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Asianization, Multicultural tensions and Identity in John Romeril's Miss Tanaka (2001)

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A B S T R A C T

This paper examines the issue of Australian "Asianization", which was adopted by Keating government (1991-1996), as one of the policies to consider the country's geographical position in the continent. In so doing, the paper explores John Romeril's Miss Tanaka (2001) to investigate how it reflects the nation's "coming to terms" with its position in the Asia-Pacific region (Varney, 2009, p.37). Further, it addresses the issue of cultural diversity through its cross-racial cast of characters. This layered theatrical approach situates Miss Tanaka as a key text in Australia's broader cultural shift toward Asia, foregrounding the importance of multicultural narratives and identities within a regional framework. Further, relying on the works of scholars, such as Ien Ang, Gareth Griffiths, Graham Huggan, this paper explores the intricacies of identity and cultural amalgamation and reflect the extent to which Australian identity has been diverse. Further, the paper conveys how Romeril, in this play, celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It also demonstrates how the play challenges the claim that Australia's identity is monolithic and critiques the white male gaze which considers the Asian female as a site of sexual desire.

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الطابع الآسيوي والتوترات لسياسة التعددية الثقافية والهوية في مسرحية الآنسة تاناكا (٢٠٠١) لجون روميرل

الباحث: حسن فلاح حسن جاسم أ.م.د. ثامر راشد شيال الزبيدي
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الملخص

يسلّط البحث الضوء على "اضفاء صبغة آسيوية" لأستراليا او"أَسْيَنَة أستراليا" والذي تم تبنيه من قبل حكومة كيتنج (١٩٩١–١٩٩٥)، كواحدة من السياسات التي تعالج وضع استراليا الجغرافي في القارة الأسيوية. تُجسِّد مسرحية الآنسة تاناكا (٢٠٠١) لجون روميريل مسار الطابع الآسيوي في المسرح الأسترالي من خلال عكس "تصالح" الأمة مع وضعها في آسيا والمحيط الهادئ (فارني، ٢٠٠٩، ص. ٣٧). بالإضافة لذلك تناقش المسرحية موضوعة التعددية الثقافية في استراليا من خلال تقديمها لشخوص متنوعة الاعراق. يضع هذا النهج المسرحي المتعدد الطبقات الآنسة تاناكا كنص رئيسي في التحول الثقافي الأوسع لأستراليا نحو آسيا، مما يبرز أهمية السرديات والهويات المتعددة الثقافات داخل الأطار الأقليمي. وبالاعتماد على باحثين بارزين: دينيس فارني، وإين آنج، وجاريث جريفث، وجراهام هوجان، تبحث هذه الورقة البحثية في تعقيدات الهوية والاندماج الثقافي مما يعكس مدى تنوع الهوية الأسترالية. وفي النهاية فأن الورقة تستعرض كيف تفند المسرحية ادعاءات الهوية الواحدة وتنتقد النظرة الذكورية البيضاء للأنثى الاسيوية على انها مصدرا للمتعة الجسدية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية ، التعددية الثقافية، انسة تاناكا، اضفاء صبغة آسيوية.

Romeril's *Miss Tanaka* (Romeril 2001) was first performed in 2001 at the CUB Malthouse, and, later, at the Optus Playhouse at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre in Melbourne in 2001. Through the play's focus on a pearl driver from a Japanese and Australian-Aboriginal parents, Romeril presents a play that depicts Australia's cultural diversity, especially Australian from Asian background. In writing this play, Romeril relied on Xavier Herbert's story which was published in 1933. Herbert's story "is inscribed with the rigid social divisions of race and gender under the combined effects of the White Australia policy and Japan's strict social codes" and "offers a lively and engaging account of Australia's pre-war Asian communities" (Varney, 2009, p.138).

Commenting on this play, Gilbert notes that it aligns with the shift in Australia's cultural and economic focus from the South Pacific to the Asia-Pacific, particularly under the influence of policies like the Keating Government's "Asia enmeshment campaign" (Varney, 2009, p.128). During this campaign, the Performing Arts Board allocated "up to half of its international arts funding budget to works related to the Asia-Pacific region in the early to mid-1990s," (p.128).emphasizing the role of the arts in fostering cooperation and engagement within the region. This strategic support not only encouraged cross-cultural exchange programs but also allowed playwrights like John Romeril to gain deeper insights into Asian theatrical traditions and integrate these elements into works such as *Love Suicides* (1997) and

Miss Tanaka (2001). These plays reflect the reorientation of Australia's cultural gaze towards Asia, coupled with a shift in theatrical narratives to Western Australian locations like Perth and Broome, where diverse ethnic dynamics underscore this evolving negotiation of Australia's position in Australia.

Romeril's adaption shifts the setting from Darwin to Broome, replacing Herbert's Eurocentric story with a diverse, multicultural, and Aboriginal cast, in contrast to the original story which focuses on predominantly monocultural characters. Further, Romeril's version contains: "music, puppetry, illusion, wrestling and dance, reflecting the cross-cultural influences that give Broome its unique character and iconic status as an east-meets-west town" (Varney, 2009, p.138). *Miss Tanaka* exemplifies this shift to dramatizing themes of multiculturalism and the lived realities of Asian-Australians. By situating the narrative in Western Australia, the play "re-orients the national gaze to the Asia–Pacific region" and critiques traditional Anglo-Celtic narratives, emphasizing the complexities of cultural identity and exchange in a globalized context (Varney, p.129).

In addition to the change in the geographical orientation, changing Xavier Herbert's novel into a play, Ouyang Yu notes, emphasizes an interest in themes of multiculturalism that were largely overlooked by "white Australian herpetologists" (Birns & McNeer, 2007, p.341). Denise Varney proposes that Romeril's *Miss Tanaka* can be read in relation to his "career-long engagement with Asian theatre" (Varney, 2009, p.128) and Australia's evolving cultural identity in the Asia-Pacific region. Romeril's later plays, including *Miss Tanaka*, emerged during a period when Australian arts funding prioritized engagement with Asia under initiatives like the Keating Government's "Asia enmeshment campaign," fostering deeper cultural connections (pp.128–129). Further, Varney maintains that the play assures Romeril's radical engagement with cross-cultural themes, its "multi-layered and complex form is resistant to a definitive reading," blending political ambiguity with humor and formal experimentation (p.22).

Sian Prior (2001) regards the play as "a hybrid production depicting a hybrid Australian community." (as cited in Lo, 2006, p.173). Also, Helen Thompson notes that '[s]imilar to the characters in the play, the production deliberately engages in a fusion of styles, employing musicals from Hollywood and drumming from Japan to create a sort of post-modern variety show (Lo, 2006). Both opinions emphasize the play's deliberate melding of artistic styles, aligning with Romeril's multi-modal approach to storytelling, which he employs to dramatize the interplay of cultural forms.

The story of the play starts with a visually rich and symbolic order. A young man, Kazuhiko, of mixed Aboriginal and Japanese descent, sits silently on a stage. The set design evokes a rock, represented by crumpled white paper, and the coastal setting is enriched by sounds of crashing waves. Lighting suggests moonlight reflecting on water, while the distant voices of women singing a traditional Japanese song accompany two kimono-clad figures performing an ebon dance (Romeril, 2001, pp.1–2). This opening portrays the play's poetic and intercultural aesthetic, blending Japanese and Aboriginal Australian cultural elements. Then, Kazuhiko's father, Tanaka Senior, a former pearl diver now crippled and prematurely aged, emerges from this dreamlike scene. The transformations of the stage elements from rock to turtle to man bind the Tanaka family to the landscape and symbolize resilience. The

appearance of luminous pearls first white, then black deepens the symbolism, as they float as ethereal projections, signifying both beauty and loss. A black pearl is "swallowed" by a shark-shaped Japanese kite, foreshadowing the play's central tensions between colonial exploitation, cultural survival, and the resilience of the marginalized divers (pp.2–3).

The narrative shifts to Broome on the eve of World War II, where Charles Rubin Mott, a newly arrived Jewish-English colonial figure, is introduced. Mott, the new head of the Anglo-Oriental Pearlshell Company, seeks to run the company's assets to save his relatives from Nazism in Europe. Viewing Broome as a cultural backwater, Mott's Eurocentric assumptions about race and hierarchy are subtly destabilized as he encounters its multicultural society (pp.7–9). Another instance of the cultural diversity of the cast of the play is noticed with the appearance Sakamoto Fuji and Hanif Mohammed Putu Rodrigues da Costa, the two quarrelsome pearl divers. This couple provides the comic subplot for the play as they quarrel over debts incurred by Tanaka Senior's gambling. When Kazuhiko's labor is pledged to both divers as repayment, he escapes servitude by disguising himself as his own cousin, Miss Kitso Tanaka. In this guise, Kazuhiko becomes the object of a "bride auction," orchestrated by his father to exploit the divers' rivalry. The colonial master, Mott, who initially condemns this "Asian way" of selling brides, finds himself captivated by Miss Tanaka's charms and ultimately joins the bidding (pp.34–36).

The plot closes with a heavy storm described as "the cockeyed bob to beat all cockeyed bobs," (p.52) a tempest that wreaks havoc on the town, scattering characters and interrupting the auction. Amid the chaos, Kazuhiko and his father seize Mott's jacket, containing the divers' bride offerings, and escape. The storm functions as both a narrative device and a symbolic force, leveling power dynamics and facilitating the Tanakas' liberation from exploitation (pp.52-54). A reflective coda set three years later reveals the characters' post-war fates. Mott has returned to London, where he has used company profits to save relatives from Hitler's Europe, while Kazuhiko survives as an "Aboriginal of Japanese extraction" in occupied Manila (p.58). The death of Tanaka Senior is symbolized through the movement of a turtle – his totem – crossing the stage toward the sea, signifying both personal and cultural continuity. The play's visual and symbolic elements are as integral as its narrative. The interplay of projected images, puppetry, and multi-ethnic casting reflects Broome's cosmopolitan profile while critiquing colonial exploitation. Light, sound, and stage transformations evoke Broome as a site of cultural and social hybridity, disrupting fixed notions of identity and power (Varney, 2009, pp.139–140).

The play also emphasizes the performative nature of gender and race through casting that involves actors portraying characters of different races and genders. In the portrayal, a Vietnamese male actor took on the role of Tanaka Senior, while a Chinese-Malaysian man Tony Yap played the Malay diver Hanif. A Japanese woman Yumi Umiumare embodied the character of the Japanese diver Sakamoto. An Aboriginal male actor Tam Phan, representing the Japanese-Aboriginal character Kazuhiko, also cross-dressed and used "yellow-face" to depict Miss Kitso and a white Australian actor Jeremy Stanford played the role of Mott (Australian Script Centre, 2017).

The play delineates the diversity of cultural diversity not solely through its diversity of characters, but also in its employment of diverse techniques. The initial segments of the

narrative which are depicted at dusk like the massive turtle that makes its way over the beach, the melodies of Fred Astaire drift over the waves; an elderly gentleman is engaged in a game of poker with a pair of frogs, the enormous pearls and numerous vessels materialize from nowhere, the rhythmic beats of a didgeridoo with Japanese drums conjure a tempest of phantoms, dragons, and scenes of cockfights and sumo wrestling; they all introduce the untamed frontier of Australia. This amalgamation of Eastern and Western influences in the theatrical execution of the play represents a tangible expression of multiculturalism.

The play's title, Miss Tanaka, can be interpreted as an ironic reference to the symbolic role of women in this world. The symbol of woman is employed to express and validate the male dominant context, while actual women are excluded from positions of authority and individual perspective. In this play, women are portrayed as commodities traded to establish financial and intimate connections among men. Kate Aughterson expresses how women are "double victims" in any patriarchal scheme because they are presented as substitutions of masculine power, and "vessels of masculine legitimate power." (cited in Nati & Rasheed, 2020, p.3). Kazuhiko's mother was offered as a sacrifice to the depths of the ocean in the interest of the pearl industry. Similarly, Kitso is slated to be wedded to the one offering the largest dowry to settle Tanaka Senior's debt. The recurring visual representation of Kazuhiko's mother acts as a symbolic reminder that the events unfold on native land marked by a history of assault, dispossession, colonization, and assimilation (Lo, 2006, pp.171-188).

A romantic connection happens between Miss Tanaka and Mott (an English-Australian man who has recently arrived). This aspect of the play brings to light a hidden history of racial intermixing, questioning the traditional view of Australia as a nation dominated by White heritage. Rey Chow's analysis of intercultural dynamics in Western societies highlights how Asian women are frequently "socially paired off or contracted to the white man," fostering the perception of their "bought entry into Western discourse" (as cited in Lo et al., 2000, p.8). This is deeply rooted in colonial and orientalist frameworks that commodify Asian femininity, positioning Asian women as acquiescent and nonconfrontational, in contrast to the more competitive and socially excluded portrayal of Asian men. Asian men, historically marginalized in Western societies, are often portrayed as "feminized Others," a representation that marks them as exotic and non-threatening while also denying them a normative male subjectivity (as cited in Lo et al., 2000).

Mott's reaction to Kazuhiko's disguise as Miss Tanaka is an expression of white male gaze of Asian female. By revealing his true identity which shatter's Motto's expectation, the play resists, employing Az-Zubaidy's words, "stereotypes of the Asian woman as a site of sexual appeal" (2017, p.51). This is explicitly depicted in the following excerpt from the play:

> *Overwhelmed by his emotions,* MOTT *suddenly turns her towards him, attempting to kiss her. Initially, she resists, but then yields. Their passion is accentuated by music as they continue the kiss. [...] When* MOTT *breaks away, he looks deeply into* KITSO's *eyes.*

> MOTT: Is this love making me dizzy, or perhaps – the growths clinging to the vessels, they shake as if they were extensions of my own body. It feels like the earth itself is shifting under me!
>
> *There's a lengthy silence before realization dawns.*
>
> *[Quietly]* Kazuhiko*?*
>
> *After a pause,* KAZUHIKO *averts his gaze.*
>
> *MOTT stands in stunned silence.* KAZUHIKO *gives a nod of acknowledgment. The music changes to 'The Moon Got In My Eyes', a recording from 1937...* (p.51)

This scene encapsulates the collision of colonial and queer identities, as Mott grapples with both romantic desire and the cultural dissonance of Kazuhiko's dual identities. Kazuhiko's statement, "I've been reared to be a good Japanese son. We thought we'd take those two oafs for all they're worth and get Dad home to Taiji-to die", (p. 52), shows his feeling of cultural obligation and the intricacies of identity influenced by colonization and assimilation. His removal of the kimono and wig in the play's final minutes "KAZUHIKO *begins to gradually remove his disguise*" (p.52), leaving him in his underwear, represents the giving up of imposed identity. This conveys, quoting Az-Zubaidy's words, a resistance to "the fixed identity of the performing body and its confinement in a fixed locality" (2017, p.49). Moreover, it is a notable example of the fluidity of identity that challenges the binary categories of male and female, Asian and Aboriginal.

John Romeril's play also offers a vivid portrayal of post-war Australia, with a specific focus on the multicultural and racial dynamics in Broome. Shaped by the pearling industry, Broome's diverse inhabitants – including Japanese, Chinese, Aboriginal, and European characters – represent the complex intermingling of cultures. It explores themes of Asianization, multicultural tensions, and assimilation. For instance, the description of "a white pearl floating in a white space, a black pearl floating in black" (p.2) symbolizes the cultural contrasts and connections that shape Broome. The racial dynamics are further explored in the scene where Mr. Tanaka offers Mott a perfumed marriage contract and a scroll between Miss Kitso and Sakamoto: "Marriage contract – Miss Kitso and Hanif. They'd like you to keep everything until decision is made" (p.36). This reflects how economic and personal exchanges are entangled in both cultural and economic spheres.

Whiteness and racial exclusivity were foundational in the establishment of the modern Australian nation-state in 1901 and continued to dominate much of the 20th century. Consequently, as Lo et al. (2000) observe, the process of engaging with Asian-Australian issues has been "slow in coming" (p.3). Asians were historically constructed as "Others," whose presence in Australia's symbolic and political spaces was perceived as intrusive and required resistance. This perception precluded their inclusion in Australian culture without a significant transformation in political and social attitudes. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Australia's relation with Asia was primarily driven by economic interests, even though the accompanying rhetoric often adopted a cultural tone. However, under Prime Minister John Howard, this orientation shifted. Howard's stance, affirming that "Australia is not a part of Asia," reflected a distancing from Asian influences (Lo et al., 2000, p.3). Howard's political stance was shared by other white Australian politician such as Pauline

Hanson, who, in her maiden speech at Parliament in 1996, declared that Australia is "in danger of being swamped by Asians" (Murphy, *The Guardian*, 2016). As such, Romeril's play critiques this premise and shows how dramatic works, such as this play, resist the imposition of such political discourse.

The play portrays Broome's multiculturalism through tense interactions between various ethnic communities. Jon Stratton's critique of Australia's 'whiteness' underscores how the white characters often position themselves as superior, despite relying on the labor and resources of Asian and Aboriginal communities (Stratton, 1998). Tensions are particularly evident in the relationship between Malays and Japanese, captured in scenes of rivalry such as Kazuhiko's dismissive retort: "You Malays couldn't farm parsley in a bucket" (p.11). Mott, a character navigating this multicultural space, experiences a profound realization of his environment: "Looking around, the young Englishman realises he's not alone" (p.3). This is further complicated by his interactions with Mr. Tanaka and Miss Kitso. In a key scene, Mr. Tanaka invites Mott to serve as a witness for Miss Kitso's marriage; "Sort of thing father would have done," highlighting Mott's ambiguous role in this complex society (p.37). Additionally, Miss Kitso's entrance, described as "a vision of Eastern perfection" (p.39), emphasizes the tension between cultural admiration and objectification in a racially diverse town.

Ien Ang argues that the essence Asians' cultural identity, such as hers, cannot be fully erased, because their facial expressions and their colour will not make them invisible. Ang emphasizes Bauman's remark that accepting assimilation involves acknowledging the existing social hierarchy and its unchangeable nature: "The acceptance of assimilation as a vision and as a framework for a life strategy was tantamount to the recognition of the extant hierarchy, its legitimacy, and above all its immutability" (cited in Bauman, 1994, p.104). In Romeril's play, the society's acceptance of assimilation is transparent since Romeril is bringing about contrasting historical and cultural segments of the assimilated figures to the extent that Romeril makes Mott, the white-man, quivers for this kind of acceptance through his courtship with Miss Tanaka. That is why it is crucial to embrace the cultural diversity rather than questioning its defects or merits. The play's reinforcement of this diversity is a current issue of its time. In a similar sense, S. Hamad, notes that "It is since the 1960s that scholars and political activists have recognized that immigrant groups should not, entirely abandon their distinct identities but embrace multiculturalism and diversity." (2018, p.418)

Post-war trauma and reconciliation are deeply woven into the drama, particularly through Kazuhiko's character. Varney believes that "The theme of loss pays tribute to the history of coastal exploitation and the dangerous work of pearl divers that has underpinned the pearl industry since white settlement." (2009, p.138). This is evident in Kazuhiko's internal conflict and memories of loss through ritualistic scenes, such as when he honors his ancestors: "It's to make the passage from this world to the next a successful crossing for our dear but departed ancestral spirits" (p. 16). The burning photographs and flames in Mott's delirium symbolize not only the destruction caused by war but also the haunting memories of loss; "Mott is hurled into the flames. The images of the photos crack and burn" (p.36).

MOTT: Not for the pleasure.

KAZUHIKO: No for the pain. When I was seven he came towards me crawling on his hands... My mother was dead—an accident in King Sound. He'd been drinking... But a shark attack—he hadn't counted on that. (p.20)

Kazuhiko's tragic childhood experience involving his mother's death and his father's trauma reflects the emotional depth of his character. In the middle of the play, the dialogue between Mott and Kazuhiko stresses the personal loss Kazuhiko has endured. The sad incidents show the psychological scars that Kazuhiko bears, which influence his connections with others, including Mott.

Miss Tanaka reflects Helen Gilbert's definition of post-colonial performance, particularly through acts that respond to imperialism and the regeneration of colonized communities, "acts that respond to the experience of imperialism, whether directly or indirectly" (1996, p.11). Romeril introduces Mott who inherits his father's pearl company—a legacy tied to colonial exploitation and the economic dominance of European settlers in Australia. Mott's ownership of the company represents the ongoing impact of colonialism, where wealth and power are passed down through generations of colonizers, further entrenching imperial structures, "acts performed for the continuation and/or regeneration of the colonised (and sometimes pre-contact) communities" (1996, p.11). Romeril also addresses the regeneration of colonized communities through the characterization of Mr Tanaka and his son, Kazuhiko. Their presence in the play underlines the struggle of Japanese-Australians, who navigate a post-colonial society where they are marginalized but also seek to preserve their cultural identity. Romeril explores their resilience and asserts their place within a predominantly white Australian society, reflecting Gilbert's idea of acts performed for the survival and regeneration of colonized communities. Through these characters and themes, Romeril critiques the lasting effects of imperialism and the challenges faced by Asian-Australians in a post-colonial landscape, such as Australia.

Alan Filewod explains that while government policies on multiculturalism are partly designed to reject imperial traditions, they also serve as a means of defining national identity and embedding the state with a unifying mission (cited in Gilbert, 1996, pp.266-268). This draws attention to the idea that post-colonial societies, despite their efforts to break away from imperial legacies, still maintain internal centers and peripheries. National discourses of identity often remain continuous with the epistemologies of imperialism, perpetuating existing power structures. This idea also relates to the fact that multicultural policies in Australia seem to embrace diversity but often marginalize minor groups like Japanese-Australians. This reflects the persistence of imperial power structures in shaping post-colonial national identity, reinforcing Filewod's point about the ongoing impact of European imperial ideologies in the construction of modern nationhood Australia.

Gareth Griffiths discusses John Romeril's treatment of Australian culture and its complex relationship with Asia, challenging national stereotypes and examining these relations through a critical lens:

> John Romeril's plays dealing with war are unique in that their concerns have not been primarily with the existential experience of conflict, but rather with the socio-political consequences of war for the individual Australian, for Australian society at large and for the future relations of Australians with the world outside. (1993, p.121)

Here, Griffiths refers primarily to Australia's military history during its "conflicts up to the time of its involvement in the Vietnam War" (p.121), in which Romeril portrays Australian interactions in an "uncomfortable" light, often addressing issues that official narratives tend to ignore:

> Asians were constructed as the racial competitor, Aborigines as the racial stranger. In both cases, racial prejudices were exacerbated by widespread linguistic and cultural ignorance, the often exaggerated fear for physical safety, and fierce competition over limited economic resources in the unruly frontier state (Huggan, 2007, p.19)

Huggan (2007) notes that while multiculturalism and Asianization have challenged Anglo dominance, yet "the boundaries of the [national] imagination" remain "Eurocentric, cemented together around a core of white traditions" (p.75). Huggan discusses Miriam Dixson's defense of Australia's Anglo core culture, which she argues should act as a stabilizing force in an increasingly diverse nation. Dixson views this core culture, strategically deracialized into a culturally homogeneous 'Anglo-Celticism,' (as cited in Huggan 2007, p.76) as essential in maintaining cohesion amid growing pluralism and social fragmentation. She further asserts that Australia has inherited many valuable aspects of British and Continental European traditions (p.76). Dixon's premise aligns with Jan Larbalestier's concept of "the imagined space of White Australia," (2007, p.76) and serves as the evaluative standard for other cultural identities and practices. It includes both reactionary viewpoints associated with the historical dominance of White Australia and the seemingly inclusive principle of cultural diversity in a multi-ethnic society that is not entirely mutually exclusive (Hugan, 2007, p.77).

The play reflects many of the concerns Huggan highlights regarding Australia's relationship with Asia. Like Huggan's analysis of Australia's ambivalence toward Asia, Romeril's play demonstrates how Australian identity is both attracted to and repelled by Asian characters. The play casts light on the complexities of cross-cultural relationships and the lingering impact of White Australia policy, which sought to exclude non-European immigrants for much of the 20th century. Romeril's depiction of Asian characters as not merely "Others" but fully realized individuals with their own agency that the white Australian try to overcome or learn from, aligns with Huggan's observation that contemporary Australian writers and dramatists are more self-conscious and sophisticated in their engagement with Asia, although lingering Orientalist themes remain. (2007, p.131)

Moreover, *Miss Tanaka* challenges the idea of Australia's position in Asia as a "white European enclave in an alien, non-European part of the world" (Ang, 2001, as cited in Huggan, 2007, p.132). By focusing on a Japanese-Australian protagonist and setting the play in a multicultural town, Romeril confronts the myth of racial purity and exposes the realities of cultural pluralism in Australia. The play's title, Miss Tanaka, symbolizes the blending of

cultures and the potential for a more inclusive national identity. The presence of such character, Miss Tanaka, in the play forces the white Australian characters to reconsider their assumptions about race and belonging, much as Australia itself has been forced to grapple with its place in the Asia-Pacific region. In *Miss Tanaka*, while Romeril presents a more positive and humanized depiction of Asian-Australian characters, there remains a sense that Asia, and by extension Asian-Australians, are viewed through a lens of exoticism.

It is worth noting that this is not the first play in which Romeril celebrates the cultural diversity of Australia and critiques its former obsession with the policy of White Australia. In his play *The Floating World* (1974), Lyn Jacobs (2002) purports, Romeril critiques Australia's historical xenophobia and emotional isolation, and "canvassed Australia/Japan relations via the *delirium tremens* [Alcohol withdrawal] of the xenophobic Australian ex-serviceman" (p.201). In the play, Romeril explores Australia's fraught relationship with Japan and heralds a shift in Australia's cultural and geopolitical perspective, encouraging a revaluation of its ties to Asia. However, in *Miss Tanaka* (2001), which is set in post-war Australia, focuses on the challenges faced by Japanese-Australian characters. Further, Griffiths states that Romeril challenges the notion of Australia as a stronghold of European civilization opposing Asian barbarism (1993, p.163). Romeril challenges these simplistic perspectives by placing Asian-Australian experiences at the forefront. In *Miss Tanaka*, the Japanese heritage contests the simplistic dichotomy of Asia as either a demonic or exotic other, highlighting the intricate dynamics of identity, assimilation, and multicultural friction in Australia.

Conclusion

John Romeril's *Miss Tanaka* cleverly intertwines Aboriginal and multicultural experiences to contest colonial hierarchies and examine cultural survival in Broome. The play'' protagonist, Kazuhiko, who possesses mixed Aboriginal and Japanese heritage, represents the convergence of marginalized identities, a prevalent motif in Romeril's work. As conveyed in this paper, the play depicts the multicultural dynamics of Broome that challenge colonial conventions, especially through characters such as Charles Rubin Mott, whose Eurocentric beliefs are undermined in the town's transitional realm. Romeril intensifies these tensions through the use of humor and critique, shown by Kazuhiko's masquerade as Miss Tanaka, which subverts the colonial authority and reveals the ridiculousness of racial and gender inequalities. As such, the paper argues that in this play Romeril portrays Broome not merely as a pearl-diving hub but as a locus of cultural negotiation and evolution through its complicated array of personalities and symbolic moments.

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