FOREWORD

Drama has always fascinated me and so I did not have to think twice about choosing the genre for my research. However, it was a Refresher Course in “Folklore” co-ordinated by Prof. Raghavan Payanad at the Academic Staff College, University of Calicut in 1995, discussions with my guide Dr. M. Dasan and with the academics I had met at the international conference of Asian Association for the Study of Australia held at Trivandrum in 1996 that helped me to narrow down the area to Australian Aboriginal Literature.

This thesis “Celebration of Aboriginality through Theatre of Hybridization: An Analysis of the Plays of Jack Davis” looks at Australian Aboriginal literature as a 40,000 year old phenomenon. Aboriginal Writing in English, which is a comparatively recent development, is a continuation of this long tradition. It is a literature of the “Fourth World”, has striking similarities with other “Black Writings” and is a post-colonial manifestation. In the introductory chapter of the thesis I have tried to place Aboriginal Writing in English in this context and to delineate its distinctive characteristics. By tracing the evolving concept of Aboriginality, the Aboriginal views of history and their political engagement, Aboriginal writing is shown to be a means for as well as a celebration of survival. Jack Davis is a pioneer in the resurgence and
continuation of Nyoongah culture and in the Black Australian dramatic revolution.

Chapter 1 entitled "The Aborigine and Literature" is divided into three sections. The first section deals with Aboriginal oral literature/history, which apart from recording myths and legends of origin and describing the Aboriginal way of life, also gives an account of the visitors to their land. With the European invasion, Aborigines were marginalised and ignored and were re-presented in white writings. Meanwhile oral literature continued. In the second section instances of the representation of the Aborigine by white Australian writers, starting from exploration literature to the poetry, fiction and theatre of the 1970's, when Aboriginal writing itself came into focus is looked at and in the third, the development and flowering of Aboriginal writing in English, which firmly anchored to Aboriginality, presents images of contemporary Aboriginal experience.

In "Aboriginal Drama: From Ritual to Theatre", the second chapter an attempt is made to trace the development from ritual and aesthetic expression to dramatic performances, drama and theatre. Jack Davis is one of the first published of Australian Aboriginal playwrights and he celebrates the Aboriginal voices of Australia. By fusing Aboriginal oral culture and western dramatic forms he deals with current Aboriginal concerns. He uses the elements of oral culture to foreground a largely
ignored Aboriginal past and to emphasize the presence and contributions of the Aborigines of Australia. He also shows the changes in the *Nyoongah* way of life by hybridising many experiences. Hence a definition of Jack Davis’s “Theatre of Hybridisation” is attempted in this chapter. Moreover, as important dimensions of meaning are located in conditions of production, reception and circulation of a work of art and as Jack Davis himself has stated that his plays “were all written for a reason,” (Shoemaker 25) these contexts are also looked into.

The Aboriginal version of history is foregrounded in the plays of Jack Davis and this is examined in the third chapter “The Real Australian Story”. *Kullark, No Sugar, The Dreamers, Barungin* and *In Our Town* together present an epic of Aboriginal history. By effectively incorporating versions of Nyoongah history and white history in his plays, enabling both to exist and co-exist, he not only shows how the Aboriginal condition has been shaped, but reinstates the presence of Aborigines in history.

In Chapter four, the various ways in which Davis’s plays interrogate/challenge the assumptions of colonialism are analysed. Differing views on the issue of land, law and justice and Christianity are examined together with instances of subversion and Self/Other dichotomy.

The techniques used by him to stage history and resistance are the subject of study in the fifth chapter. Verbal and non-verbal trajectories of
drama are deployed with great ingenuity in his plays and these include song, dance and the traditional modes of story telling -- essential features of Aboriginal heritage and culture. The Aboriginal sense of place and displacement, tendency towards subversion, a distinctive Aboriginal view of time-space relationship, ethics, metaphysics and aesthetics presented in his plays, together constitute an altogether new dramatic genre that certainly lie far outside the domain of Australian mainstream culture.

A comprehensive bibliography is included in the thesis.

This thesis has been documented in accordance with the guidelines provided by the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, by Joseph Gibaldi, 5th Ed.