a few centres, but no clear idea of nationhood, no sign of development towards a law of nations, and no concept of permanent boundaries between sovereign nation states ²⁶ .

In a historical analysis of this condition Wang Gungwu observes that the national ideal as developed in Europe was superimposed on new as well

as old boundaries between sovereign national states through European colonisation. Gungwu goes on to say, These boundaries which distinguished bits of European territory in the colonies became, after the anti-colonial movements that followed in the C20th, the boundaries of new kinds of political units demanding a new kind of identity and loyalty. From these political units sprang the garrison-fortress idea of permanent national frontiers which divided vertically and sharply between different states and peoples, and even religions. And the force which was to give meaning and security to these states was that of nationalism.²⁶ Erik's discourse remains a tense mixture of such a self conscious native nationalism borrowed from the idea of European colonisation and a protest against such cultural institutionalisation of which nationalism forms a part, making him an unbecoming site of negotiation of these paradoxes. I shall come to this later.

Erik's identification with the 'third world', proclaiming it as 'authentic', and further, his identification with the working class, fits comfortably into the nationalistic design of his quest. As Bruce King has pointed out,

"Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the 'folk', the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at.... rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas"²⁸

The inherent nationalism of the working class ideology that Erik is a spokesperson of, is highlighted in Timothy Brennan's reading of nationalism and democracy.

"In short, Nationalism is enmeshed in the particular history of Europe and its ideology of 'democracy', it necessarily invokes the 'people', although this 'people' becomes increasingly after the late C19th, inseparable from the modern working class, both in the Marxist sense, and in that hybrid of Marxism and third world populism made famous by figures like Ho Chi Minh, Amikar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon and many others."²⁹

In his insistence on plebian authenticity Erik is no more than a reassertion of the idea of modern nationalism that arose in Europe. "Yeah,

India, the third world is let's say, authentic and ³⁰
real, but the stomach wogs are sometimes real bad".

There are three paradoxes that work simultaneously in this statement. One, Erik is homogenising a whole new unknown entity called 'the third world' in the name of India. Two, he conforms to notions of 'authenticity' and 'reality' of a divergent and multifaceted area that he knows little about. Thirdly and interestingly, he is seen complaining about the lack of development, the filth that comprises a general concept of the third world.

Erik's statement deflates the cross-cultural impulses of his discourse, showing it to be a kind of ³¹ neo-orientalism that attempts to valorise, glorify, patronise and hence construct an altogether exhibitionist idea of the third world. The symbolic protest of his language is now added on to the ³² symbol of his new attire, 'a kardi suit' (sic) in which he makes his appearance in the last scene of the play. The logic of daring seen in his flouting of traditional beliefs and the recognition of the relativism of, and possibilities inherent in all societies, systems of belief and cultural practices transforms into a logic of yearning and regress.

Erik's yearning for a third world / Indian identity is the manifestation of a 'cringe'³³ towards third world / Indian culture seen in the statement of the 'kardi' suit, a stand as inappropriate as a cringe towards Britain/Europe that he is desperately trying to do away with. This seems the inevitable consequence of a strategic silence where the complex history of a country initially inhabited by native aborigines and subsequently endorsed by 200 years of white colonial settlement is systematically avoided. The silence almost carries with it the burden of guilt of the white settler to whom the tropes of a nationalist discourse inevitably lies outside the reality of his/her own socio-politico sphere, elsewhere in an idealistic world. Williamson resorts to the classic technique of displacing social problems - shifting these concerns in terms of time (locating them in a past or future) or space³⁴. The characterisation of Erik serves to construct a precarious nationalist discourse through the socio-economic and cultural constructions of another country.

If Erik and Barbara seem voices of dissent against the Western system of ideology that Stuart symbolises, characterised by its rationalist outlook,

perfectionism and historical commitment, their impending visit to India has elements of a similar imperial creed, the "sense of mission, historical necessity and evangelical fervor"³⁵ that Richard Barnet speaks of. Even Erik's knowledge of several languages in this light serves to enhance the colonial urge, for the great Orientalists of the imperial days learnt several languages as part of the cross-cultural enterprise and served as colonial functionaries. Said's theorization of "Nationalism, independence and liberation as alternative cultural practices to imperialism"³⁶ acquires a significant application here; the three categories stand as opposing ideologies rather than struggles that enhance each other. The quest for identity manifest in the 'authenticity' of the 'third world' with its implications of "world responsibility" forges a nationalist narrative rooted in the imperialist ideology. The language of Erik's multiculturalism is therefore, hardly what Said calls "genuine multiculturalism and new knowledge, as a barbaric threat to 'Western civilization' "³⁷

Barbara too is seen indulging in such an unbecoming fight against cultural monoliths. Her

thesis on "Changing attitudes towards breast feeding
in the inner suburbs of Sydney in the fifties"³⁸ is
one that challenges the unrepresentativeness of major
cultural institutions in Australia- the university in
this case. Her struggle too however is rooted in a
'cringe' towards Europe, an open acknowledgement of
the superiority of European culture. It is in Europe
that she is enlightened into resumption of her re-
search. The efficacy of Erik's multiculturalism
stands as a means of criticising institutions - both
political and discursive ones, but fails when seen as
a cultural theory which operates between heritages,
language communities and institutions. The issue of
representations is almost fudged into universal
declarations of brotherhood, for Erik is seen infus-
ing the concerns of woman, the working class and the
third world into a single discourse at once distort-
ing and homogenising these social categories. What
emerges out of this third world homogenisation is a
fundamentally static notion of identity, which, Said
notes had been the core of cultural thought during
the era of imperialism. Erik's journey to India has
the resonance of the imperial mission, the desire and
zeal to explore the Orient, the determination to

brave the 'stomach wogs' for the 'authenticity' of the experience. As Said's introduction to Culture and Imperialism explains "There is always the appeal to power and national interest in running the affairs of the lesser peoples "³⁹

The colonial desire implicit in the appropriation of the third world is Williamson's construction of nation retreating easily into a pre-European colonial era, unmediated by colonial history. Barbara's nostalgia for Europe and Erik's love of India, are this sense part of the same colonial urge/programme. What is achieved in this programme (the slippages in the construction of Erik's character as a site of negotiation of nationalist and imperialist ideologies) is a remarkable awareness of self, a recognition of otherness in nationalist constructions.

Williamson's desire for colony as I see it, is the loudest statement of the paranoia of nationhood, the declaration of fear of facing the history of a nation that is simultaneously coloniser and colonised, the promise of redemption and the permanent outsider (Dicken's Great Expectations is an

excellent illustration of this situation), the land set apart for convicts but open to profiteers, as 'rootless as tumble weed'⁴⁰. Between the fear of its national history and a desire for colony is seen a whole debate of the first and the third world, the coloniser and the colonised divide that is never quite settled, clear, and unassailably self-evident.

CHAPTER - 4

REDUCTIONISM OF 'THE MIDDLE PATH' - RECONCILIATION OF SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES IN THE DEPARTMENT

In The Department (1975) Williamson presents the metaphor of a thermodynamics laboratory, the drab and colourless mezzanine with its numerous pipes and machines, for the dehumanized void of bureaucratized education. He exposes a list of functional binary opposites such as science versus humanities, academics versus bureaucracy, Physics versus Engineering (pure science versus technology), attempting to evaluate the consequences of their interaction upon society. While educational politics and the university system form the backdrop of the play appearing to contribute to the central debate there, I attempt to deconstruct the disciplinary debate of science versus humanities articulated in the academic staff meeting, for it is in this dialogue that ideas of progress and development with their definite social implications get expressed best. In what seems like an ambiguous and "intrinsically bizarre"¹ ritual of a staff meeting, Williamson's sympa-

thies seem inclined towards the profit oriented ideology controlled by the market even as he is silent on the issue of the ramifications of the economic structure of the society he discusses.

The academic staff meeting is a critique of the intriguing, labyrinthine secrets of tertiary technical educational institutions, the nature and scheduling of the whole vast spectrum of meetings that consume the lives of bureaucrats and decision-makers, and most ostensibly the nexus between the establishment and scientific experiments. As Rodney Fisher remarks, "again one sees that Williamson is moving in an area far removed from a bourgeois theatre not daring to let science loose on the field of human relationships" (play,p.8) . However, Williamson's protest against inefficiency and compromise turns out to be a valourisation of the scientific method and a curious compromise by itself. It is this paradox that I intend to show through a discussion of Williamson's "intrinsically bizarre- albeit recognizable and amusing" (play,p.8) characters and situations.

Williamson's play is concerned with the characters' outer life. The all important character

of The Department is the meeting itself and the matter of discussion there . All the characters seem trapped and defeated and controlled by the meeting just as they are by their professional lives. Peter, the epitome of brash scientific brilliance ,Myra, the spokesperson for social studies, Robby, the manipulator who bulldozes his way through a time consuming nine-point agenda with no interest in debate or dialogue, John, the symbol of straight forward labour -are all pointers of a certain institutionalized violence, corrosive, subtle and degenerate, different from the personalized face to face ,impassioned violence associated with traditional concepts of sacrifice and feuds. The science versus humanities debate seem to serve the purpose of suggesting an understanding of the way systems of knowledge become new sources of violence and oppression once they acquire power or the capacity to bestow power. However, Williamson's sympathies seem to stay with Robby in the last instance, for he is after all trying to combine science with humanism. Williamson examines the power of scientific study from within the logic of science. While his characterization of Peter expresses faith in the possibility of science unintervened

by politics, his portrayal of Robby is the acknowledgement of science as a kind of necessary evil.

In the oppressive world of science Myra's, the Humanities teacher, discourse is a potential alternative form of knowledge. Myra's position in the staff meeting serves to highlight the sharp divide between the expert and the non-expert in the understanding of science- " a divide which converts the vast majority of non-experts into non-knowers even in those areas of life in which the responsibility of practice and action rests with them"² . However, the charge against Myra's research project for her students is highlighted by the playwright in her dialogue with Robby, where the anarchic consequences of her "simple, straight forward, research exercise" (play,p.37) are pitted against the "humanistic" pleas of Robby.

Myra has engaged her students in a research project that delves into the college history and consequently exposes the double standard of its founder, Milton. Her students bring their findings into a debate on the founder's day when the ninety year old sister of the founder, Miss Milton is called

to be honoured on the occasion. "It is pretty destroying to watch your own students behaving like louts. When there was just Bobby and I we knew our students as well as our best friends. They were our best friends, and they respected us well", protests Robby. It is precisely this respect he seems to be showing towards Miss Milton, the founder of the College whose dream and illusions he does not want to shatter when she is aging. "Do you really think it would have been a terrible crime if Miss Milton had gone to her grave with her illusions intact,"(play,p.41) he is seen pleading.

In the exposition of a department where most men of learning are shown to be manipulators, Williamson arms Robby with a discussion of defence, of a well-thought out strategy in terms of 'ultimate benefits' (play,p.57) and 'national welfare' (play,p.59). The defence is of an earlier life of idealism that had to adapt to the politics of the university system. " I am sorry that our present students are going to get loaded up a little more than they should, but it is for the ultimate benefit of those students who are coming after them, I am sorry that it has to be done this way , but in a mad

bureaucracy that gives a new building to a department simply because it is the biggest without even considering which department really needs it, then I have got to play these crazy games" (play,p. 57, note that Williamson has emphasised 'needs')

Robby offers an explanation of why and how Robby has adopted his method of procrastination and compromise, locating the sources of violence of scientific method in politics and bureaucracy, in the application of science and technology and not in scientific knowledge itself. If the statement of revolt through the characterization of Peter (I shall come to this later) is the expression of Williamson's faith in value-free science, Robby's revelation is a faith in the 'ideal' combine of science and social values, the "middle path" (play,p.70) of John's argument that is suggested in the Myra-Peter union too. What Williamson ends up arguing for is this middle course and thus the ultimate benefits of modern science. John, Robby and Peter essentially stand as three points of view of the same scientific method that stoops to violence and oppression only through political misuse.

Peter's earth-shattering revelation, that he has calculated the retentive capacity of the towing-tank, and that it will not give-way even when fully filled with fluid, accelerates the denouncement of the play and is further a statement of Williamson's faith in the scientific method. Peter's research attempts render modern science as a possible description of reality unprejudiced by value. Myra's attempts at proving the social relevance of her subject are silenced by Robby's defences. Further, she is seen adopting Robby's logic of balance when she says "Engineers should be getting more humanities". Scientific method here is one that generates 'objective', 'neutral' and 'universal' knowledge. This is why Myra's discourse cannot evolve beyond the very large and general term of Humanities, a discipline that is intrusive at times, but can be appropriated into the realm of Robby's humanism for the sustenance of "ultimate benefits".

Myra's discourse cannot critique the discourse of scientific knowledge from within the subject for she belongs to the realm of non-experts and non-knowers. It is not perceived that scientific knowledge is built through the use of a plurality of

methodologies, and thus the larger logic of science is left as a positive and 'developmental' methodology. As Feyerabend observes:

"There is no scientific method ; there is no single procedure or set of rules that underlines every piece of research and guarantees that it is 'scientific' and therefore, trust worthy. The idea of a universal and stable rationality is as unrealistic as the idea of a universal and stable measuring instrument that measures any magnitude, no matter what the circumstances scientists revise their standards, their procedures, their criteria of rationality as they move along and perhaps entirely replace their theories and their instruments as they move along and enter new domains of research."⁴

Williamson is unable to adopt this very malleable nature of science as a critique of the scientific method and instead points at a certain 'misguided science' subject to corruption by the politics of bureaucracy, by interference from the realm of non-experts.

John's questioning of the policies of the industry and market, expresses a faith in a value-

free Engineering criterion and thus creates a fact-value dichotomy that Vandana Shiva speaks of in her essay on the epistemological violence of science. "The fact value dichotomy is a creation of modern reductionist science which while being an epistemic response to a particular set of values, claims to be independent of values" (Vandana Shiva, p.233) John remarks, "I merely stated the fairly obvious truth that Engineering criteria play very little part in car design being almost totally outweighed by pressures towards ostentation, model proliferation, excessive engine power and poor passenger protection. If that is forcing politics down my students' thoughts I offer you my resignation right here and now"⁵. John's protest indicates the introduction of what seems like a counter-discourse in the play, namely, a critique of consumerism, but this does not live up to its ambitions of challenging Robby's stand as Williamson relates this argument to a deeply felt ambition. John's heroic moral indignation is reduced to a banal desire for personal success. He even thwarts Peter's designs of resisting the dictatorial policies of Robby. Williamson, negates personal integrity in John as he is seen indulging in a compromise

similar to that of Robby's in the staff meeting. "I try and steer a middle course" (play,p.70), John states. Thus Robby and John are two versions of the same point that Williamson is making of the acknowledgement of a fact value dichotomy and the possibility of steering a middle course for 'ultimate benefits'.

The discussion of Robby and John brings to light the major silence of Williamson's apparent critique of the system of knowledge - the absence of a discussion of the economic system of "the capitalistic logic that is inseparably and dialectically linked with the reductionist character of contemporary science"⁶. Robby discusses strategies of student induction into various disciplines, prioritising Engineering over Physics. There are more jobs available for the Engineers since the country is in need of more engineers for its advancement. This academic rhetoric is a statement of gain maximisation. Robby and John are seen creating yet another dichotomy of disciplines not perceiving that the artificial cognitive dichotomy between Science and Engineering (technology) dissolves when Science is viewed as a set of beliefs guiding practice, and technology as

practice guided by scientific belief.

Peter, Hans, Robby, John and all the spokes-
persons of the Engineering department are seen en-
gaged in a mature or immature fight against the same
inefficiency and incompetence. The logic of internal
efficiency strived at through this discourse is never
consciously linked to the profit-oriented rhetoric of
its capitalist economic base and therefore, never
critiqued as reductionist in itself. As Vandana Shiva
says :

"The logic of this internal efficiency is
provided by reductionism ; only those properties of a
resource system are taken into account which generate
profits through exploitation and extraction ; proper-
ties which stabilise ecological processes but are
commercially non-exploitative are ignored and eventu-
ally destroyed."(Vandana Shiva, p.238)

Shiva's statement of reductionism decon-
structs Williamson's statement of misguided science
which sees the reductionist tendencies of science as
an epistemological accident. Williamson's redemptive
logic of 'ultimate benefits ' is an inherent faith in
the economic structure based on exploitation, profit

maximisation and capital accumulation, a belief by which Erik's Marxist logic is completely demolished in The Perfectionist. The applicability of Peter's calculation at the end of the play make further statements about scientific truths against the 'truth' Myra tries to introduce. Scientific truths as in Peter's calculation are verifiable. They are justified beliefs and therefore universal.

The reductionist worldview undercuts the very premise of the disciplinary debate that Williamson is seen initiating in his play. As Vandana Shiva reveals in her historical critique of scientific study, "The reductionist world view, the industrial revolution and the capitalist economy were the philosophical, technological and economic components of the same process". (Vandana Shiva, p.238) The silence of economic structure is maintained effectively in Williamson as he restricts his debate to the academic world of scientists. The academia-model is unable to deal with the more significant facts of the demands made on the science system by economic interests. The paradigm restricts itself to the material world of the lab, failing to deal with outside processes, those social and more importantly,

ecological situations in which reductionist claims are falsified by nature.

Williamson's debate of the systems of knowledge has the same ostensible logic of daring that the cultural critique of The Perfectionist seemingly displays, but in a world where the straight-forward labour of a character like Gordon or the brash intelligence of Peter, eternally falling short of a reasoned statement of revolt fall to 'disuse', Robby and John are expessious of faith in a certain guided science, a vague compromise between science and not Humanities as a disciplinary study but, intuitive humanism. There fore the magnitude of scepticism that should come into this kind of science is as ill-defined (as a coherent statement against violence in disciplinary interaction) as the hazy characters of Robby, John or Peter.

As coherent statements of protest against oppressive knowledge the various discourses in the play fall far short of their objectives. Even Myra's protest against the supremacy of science (rather than the logic of scientific method) is a protest against bureaucratic method and institutional control, in

keeping with the general tone of institutional resistance of Williamson's plays (The Removalist, The Club, The Perfectionist). Even Myra's feministic line, of not wanting to be the stereotypical 'steady-ing influence' in Peter's life does not go beyond the macro-motif of institutional resistance. "I don't particularly want to channel my affections in the way best suited to serve the interests of your department"⁷. Further, the anarchic consequences of her discourse is critiqued in the debate with Robby.

While a debate seems initiated in the pitting of various characters against each other, the rationality and efficacy of the reductionist and non-reductionist knowledge system are never evaluated cognitively. The argument of the use-value of technology in Robby's justification is a happy manifestation of Williamson's superimposition of humanism on the scientific method. Thus what Robby valorises as humanism is an offshoot of the same reductionist and universalising bid of the scientific method.

That more jobs are available for the students of engineering, ensuring them a future is the logic adopted by the state to promote technological educa-

tion. What is overlooked in Robby's defences is the way in which mediation of the state can paralyse peoples' assessment of costs and benefits for themselves. As Vandana Shiva explains, "But with the mediation of the state the citizen - as - subject becomes the object of change rather than its determinant and consequently loses the right to assess progress. If they have to bear the cost instead of reaping any benefit of development, it is justified as a minor sacrifice for the 'national interest'"⁸. Williamson seems to take a tilt towards the humanistic commitment of such a rational interest that Robby is advocating. That technological pursuit is profitable completes the discourse of profitability as the only social 'need' working in the debate of the play. Williamson thus betrays his comfort with a notion of science underlying which is a monolithic world view.

As I have mentioned earlier, in a play that seems to be protesting against one form of knowledge, the discourse of an alternative method is nipped in the bud. Myra's argument has in it, the potential of a third world point of view against Robby's sentiments of national welfare or discourse of the nation

state , but never quite evolves into one. Its violent ramifications are highlighted siting it thus as an irrelevant obsession which is best appropriated in 'the middle path' between science and a kind of intuitive humanism.

The monolithic world view that compromises the various dichotomies posited by the playwright culminates predictably in the discourse of the Nation state. As Shiv Viswanathan says in his essay 'On the annals of the laboratory state':

"The nation state cannot become ethnicities which serve as competing sites of power and modern science cannot tolerate the legitimacy of folk or ethnic knowledge"⁸. The cynicism directed at alternative discourses and the apparent self reflexivity of the scientific discourse in question (Robby's autobiographical outburst) is but an extension of the colonial regression that I have discussed in my earlier chapter, for Williamson's compromise carries with it the consious and unconscious violence elicited in the colonial history of Australia.

The early settlers internalised the modernisation project of the parent land without a clue to

its geneology and its self-doubts. Their curious attempt to breakaway from the colonisers was an imposition of this colonial violence on the natives of the land. 'Independence' with them too, as in the case of many third world nations was literally a celebration of science.⁹ If Nehru's vision for independent India speaks of a tryst with destiny, the settlers' was a tryst with Nature's hardest conditions, explicitly an enactment of the Baconist idea of science's conquest of nature. Williamson's developmental ethics is the continuing ethics of this colonial idea, wherein achievement is measured in terms of dams, laboratories, railways and hospitals (as a concession to the concurrent idea of humanism that Williamson seems to advocate), statist goals and scientific endeavours.

CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION

Rodney Fischer's appraisal of Williamson's plays portrays him as a playwright whose work indicates a desire for change, for a differently ordered environment in which life can be lived differently. Here, he has recognised Williamson's ability to intuitively capture exactly the way Australians behave and express themselves in defined situations. Fisher observes, "here, the bourgeois consciousness reaches an impasse : its image of the world precludes the possibility of change" (Fisher's introduction to The Perfectionist). Peter Fitzpatrick's study of Williamson as a revolutionary playwright too explores his plays in similar light. Here Williamson is seen as a reformer of the puritan limitations of Australian English and the Australian theatre. Certain reviews of performances., on the other hand, charge him with opportunism, ockerdom and commercialism.

My study has deviated from the designs of these popular criticisms of Williamson in that it explores the compromises in his plays thus illuminat-

ing areas where the ostensible reformist discourses fall short of their 'intentions'. The apparent prioritisation of the feminist discourse in The Perfectionist over the Marxist one does not endure as the play ends on a note of compromise where not much has changed for Barbara. The valourisation of the familial ideology and the female principle seems to stand out as the lapses of Barbara's own discourse. As I have suggested earlier, the solution of 'solitude' that Barbara dreams at the end of the play only goes to show suggest that the needs of intimacy, sexual relations, emotional fulfillment and so on are in themselves oppressive for they breed inevitable power structures that stem from biological differences. My study of The Perfectionist has attempted to show how the 'feminist' critique of Marxism journeys into reductionist theories of patriarchal absolutism and biological determinism. Williamson's feminism lacks any adequate grasp of historical change. The essential reductionism of letting masculinity and femininity develop as categories of meaning is kept intact here.

Exploration of nationalist construction in The Perfectionist brings to light a rather interest-

ing dramatical motif of the play wherein Williamson makes Erik, the European-Marxist a spokesperson for Australian nationalism. I have explored the use of some linguistic, geographical and cultural metaphors falling within the scope of this dramatical device. While these metaphors in themselves are effective images of protest (against Australia's immediate colonisers, the British), Erik's impending visit to India and his reading of India (with the accompanying gesture of sporting 'a kardi suit') betrays a deliberate appropriation of the third world. Williamson constructs the ideal of a nation retreating easily into a Pre-European colonial era, unmediated by colonial history. I have shown how Barbara's nostalgia for Europe and Erik's love of India are part of the same colonial desire.

My examination of The Department throws light upon the reductionist logic by which seemingly dominant concerns of a disciplinary debate between Science and Humanities get marginalised in discourses of 'the middle path' and 'ultimate benefits'. These discourses express an implicit faith in the economic structure of gain maximisation and capital accumulation. The idea is an extended version of Barbara's

call for a 'temporary truce with capitalism' in The Perfectionist. Williamson's satiric exposure of the conflicting systems of knowledge thus also becomes a celebration of Science reminiscent of the modernisation project of the early settlers of Australia. The settlers' tryst with the harshest conditions of nature gets perpetuated in the developmental ethics of a colonial perception wherein achievement is invariably measured in material terms. My reading of the two plays of Williamson in this dissertation has attempted to establish the consistency of such capitalist-colonial discourses.

Much needs to be done in the examination of Williamson's use of language and linguistic metaphors for these acquire a singular significance in his plays such as The Removalist and Don's Party. However this has not been possible within the scope of my study. The marked and consistent absence of the history and politics of race in discussions of contemporary society in Williamson is another area that I leave to the endeavors of cultural studies. Having spelt out the specific layout of my study, I would like to add that my reading of Williamson does not seek to make general statements about the direction

and destiny of contemporary Australian Drama. Infact, a number of the younger generation of Aboriginal, women and other writers such as Jimmy Chi (Bran Nue Day-1988), Richard Whalley (Munjong-1990) and Tobsha Learner (Wolf-1992), probe the realities of a multi-racial society in ways very different from Williamson's. These playwrights and the 'Australian' attitudes reflected in them, lend themselves to studies quite outside the scope of this dissertation.

NOTES

CHAPTER - 1

1. Peter Fitzpatrick, After "The Doll" : Australian Drama Since 1955, Melbourne, OUP, 1980.

2. Peter Fitzpatrick, Williamson and Stephen Sewell: The Playwright as Revolutionary, Melbourne, OUP, 1982

3. Turnbull, A Concise History of Australia, U.K., Collins, 1958.

4. David Williamson began writing plays for the Australian theatre in the 60s and has gone on to be successfully staged ever since. He has written 10 plays namely, The Removalist (1971), Don's Party (1971), The Department (1975), A Handful of Friends (1976), The Club (1976), Traveling North (1979), a collection of Three Plays (1981, The Coming of Stork, Jugglers Three, What if You Died Tomorrow) and The Perfectionist (1983). Known for his impeccable representation of the Australian bourgeoisie, Williamson changed the Victorian legacy of years of private and public censorship in Australian theatre in the early 70s.

5. As Rodney Fisher remarks, "this was a victory, a

magnificent victory".

5. Peter Fitzpatrick, Williamson and Stephen Sewell: The Playwright as Revolutionary, Melbourne, OUP, 1982

6. Peter Fitzpatrick & Helen Thomson, 'Developments in Recent Australian Drama', Westerly Looks to Asia, A selection from Westerly, 1956-1992, University of Western Australia, 1993.

CHAPTER - 2

1. David Williamson, The Perfectionist, Australia Currency Press Pty Ltd., 1983, p.3

2. Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism & Feminism', Capital and Class, no.8, 1979, p.122

3,4. Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, London, 1971, pp.98-103.

5. Bruce Grant, Introduction to What kind of Australia, Melbourne, Penguin, 1986, p.14

CHAPTER-3

1. Rodney Fisher 'In the wake of the Seventies', Introduction to The Perfectionist, David

Williamson, Sydney, Currency Press, 1983, pp. 11-12

2. David Williamson, The Perfectionist, pp. 11-12

3,4. A.Couani, Were All Women Sex-Mad? Melbourne Rigmarole Books 1982 pp. 29-30. A third generation Australian, Couani writes from a self-consciously Greek-Polish Cultural background.

5-8. David Williamson, The Perfectionist, Sydney, Currency Press, 1983) pp.8,11,27,7

9. Edward Said, 'American Ascendancy: The Public Space at War', Culture and Imperialism, London, Vintage Edition, 1994, p.341)

10. David Williamson, The Perfectionist p.8

11. Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 'Freedom from Domination in the Future', p.405

12. J.J.Smolicz, The Rhetoric of Multiculturalism, Occasional papers, 7, Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW, 1985, p.6

13. David Williamson, The Perfectionist, pp.23-24.

14. Sneja Gunew, 'Decentralising Cultural Nationalisms' in Nation and Narration, ed.Homi K. Bhaba.

Quoted from the essay.

15. A.Walwicz, 'Australia', in D.White and A.Couani (eds), Island in The Sun, Sydney; Sea Cruise Books, 1981, pp. 90-91

16. Richard J Barnet, The Roots of War, New York:Atheneum,1972,p.21

17. D.Horne, The Perils of Multiculturalism as a National Ideal, Melbourne:Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, 1983,pp 3-4

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