Chapter - III
Historical Realism
(No Sugar)

*No Sugar* is one of Jack Davis’ most acclaimed plays. The play is set in 1929 which is a period of great economic depression. The eldest male of the family, Sam Millimurra, is presented filling the tea mugs very generously with sugar which contrasts with the title of the play increasing curiosity in the minds of the audience. The elder females in the family, Gran Munday and Milly Millimurra, are presented fulfilling their role as care takers. The younger ones of the family, the children David and Cissie are presented playing cricket with a home-made bat and ball revealing the economic condition of the family and Jimmy Munday, Milly’s brother sharpening an axe in traditional bush fashion representing the way they safeguard their ancient valuable skills that are passed on from one generation to another.

Joe, the eldest son of the Millimurras, is presented reading an article about the Australia Day celebrations in the newspaper. The Australia Day is celebrated to commemorate the Whites man’s first settlement on the Australian landscape. His faltering reading indicates that though he is the most educated in the entire family, he falls short when judged by normal standards. The English used in the news paper is verbose in contrast to the broken and casual English of most Aborigines. The contrast in the English used in the newspaper and that used by the Aboriginal family juxtaposes how the Aboriginals are still in a
disadvantaged position in spite of Australia progressing in all dimensions. The article states:

…Were a steadfast performance of duty in the face of difficulty and danger. With them was a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries…carrying Aborigines. (15)

The article proceeds to describe the Aborigines’ dancing ‘incongruously’ to a brass-band. The Aboriginals are carried in three lorries to the festive celebrations of the Australian Day not as Australian citizens equal to the Whites citizens but as a reminder to the Whites Australians of the dangers that the first settlers had faced in the new found land. The dance of the Aborigines to the brass-band is again described as inappropriate. Jack Davis brings his characters to a standstill when they hear the description of the Aborigines participating in the celebrations. The stage direction goes ‘They all stop what they are doing and listen.’ (15) The family is shocked at the way they are being treated in their own country by the settler. Their shock only deepens at the indifference of their own people towards the way they are being treated in their own country and dancing to the brass band.

The scene is significant in two aspects: the de-humanization of the Aborigines and the absurdity of Native Aborigines dancing to a Western brass-band. Sam cannot believe his ears and Jimmy is outraged hearing this. Jimmy groans ‘Ah! That beats everythin’: stupid blackfellas(15) He is agitated that their own people are bringing disgrace to their own communities by dancing for
the Whites who have stolen their country from them. This also shows that the Aborigines are still helpless in the hands of the Whites Australians. This is the very reason that they are showcased as objects in the parade. Milly argues that there is nothing that the Aboriginals there can do about it and that he would have also done the same if he had been there to which Jimmy retorts that no fear would make him do so. Saying so, he cuts his finger and drives the axe savagely into a log. The hurt of Jimmy to the indifference of the Whites, even more to the ignorant indifference of the Aborigines themselves, to their own condition manifests itself in the form of self inflicted physical pain. Through the character of Jimmy Jack Davis suggests that self assertion, self respect and self defense are a strong possibility even in a socially and politically vulnerable community or individual: but the possibility becomes a reality if the community/individual concerned has the required ethical temper and righteous anger which make them fight back. Otherwise the pent up anger ends up in frustration and self denigration. Jimmy is a typical case of an individual vacillating between righteous anger and self denigration. He wants to retaliate but he can create only a minor sensation. He also represents another aspect of the painful reality of the Aborigine life in the Whites Australia. The Aborigines are so poor that they have no means of education, alleviation of poverty, employment or concern from the ruling class. Jimmy’s character typifies the Aborigines’ sense of loss of self respect life.

While reading out from the newspaper the news about the pageant (of the Australia Day celebrations) Joe gives us an idea of what the Whites people think
of the Australian Nation and its soul. When the news indicates bright future for Australia it only means bright future for the colonizing Whites.

JOE: ‘The page … page … page-ant pre-sented a picture of Western Australia’s pre-sent condition of hopeful optimim-optimis-tic prosperity, and gave some idea of what men mean when they talk about the soul of the nation. (17)

Jack Davis tries to create and give meaning to Aboriginal identity in the present by juxtaposing Australia Day Celebrations on the streets with the mundane routine and reactions of the Aborigines at home. Shoemaker, talking about the Aborigines’ Progressive Association in Black Words Whites Page, states:

its 1938 manifesto, ‘Aborigines Claim Citizenship Rights’, stated in no uncertain terms that ‘this festival of 15 years’ so called ‘progress’ in Australia commemorates also 150 years of misery and degradation imposed upon the original Native inhabitants by the Whites invaders of this country. (24)

Milly gives two pence to David and Cissie to buy an apple each for lunch. David requests Milly to give them money enough to buy a pie and Cissie complains:

CISSIE: Aw mum, Old Tony the ding always sells us little Shivelled ones and them wetjala kids big fat ones. (16)

Cissie’s words reveal the pervasive racism in Australia which claims to be a land of hope and prosperity for all its citizens. On another occasion Jimmy shares

JIMMY: [calling] I seen that talkin’ picture at the Palace, sittin’ Right up the front, the roped off section for blackfellas. Al
Jolson makin’ out he was balck, poor whites bastard. (33)

The stark racism prevalent in the then Australian society is brought out very skillfully by Jack Davisby paralleling this with an interaction between a loyal Whites policeman and a sympathetic Whites commoner heightening the impact of the messages. The audience is taken to a street in Northam to witness an interaction between Sergeant Carrol of Northam Police and a White settler Frank Brown. Frank Brown in the play becomes a representative of the innate goodness in human nature and especially in the unbiased Whites. Jack Davis presents Frank Brown as a symbol of goodness among the Whites inspite of stark racism rampant in the country. Frank Brown can empathise with the Aboriginal condition and is kind towards them, treating them as equal fellow human beings. He becomes a good friend of Jimmy and visits his family one day. When Sam introduces the children to his White friend they are apprehensive about him and are not very friendly. They even fail to wish him back. Jimmy informs his family that Frank who is now wandering from town to town in search of a job leaving his family behind, is married with three kids and owned a farm a while ago. They are sorry for him when he tells them that he had to send his wife and children to stay with his wife’s parents when he was bankrupt and so had to go from one place to another in search of a job. They are filled with pity when he adds that it has been six months since he had seen his children and was not even able to send them any money. Jimmy blames the government for the miserable conditions. When Sam and Jimmy start their petty fight, Frank is prudent enough to thank Milly for their wonderful meal and
hospitality and leaves. He addresses Milly with utmost respect as Mrs. Millimurra. When he is accused of providing alcohol to the Aborigines he tries his level best to explain how good Jimmy’s family is only to be disappointed. Frank’s innate goodness is once again brought out as he explains how he happened to befriend Jimmy’s family. He is grateful to Jimmy for his hospitality. He tries convincing the Justice of Peace how warm and affectionate the family was to him and the circumstances in which he had to buy alcohol for them. But the Justice of Peace does not pay any heed to his words. Though Frank tries telling him that he is an ex-serviceman the Justice of Peace is not convinced. He is determined to go by the book and punish anyone accused in connection with to the Aborigines. To him acquaintance with the Aborigines means degradation of one’s character to their level. This is the very reason he sentences Frank to six weeks of imprisonment with hard labour even before he hears him. He cuts short Frank’s explanation that Jimmy took him home only to be informed by the Sergeant that the home of Jimmy that Frank mentions is Jimmy’s camp at Government Well Such is the Whites man’s conviction in Social Darwinism.

The character of Frank Brown is contrasted with another White settler by name Skinny Martin. Though he is not seen anywhere in the play in person a reference to him in the play at crucial moments brings forth the attitudes of the Whites Australian majority.

MILLY: Look, last week my Joe cut a hundred posts for old Skinny Martin and you know what he got? A pair of second-hand boots and a piece of stag ram so tough even the dawgs
could’t eat it; skinnier than old Marin ’imself.

GRAN: And we couldn’t eat the boots (23)

On another occasion when they had to bring Cissie home from hospital, Milly suggests that they borrow Skinny Martin’s horses and cart. Sam sighs that Skinny Martin would want him to cut another hundred posts if he had to lend them his cart. But they decide to do so for Cissie. Jimmy then suggests that they get hold of Skinny Martin’s sheep when they go to fetch the cart and that he knows Skinny Martin’s farm very well suggesting that it would not be very difficult for them to steal the sheep without anyone noticing them. Joe is excited on hearing this and exclaims that ‘Old Skinny might be bony but his sheep are cruel fat.’ (45) Gran warns them not to be glad just by the idea as they might end up in prison for about six months if the Sergeant catches them stealing. Sam remarks that Skinny Martin would help as long as he is convinced that ‘he’s gettin’ somethin’ for notin’ (46) Jimmy chuckles saying that Skinny Martin is not going to get something for nothing this time. Jack Davis seeks to emphasize the materialistic preoccupation of the Whites culture through the character of Skinny Martin. The outstanding feature of any great writer is certain objectivity in the evaluation of the individual characters. When we talk of communities and nations we rush into hasty conclusions and categorizations. But society as an abstraction can be qualified by descriptions and generalizations but not individuals. Individuals have distinctive individualities and personal predilections which a good writer like Jack Davis never misses. Therefore, besides throwing light on the shared characteristics of the Whites community,
Jack Davis offers us a sort of contrast study of two characters opposed to each other in nature – the characters of Skinny Martin and Frank Brown, one a man of great cunning and mischief the other of generosity and goodwill.

As Cissie falls sick and as the family arranges to take her to the hospital the abject poverty that the family is living in comes to light. Sam is initially reluctant to join Milly and Gran to help take Cissie to hospital but gradually upon Milly’s insistence joins them. He sighs that he would be able to pay off his fine if he stays back and finishes cutting another hundred posts. The following conversation between Milly and Sam brings forth the web of poverty and helplessness that the Aboriginal families are caught in.

MILLY: [to SAM] You better ask Skinny for a couple of dozen bags.

SAM: He’ll want me to cut an extra one hundred and fifty posts for that.

MILLY: Well, cut ’em then, and get a lend of some bag needles and don’t forget binder twine.

SAM: Another twenty posts.

MILLY: You an’ Joe can patch up the sides, then go down the dump an’ see if you can find more tin for the roof. Bloody place is colder than the North Pole. And that old baldy had better cough up with some more blankets. (38)

The next part of the scene takes place in the office where Miss. Dunn works. The signboard states, ‘Government of Western Australia, Fisheries, Forestry,
Wildlife and Aborigines.’ The functioning of this government department further highlights the dehumanizing attitude of the settler. The conversation of Miss. Dunn and Mr. Neville reinforces the depression era and the racism that is prevalent in Australia.

Placing an advertisement to sell her brother’s motorbike, Miss. Dunn shares with Mr. Neville that her brother has gone to the South West searching for a job leaving his wife and children with her. Mr. Neville informs her that around 30% in Australia are unemployed due to the depression. He adds:

NEVILLE: Goodness me, the West’s scraping the barrel for a bit of good news. Results of the ‘Most Economical Housewife Contest’ … What next?’ (19)

Neville’s exclamation the he wishes that there is a competition ‘for the most frugal civil servant’(20), his letters to the minister and Neal, Superintendent of Moore River settlement regarding a few Aboriginal issues and the issues discussed during the course of his conversation with the Sergeant in Northam are very revealing.

In his letter to the Minister he makes the following noteworthy points clear. Neville states:

…I don’t need to remind your good self of the extreme budgetry constraints under which this Department operates. Item one: the Native weekly ration currently costs this Department two shillings and four pence per week. Perhaps this bears comparison with the sustenance paid to Whites
unemployed which I believe is seven shillings per week. (20)
The contrast in the weekly ration obtained by the Aborigines and the
unemployed Whites clearly gives one a glimpse of the depth of poverty and
social injustice that the Aborigines are caught in. He continues:

Item two: off the cuff, the proposed budget cut of
three thousand one hundred and thirty-four pounds could
be met by discontinuing the supply of meat in Native
rations. Soap was discontinued this financial year. Item
Three: of eighty girls from the Moore River Native
Settlement who went out into domestic service last year,"
Thirty returned to the settlement in pregnant condition (20-21)
Some basic rights required for a healthy and decent life are denied to the
Aborigines. The abuse of women is another serious aftermath which is seldom
mentioned or looked into. Similar is the issue of the Stolen Generation. Jack
Davis makes several allusions of many atrocities in his plays. In his letter to
Neal, Superintendent of Moore River Settlement, Neville opines:

…I was a little concerned to see so many dirty
little noses amongst the children. I’m a great believer that
if you provide the Native the basic accoutrements of
civilization you’re half way to civilizing him. I’d like to see
each child issued with a handkerchief and instructed on its
use. Funds as always are short so I’ve taken the liberty of
ordering several bolts of cloth from Government stores. I’m
sure the girls in the sewing room could run up the handkerchiefs. I take your point about losing them and suggest attaching them to their sleeves by way of a tape. Likewise, as discussed, the stores branch will henceforth be supplying limited supplies of toilet paper for use in the dormitory lavatories. I think some practical training from yourself and Matron in its correct usage would be appropriate. If you can successfully inculcate such basic but essential details of civilised living you will have helped them along the road to take their place in Australian society. (24)

The concept of being civilized is being held up to interrogation by Jack Davis. Who is actually more civilized in their thinking and attitude? Is it the Whites who are trying to eliminate the original dwellers of the land that they have come and settled in or is it the Aborigines who innocent of the hidden agendas of the new comers have welcomed them and supported in making the settlers feel at home? If it amounts to civilizing the Natives by teaching them a number of useful western habits into day to day life, like using handkerchiefs when one has cold, it is quite acceptable without any prejudice. But no civilization which imposes itself on another civilization stops there. It proceeds to inculcate upon the minds of Natives a prejudice against their own culture, every iota of it, in order to make them lose self confidence personally and collectively in matters of their culture. Natives are dubbed as a superstitious mob and they are taught that
their beliefs and habits are superstitions. Constant propaganda from people who belong to the dominant ruling class (in this case, Whites Australians) that their subjects are a superstitious lot desperately waiting to be civilized, makes them believe really that their own traditional culture is intrinsically superficial and false, besides infusing inferiority complex among Natives. Gradually Natives develop contempt for their own people and culture because their failures are attributed to their culture and the success story of the Whites man is ascribed to their culture by which Natives mean unconsciously their outer social habits. No culture can be completely or truly appreciated by just looking at the outer social habits which are indeed determined by geographical, climatic and environmental factors. Therefore people ape more successful civilizations by just mistaking its habits for the core values of its culture. All over the world the same phenomenon is discernible in the relations of different cultures and civilizations.

Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words Whites Page* emphasizes:

> Even those welfare officials and missionaries with the best of intentions could easily interpret their mandate over-zealously and attempt to force Aborigines to become pseudo-Europeans as quickly as possible, rather than encourage them to adopt European ways gradually. This was another of the inherent flaws in the theory of assimilation: that it could so easily be perverted into a campaign of absorption, bordering upon cultural genocide, by those individuals just slightly too eager to make it a success.

Despite the attractions which missions and settlements offered in
terms of food, accommodation, and health care, many – if not most – Aborigines failed to assimilate. Ironically, the effort which was put into the process was often inversely proportional to the success derived from it.

At its best, the policy of assimilation was charitable, though tainted by a strong streak of paternalism. At its worst, it offered little more than empty cultural shell to Black Australians. (68-69)

In his conversation with Sergeant Carrol in Northam, Neville informs him that the site that the Sergeant has proposed for the Native reserve would not be gazetted by the Lands Department as the neighboring landlords have raised opposition and a person ‘Claims he wouldn’t be able to go out and leave his wife home alone at night.’(21) Neville’s last remark before concluding his conversation with Sergeant is ‘The Council’s concerned that it’s well away from any residences.’(21) - a thorough and clear testimony of racism and the utter chauvinism in the Whites’ attitude towards the Aborigines.

A. O. Neville’s character typical of the Whites in Authority. In this context it is interesting to note Jack Davis’ characterization of Neville is in sharp contrast with the Whites Historians’ portrayal of his character. Whites Australian historians consider him a liberal, disciplined and an efficient administrator. Let us examine the incidents after Jimmy’s release from the prison. Jimmy, after release from the prison, goes to the Aborigines’ Department to collect the train fare back home to Northam which he is entitled to. When he expresses his wish to meet Neville, Neville makes it clear to him that he would not see him till the
office opens. When Jimmy informs Neville that he has a train to catch and that is the reason he is in a hurry, Neville tells him that ‘The Native’s entrance is around the back.’ (39). This is yet another testimony of the racism of the ruling Whites. Jimmy’s eagerness to go home and his confrontation with the Whites authorities, not only makes him restless but also makes him lose his temper. True to his nature, Jimmy gives Neville a piece of his mind telling him that all he wants is the train fare to Northam and that he is not going to wait at the office all day for nothing. It gradually becomes obvious that Neville is not very pleased with such directness from an Aborigine. Acknowledging that he has ‘got a good fat file of police reports’ (39) on Jimmy, Neville doles out a piece of advice to Jimmy. He tells Jimmy that ‘sugar catches more flies than vinegar’ (39) His idiomatic expression is, however, lost on Jimmy. When he is asked by Miss. Dunn what Neville has told him about the fare he tells her, ‘Somethin’ about catcin’ flies.’ (40) It is very obvious from this statement of Jimmy that Jimmy was not able to understand what Neville meant. The cunningness of the Whites in sugarcoating things is contrasted with the naivety of the Aborigines. Jack Davis, in true postcolonial spirit, writes back to the standard British English. Though Jimmy has informed Neville that he would like to catch the morning train to Northam, it is not until later, that too with the constant concern and persuasion of Miss Dunn that he finally agrees to sanction Jimmy his due train fare to Northam. In spite of sanctioning this he informs Miss Dunn to ask Jimmy to come after two o’clock to collect his travel voucher. It is not until Jimmy barges into Neville’s office saying that it is getting too late to get the
train that he is paid any attention again. Neville asks him to catch the Kalgoorlie train at five. This statement clearly exhibits his utter insensitive inattention. Why would Jimmy go to Kalgoorlie when his family is in Northam? It is nothing but Neville’s reluctance even to know where Jimmy is heading. But Jimmy is self-assured. Disturbed by Jimmy’s assertiveness and after making Jimmy wait so for long Neville wants to get rid of Jimmy as soon as possible. He yells at Jimmy asking him to ensure that he is on the eleven o’clock train. Jimmy’s courage and mischievousness come out when he informs Neville that it is already too late to catch the eleven o’clock train and as it has been quite a while since he was out and he would catch the five o’clock train to Kalgoorlie. He even mischievously snubs Neville by saying:

JIMMY: [interrupting] You know one thing about Fremantle Gaol? Even some of them screws are polite – not like this

this place. (44)

When Constable Kerr answers a phone call from Neville and informs the Sergeant that it is from ‘Niggers’ Department’ (41), the unconscious speaks through the slip of the tongue. The Sergeant hears from Neville that the land he had proposed for the Native reserve cannot be gazetted as the town council finds it to be unsuitable as a Native reserve but intends to develop it as a recreation park for Whites to have picnics. The increasing number of Aborigines being removed and not being invited even into the jurisdictions of towns is indicated by the following dialogue between the Sergeant and Neville.

SERGEANT: Between you and me and the gatepost, the
Council’d prefer it if you sent ’em to Moore River or somewhere.

......

NEVILLE: Most councils would prefer that, Sergeant, but the place is bursting at the seams.”(42)

Neville insists that the Sergeant come up with another alternative. Their exchange not only shows clearly the number of Natives that have been removed from their Native land and moved into reserves away from their homes and also away from the residences of the Whites. The White settler is indifferent to the way in which the Native culture and people are tied to their land. He is just repulsed at the thought of having the Natives live near their townships. These are the tendencies that hit hard the Natives’ sense of dignity, self respect and basic human rights.

Jack Davis unravels his story steadily highlighting each aspect of Aboriginal experiences. Mr. Neville’s reluctance to meet Jimmy and Jimmy’s restless waiting to meet his family when he is released from prison is contrasted with Mr. Neville’s gladness to see Sergeant and deal with the task at hand with alacrity. Jimmy has just been released from prison and is entitled to get a travel voucher. He is eager to see his family and is desperate to catch the earliest train possible. The Sergeant on the other hand has come there on official duty and has the whole day at his disposal. Thus the playwright by juxtaposing the attitude of Mr. Neville in meeting the two characters subtly brings out the innate nature of Whites people in power towards the Aborigines.
Neville confides in Sergeant that Doctor Aberdeen has examined the Aborigines at Government Well and reported that he:

NEVILLE:...found them to be…’rotten with scabies’, and as a result o – ah, well, various submissions, it’s been decided to transfer the entire Native population to the Moore River Settlement. (47)

He discusses just the logistics of transfer but not the logistics of their settling there comfortably. He asks the Sergeant to ensure that “It’s essential that the town and shire are quite devoid of the Natives after the seventeenth.”(47) Mr. Neville cautions Sergeant that he “don’t need to impress upon you the absolute confidentiality of the matter.”(48) This is the reason he wanted the Sergeant to meet him in person but neither of them is concerned about the feelings of the Native, who are treated as objects rather than humans by virtue of which they can be moved or dealt with as the Whites man pleases. We can gather from the conversation of Neville and Sergeant that they are eager to avoid the proximity of the Natives rather than to protect them from penury, disease and death. Yet Neville is ostentatiously called ‘Native protector’. The actual process obviously smacks off ethnic cleansing.

The Sergeant thinks that there would not be a necessity to look for a site for the new reserve now. But Neville informs him that they are shifting the Aborigines only temporarily but does not give the Sergeant specific dates or period of this settlement even when the Sergeant asks him and proceeds to discuss the logistics of the transfer of the Aborigines from Northam to Moor
River Settlement. He simply says, “Until the scabies are cleared up and a new reserve is gazetted.” (48) Sergeant wonders if it might be ‘until after the election’ (48) to which Neville replies saying that he does not know about it. Neville’s speech and behavior rises questions regarding the true intentions and hidden motives behind the decision. From the previous happenings and conversations that took place between the different Whites characters one may as well conclude that it is likely that the decision might be more based upon political exigencies like the government’s need to impress the Whites voters. A hint of the Sergeant being a bit considerate towards the Aborigines is dispelled by Neville.

When Joe and Mary escape from the settlement, Neville is very much particular to punish them in spite of the Sergeant informing him that they have already been there for the last two months and that they are not in any way causing any trouble. It is not until two months after the arrival of Joe and Mary that the Sergeant receives orders to arrest them on charges of absconding with a minor girl. Joe takes care to see that they are not in the town. He has, however, been residing outside the town and had been successful in earning a living even by staying away from it. Constable Kerr though a little sympathetic towards Joe and Mary when he hears the complaints of the locals against them, shows his real nature when they meet Joe. He instantly becomes impatient and calls Joe ‘cheeky.’ Joe initially resists by trying to convince Sergeant but gives in gradually. He is greatly disappointed upon learning that Mary would be sent back to the settlement. He assures them that he would not run away and asks the
Sergeant not to put handcuffs on him to which the Sergeant agrees. He then requests the Sergeant to inform Mary of his whereabouts and the Sergeant obliges. He refuses to walk in front of constable Kerr chiding him by saying, “You are not the sort of bloke I want to turn me back to.”(85)

Jack Davis play No Sugar incorporates real character of Neville, though from the view point of the Aborigines. Obviously we cannot have an absolutist view of any historical character by studying about it in history books. The truth is often beyond the documented reality. Jack Davis play projects an Aborigine’s portrayal of Neville. By juxtaposing the historical facts about the gradual vanishing and dwindling of the Aborigines, we can understand that Jack Davis portrayal must be nearer to truth than the biased accounts of official history. In order to corroborate his insight Jack Davis introduces a speech of Neville at the Royal Western Australian Historical Society which highlights the harsh realities of the Aborigine history after the advent of the Whites on to the island of Australia and the gradual dwindling of the number of Aborigines.

Another representative of Whites in authority is N. S. Neal, Superintendent of the Moore River Settlement. The Superintendent of Moore River Settlement, Mr. Neal’s true nature is very obvious in the play. He enters his office drunk and is ‘almost’ caught by Matron smirking at Mary who has come to give him tea. From Matron’s words we come to know that he had been away for a day at a hotel only to drink. It is unbelievable for him that only four out of the eighty nine sent to the Moore River quarantine camp, are diagnosed with scabies.
NEAL: Good God, woman, what’s the bloody game? Eighty-nine Natives in a bloody quarantine camp I’ve just busted me gut to get ready on time, and there’s nothing bloody well wrong with ’em? (64)

When Matron asks him not to get cross and use foul language as they would be sent back in a few days he bawls, ‘The whole job’s a waste of time. They could have been treated in Northam.’ (64) This again stands as testimony to Jimmy’s shrewdness in guessing the reason behind the transfer of their families from Northam to Moore River Settlement. Upon hearing that the Natives have brought dogs with them Mr Neal immediately grabs his rifle and goes out to take charge.

Even the pretence of concern is shallow and can be easily seen through as really false. Matron’s attitude and behaviour while dealing with the Aborigines, makes one believe that she might be a woman of discretion and concern. Matron represents the finer side of European culture – keen sense of administration judiciously blended with Christian considerateness. Herself being the wife of an ever drunk debauchee the Matron has consolation for her own heart in being considerate and kind to women in the settlement. She cannot change or reform her husband who is incorrigible. But, whenever possible she attempts bringing a little alleviation to the suffering Aboriginal women in the settlement. When she says that Mary, an Aborigine girl is pregnant Neal, in utter shamelessness says “NEAL: Don’t worry, I won’t touch her.” (92)

Aboriginal women, besides being targets of social persecution and affront like Aboriginal men are also quite often victims of sexual molestation from the
Whites. Neal informs Mary, that she would be staying in the nurses’ quarters and would be working at the hospital. Mary says that she does not want to work at the hospital and that she wants to stay with Joe’s Mum and Dad. She is obstinate and does not give in to Neal’s warnings. Unable to take this confrontation from Mary he tries threatening to her that she would dig the graves if he wants her to do so. Mary is too strong to surrender. She defies him. Jack Davis writes:

NEAL: Millimurra seems to have learnt her well. Well, I’m going to unlearn you.

[NEAL grabs her. BILLY holds her outstretched over a pile of flour bags. NEAL raises the cat-o’-nine-tails. Blackout.

A scream.] (93)

Neal sees a kind of nexus of understanding between the poor girl Mary and Joe Millimurra family. He cannot bear to see any sense of unity among the Aborigines. Each individual should be treated as an isolated orphan – a helpless victim of the Whites man’s unilateral violence.

The depiction about Neal in the play goes, ‘Neal reads West Australian, *Monday 30 January 1934. Matron enters.*’(100) When Matron asks if there is any news from Kalgoorlie. Neal states, ‘One of us stabbed – typical – and one of them shot’(100) The use of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is indicative of the divisive mentality of the Whites constantly in operation, resulting in conflict and prejudice and injustice to the Aborigines. Matron is very familiar with his attitude. The following dialogue between them and the sarcasm used by Matron is applaudable.
MATRON: Got your own civil war?

NEAL: Don’t be stupid, woman, I can handle a mob of unruly niggers (100)

Neal not only addresses the Aborigines as niggers in racist style but also brands them as unruly. Milly and Sam approach Neal to seek permission for Joe to be able to attend Jimmy’s funeral. Neal brushes aside the request saying that it is ‘Impossible’ (100) Milly and Sam request a justification as Joe is the only one restrained from attending his uncle’s funeral when the other Nyoongahs are permitted to meet their families when their relatives die and request him to call Neville. Sam and Milly are aware that if Neal wishes he would be able to get Joe to the funeral but Neal is very obstinate as usual and slyly asks them to write to Neville directly. Milly calls out that he is scared to permit Joe out of the prison as he is scared of what he might do to him when Joe gets out. Sobbing, Milly requests him not to bury Jimmy wrapped in a government blanket but to put him in a proper coffin. Matron tries consoling Milly by telling her that though they cannot do anything to bring Joe home, they would ensure that Jimmy receives a proper funeral. Milly leaves, warning Neal to wait till Joe gets home as she would tell him how he had been held back from paying his last respect to his dear uncle Jimmy. Neal comments:

NEAL: [to MATRON] A classic case of emotion comes in through the door and reason goes out the window.

MATRON: [exiting] I couldn’t agree more. Seems to be happening frequently in this office lately. (101)
The scene once again emphasizes the utter racism of Neal and most White Australians besides the innate strength of the characters of Milly, Matron and Joe.

The character of the Justice of Peace though a very minor one, plays a very important role in bringing forth the darkest side of the Whites man’s judicial system. The scene becomes extremely significant in understanding the extent to which the ones in power were blind to even recognizing the Aborigines as human being. The Justice of Peace is made ‘a local cocky’ by Jack Davis intentionally. The Justice of Peace is in a great hurry to finish and go to a bank auctioning a bankrupt farmer’s machinery. He does not in the least hesitate to state this openly. This is the first peep into his character. Name is one of the most important identities of humans. He does not even bother to look at the name of Sam. Frank’s good nature is once again brought out the way he tries convincing the Justice of Peace how warm and affectionate the families were to him and the circumstances in which he had to buy alcohol to them. But the Justice of Peace does not pay any heed to his words. Though Frank tries telling him that he is an ex-serviceman, the Justice of Peace is not convinced. All that he is interested in is in going by the book and punishing anyone who are accused in relation to the Aborigines. To him acquaintance with the Aborigines means degradation of one’s character to that of theirs. This is the reason he sentences Frank to six weeks of imprisonment with hard labour even before he hears him. He cuts short Frank when he mentions that Jimmy took him home only to be informed by Sergeant that Frank means Jimmy’s camp at Government Well
when he says Jimmy’s home. Aborigines’s cluelessness when confronted with the Whites systems is elucidated by Mudrooroo in his work titled *Us Mob*:

> When Indigenous people come before the Master’s court they sometimes find themselves in an incomprehensible situation, often extremely distressful. The British legal system, with its arcane rituals and procedures from an alien culture, makes for unease not for ease, not only among Indigenous people but many other Australian citizens who fall victim to it. (98)

In principle a Judge or a Justice of Peace must listen to the explanation of the accused/complainant – who ever he/she may be before he forms an opinion about the issue on hand. Usually laws are elaborately devised to protect innocence and leave them unpunished if he is not proved guilty after investigation. Law may allow a criminal to go unpunished if there is no roper evidence but it would not punish an innocent man. In the case of Australian Justice of Peace the judge is not fulfilling the first requirement – listening to the accused. The Justice of Peace acts in the case of the Aborigines in total contradiction to the very spirit of the law. The law and the legal system are just reduced to impressive formalities and rituals to punish the accused. In the Australian Aborigines’ context punishment is a foregone conclusion of the judge. The Justice of Peace sentences Jimmy and Sam even before he hears their version. He decides on his judgment by hearing only the Sergeant’s version of the story. When Jimmy interrupts him to give him the actual version, he humiliates him:
JP: [interrupting] Shut up, you bloody idiot, or I’ll charge you with contempt of court. (36)

Jimmy is sentenced to imprisonment and Sam is fined. He is so harsh in his punishment that even the Sergeant interferes and requests the Justice of Peace to give some time to Sam to pay his fine.

Sergeant Carrol of Northam is another aspect of Whites authority. Sergeant Carrol is a representative of those Whites, especially those in power who hold prejudices against the Aborigines. Sergeant Carrol interrogates and enquires about Frank Brown’s stay in Northam. Upon Frank Brown assuring him that he is not living with either Aborigines or half-castes, he tells Frank Brown that he is suspected of hanging out with the Natives. Frank Brown retorts firmly that it is not unlawful to do so. The Sergeant Carrol and Frank Brown represent opposing views on the issue. Neither gives in nor can neither take the other to task. Sergeant Carrol suspects Frank Brown to be supplying liquor to James Munday Frank Brown denies the accusation telling that he is a wine connoisseur. Not very convinced with the reply, Sergeant Carrol gives the reasons behind his accusation and warns him that he had left James Munday to go home with a warning this time but the next time this repeats he is going to take both James Munday and the person who gives him liquor to task. He suggests that Frank Brown find a job. Frank Brown informs him that he had been on the same task, leaving his wife and children with her mother, for the last six months but in vain. Sergeant Carrol tells him that he hears this kind of experiences every day suggesting to the onlooker that it is the period of great
economic depression and tells Frank Brown that he is just doing his duty. The statement becomes crucial in understanding the attitude of Sergeant Carrol and the Whites in power in general. He is a faithful servant of the government who un-questioningly believes in its spirit of planning and implementation of the government policies. He is not even willing to hear to other side of the story as far as the Aboriginal issues are concerned even if it is from his fellow Whites citizen. He is extremely biased and prejudiced. He interrupts Frank Brown to warn him that he thinks that he is doing the Aborigines' some good but in reality he is not. Sergeant Carrol also tells Frank Brown that he has no prejudice against the Aborigines at all but from his experience dealing with Aborigines for years he knows what exactly they are.

The following dialogue is another excellent example of how the Whites man has devastated the foundations of the Aborigines’ lives. Milly and Gran come to collect their ration.

GRAN: Damper won’t rise without no bicarbonate.
SERGEANT: That shouldn’t worry you, Granny, you should remember when you used to grind up jam and wattle seeds.
GRAN: More better than the Whites man’s flour, no weevils in jam and wattle seeds.
SERGEANT: Good tucker, eh?
GRAN: When I was that high we go and get ’em and smash ’em up and get a bag full, that much!
SERGEANT: you can still collect ’em, nothin’ stoppin’ you
GRAN: Where? *Wetjala* cut all the trees down

MILLY: Haven’t you got any soap yet.

SERGEANT: I’m afraid that soap is no longer included as a Ration item. (22)

It is the Whites man who had forced the Aborigines to change their lifestyle and habits. Then items started to disappear from the ration given to the Aborigines. Even if the Aborigines want to use their indigenous knowledge to compensate for the items cut in the ration, they are helpless in doing so. This is so because the Whites have not only influenced and dominated the political and cultural aspects but as well have also tampered with the Australian Landscape. Many plants, bushes and animals from which the Aborigines collected livelihood material are now no longer available or have become very scarce. The dialogue also shows how the Aborigines lived in harmony with nature and knew all the necessary things in life. Mudrooroo in *Us Mob* states:

> The elements involved in the Aboriginal system are land, human being and all other things that dwell with them. This system is a harmony and balance, and this is perfection.

> The problem is that if any element of the system is destroyed, this circle of perfection is broken. One hundred and ninety four years ago this cycle was broken and in the southern areas of our continent our society was all but destroyed.

> The balance and harmony was lost but the strength of it lived within the survivors and gave rise to the identity that Aborigines
will carry with them into the twenty-first century and beyond. It is
this identity which distinguishes us from anyone else who lives in
our place. It is this identity which makes us what we are, and
accounts for our continuing struggle. (208)

Nature, culture, society and the mind of man – all of them have an underlying
organic unity which is disrupted when ecological imbalance, social upheavals
and psychological turbulence are caused by discordant external interference. The
Wetjalas being aliens to the natural culture of the original inhabitants introduced
by force their civilization which is urbane, machine oriented and politically
motivated. The result is the tragedy of modern Aboriginal history.

The Sergeant remarks that there are ‘three healthy men bludging off you,
too lazy to work.’(22) But the reality is that racism coupled with economic
depression has left the Aboriginal men unemployed. The Sergeant is very rude
towards the Aboriginal men. When Milly tells him this he merely retorts,
‘They’re afraid to look for it in case they find it.’(22) Gran asserts the pride of
their men by making it clear that the Aboriginal men are not ‘slaves.’ The
Sergeant considers soap to be a luxury item and says that their men have to work
if they want to enjoy luxury items like soap. The following conversation
between Milly and Sergeant also brings forth some other important aspects. It
once again gives one a glimpse of Jimmy’s knowledge, wisdom and nerve to
fight for what he believes is right and also against injustices. There are burning
cinders of revolution in Jimmy but the brute numerical majority of the Whites
and their weaponry and their belligerent attitude snuff out any probability of
revolution. Through the character of Jimmy, Jack Davis brings out the innate strength of an individual to fight an injustice as opposed to the system that one is living in. The inner strength, determination and will power to achieve this inner strength in the absence of basic security for life of the ‘fourth world’ are bought out in such traits of the characters.

MILLY: You wait till brother Jimmy hears about this no soap business. He’ll make you fellas jump.

SERGEANT: Yeah, and you tell that bush lawyer brother of yours, if he comes here arguing I’ll make him jump: straight inside. (23)

The Sergeant calling Jimmy ‘bush lawyer’ suggest the insecurity of the Master. The White settler has meddled with the Australian landscape which in turn has meddled with the Aboriginal system to the extent that the made the Aboriginal men has completely dependent on the system and incapable of doing anything. The insecurities of the White settlers is brought to light by Mudrooroo in Us Mob:

For the Native, the Woman, the Other to have equal power may mean a loss of position, control and conformity and the Master is ever the conservative, the Father in absolute control, for if he was to lose control, was to share his power, then this might in effect mean that he would lose control of himself. When a plurality of voices and power-sharers emerges, then other mean of ordering are necessary, and these other means of orderings – or should I say
negotiations? mean the death authority as structured by the Master (5)

Upon hearing that the Sergeant has warrants to arrest and transfer all of them they are keen to know the accusations. When the Sergeant informs them that they are not accused of any crime but are being transferred on medical grounds they are unhappy and resist the warrant. Jimmy has abundant common sense and worldly wisdom and immediately guesses the reason behind this transfer. He is bold enough to state:

IMMY: You reckon blackfellas are bloody mugs. Whole town knows why we’re goin’. ‘Coz wetjalas in this town don’t want us ‘here, don’t want or kids at the school, with their kids, and old Jimmy Mitchell’s tight ‘coz they reckon Bert ‘Awke’s gonna give him a hidin’ in the election. (50)

The Constable questions his analysis retorting that Jimmy does not even vote. This is another key concern in the play. While armed suppression is always used to subjugate the Aborigines, the process of exclusion is completed by denying them political rights. The basic right to vote would have given the Aborigines atleast a legitimate though feeble voice which some kind Whites people would have listened to. But the Aborigines are not only discriminated socially but also excommunicated politically. It is not until very recently that the Aborigines, who are the original dwellers of the land, were counted in the Australian census or given the privilege of universal adult suffrage in their own land. No doubt the Apology of the Harper government can be considered, to an extent as a first step
of the guilty Whites majority towards reconciliation. But it should also be noted that there are aspects of the Aborigine culture and life experiences which are lost forever and therefore are beyond compensation.

The Sergeant tries pacifying Jimmy saying that he does not know whose idea it is and makes it clear that he has nothing to do with it only to be ridiculed by Jimmy who claims he knows about the government very well, in fact better than them. He asserts his opinion that the transfer of Aborigines away from Northam on the pretext of their medical condition is just a political stunt by Jimmy Mitchell to win the elections. The Sergeant tries further to pacify him saying that Jimmy Mitchell has nothing ‘against blackfellas, or anybody else, for that matter.’(50) Jimmy is determined and bold enough to speak out his mind. The pathetic condition that the Aborigines are in gives him this audacity to speak the truth. The priorities of English political culture surface at the time of elections, and candidates make an effort to please the Whites voters by keeping the Aborigines as far away as possible from every walk of life.

Though given very little education at the mission, lacking opportunities and resources, Jimmy’s awareness and understanding of the world around him and his analysis of the situation is exceptional. He stands as a symbol of what Aborigines can do for the progress and wellbeing of their society if they are given equal opportunities as the settlers. The Sergeant is taken aback by Jimmy’s analysis and warns that they would in any case be taken by them ‘for resisting arrest and escaping legal custody’(50), if they do not oblige. Giving in Sam enquires the details of the transfer. The Sergeant promises them to take care of
their dogs, kangaroo and other possessions in their absence. The exclamations of each of them when they are informed, brings to light how well the Aborigines are aware of the false promises of the settlers. Gran is clever enough to ‘frantically’ force the Sergeant to allow them to take their dogs with them. Though Jimmy resists, the Sergeant is successful in putting him on the train claiming that Dr. Aberdeen have told them that Jimmy has got a serious heart condition. Constable and Sergeant’s efforts fail in convincing Gran to take the train. The Constable is very nasty towards her but Jimmy is smart enough to hit back.

CONSTABLE KERR : It’s her funeral if she doesn’t make it.

JIMMY: It will be your funeral. (51)

Later in the play when Joe and Mary meet Sergeant Carrol at Northam when they run away from the settlement, he is a bit liberal with them and it is not until Neville insists that he takes any action on them. Joe has inherited his uncle Jimmy’s courage and intelligence. He is not in the least hesitant to speak his mind. Upon realizing that The Sergeant has not kept his promise to keep their belongings safe, Joe demands an explanation from the Sergeant. When Joe insists on Sergeant’s taking responsibility for keeping their things in safe custody the Sergeant answers that he takes orders from higher ups and cannot be considered accountable for what is kept with him. Joe then enquires about their ration.

SERGEANT: I can’t help you there. Since all the Natives have shifted out, Northam is no longer a ration depot.
JOE: We never shifted out, we was booed out. (80)

Joe has also imbibed the temper and bitterness of his uncle Jimmy. When the Sergeant asks him where the rest of his family are and hopes that they are not at the Government Well, Joe is direct, ‘You oughta know where they are, you dragged ’em there.”(80) The Sergeant follows the instructions of his superiors but with a few concessions when the situation demands it. Though the Sergeant knows that no Aborigine is supposed to be at the Government Well, he leaves Joe and Mary without taking any action by just suggesting:

SERGEANT: …Just make yourself scarce

and don’t go campin’ anywhere you’re not s’posed to be

— and that includes Government Well. (81)

Sergeant makes it clear to Neville that, ‘They’re not actually camped in the town’ (82) and that he did not have ‘any bother with’ (82) them. He also informs that they are working outside the town for a living and are not collecting rations. Neville replies that he has had two letters from the town council and that they are still firm about removing all the Natives from Northam. Neville tells him that Joe if found to be guilty of absconding with a minor girl should be subjected to a mandatory imprisonment of six months and Mary is to be sent back to the settlement. The Sergeant declares that he should be able to implement Neville’s orders the very day. Upon learning this bit of news about the arrest of Joe and Mary, even the usually inconsiderate and domineering Constable Kerr is annoyed with government and public likewise.

CONSTABLE KERR : Haven’t seen them for months. What’s the
panic? They have been here for weeks.

SERGEANT: Oh, you know all this Royal Commission business. Some mob of do-gooder women are kicking up about them being shifted out before the election.

…Royal Commission on Naives; they had one about thirty years ago. A waste of bloody time, like the bloody referendum; they’ll just stick it in some government filing cabinet and forget about it (83)

The Royal Commission which has come into effect to look into the condition of the Aborigines’ lives after a stark criticism from the global audience does not have any impact on the deeds of the White governments. The above is an authentication of how the several policies, laws and departments that have come into existence to deal with the Aboriginal issue become ‘null and void’ in a practical sense over a period of time bringing to light the deterioration of the Aboriginals’ quality of life and condition.

The different attitudes of the blacks towards the White settlers can be understood by observing the contrast in attitudes of Jimmy and Billy towards them. Jimmy’s is that of a very strong proud Aborigine deeply rooted in his Aboriginality. He is not only extremely unhappy at the Aborigines dancing for the Whites’ brass band at the Australia Day Celebration but fights and resists the Whites’ dominance till his very last breadth. Jimmy is very agitated when he hears that basics like soap are cut off from ration. He declares that he would definitely give Sergeant his due for doing this to them. Gran warns him that he
would be sentenced to six months imprisonment if he gives the Sergeant a piece of his mind and Jimmy replies with pride:

JIMMY: Six months.

[He laughs.]

Mother, I can do that standing on my head. (26)

This shows how Aborigines face a lot of discrimination and have to suffer punishment for merely claiming their rights. They are expected to accept the whims and fancies of the authorities and policy makers unquestioningly. Neither are they allowed to voice their opinions, needs or disappointments. The above also makes it very obvious how common it is for an aborigine to go to prison even if they are right. The experience of imprisonment becomes so common among the Aboriginal men that they started taking it in their stride and are not in the least worried about it. Jimmy enquires if Frank had ever been in prison to which Frank replies in the negative. Gran sarcastically jokes with Frank that if the Sergeant sees him in their company he is sure to be in prison. This again is a testimony of racism prevalent in Australian society. The Whites, again especially those in authority do not overcome their psychological blocks in recognizing the Aborigines as equals. As he slowly gets drunk, Jimmy enquires if Frank is allowed to walk down the street after sundown. When Frank exclaims that he does not understand why he should not, Jimmy tells him that none of the Aborigines are allowed to walk in the street after sunset, march in the street or buy alcohol. If they happen to do any of these they are sent to prison. The fallacy of Aboriginal existence in Whites dominated Australia is brought out when
Jimmy further informs Frank that the policemen can shoot their dogs anytime without having any reason to justify their acts. Sam shares with Frank that he has also been in the prison a couple of times, showing how the police can pick up Aboriginal men anytime and put them in prison at their wish and with no justification. Jimmy proceeds to share that he used to sing in the Choir of a mission. Jimmy and Sam are arrested for getting drunk. The policy of banning of Aborigines either from buying or consuming alcohol is presumably based on the premise that it is in the interests of their well being. A drunken Aborigine is arrested but the White who had sold the liquor is not found guilty. Such were the White Australian policies. Jimmy and Sam are put in two separate cells and their possessions are ceased. Jimmy pulls out the mouth organ that he had retained and starts playing it, till it is seized by the Constable. When the Constable asks Jimmy to hand over his instrument, Jimmy points out that it is not an instrument but a mouth organ. This is a sign of respect that his culture has taught Jimmy. Jimmy being a part of the choir in the mission and he being talented in playing the mouth organ and he doing so even in times like these brings to light the part played by music in Aborigines’ life. Music runs in their veins giving solace to their souls. The language of music is universal and so are its healing qualities. Jimmy is undisturbed. He tells them the same and starts singing for the Sergeant.

Hail, Queen of Heaven, the ocean star,

Guide of the wanderer here below,

Thrown on life’s surge, we claim thy care:

Save us from peril and from woe.
Mother of Christ, star of the sea,

Pray for the wanderer, pray for – (32)

Stopping the song suddenly he remarks that the song is of no use to the Sergeant and the Constable as they are such menial souls. The Christian reference in the song shows how well the Aborigines have imbibed the spiritual aspects of Christianity where the Whites man has failed to comprehend and live out the true spirit of his own religion. This too becomes a cause of irony and pain for the Aboriginal Christians. They are torn between two cultures when they see their preachers’ word and deed not going together.

Jimmy starts singing another humorous song only to end it quickly to annoy the Sergeant. Sam confirms that Jimmy is going to be sentenced to six months in prison. Jimmy, unfazed, reiterates the fact that he can go through it on his head meaning that he had been in prison so many times that it does not mean anything for him to go to prison for just six months. He then proceeds to ask the Sergeant if he had seen the film in which a White man was acting like an aborigine. Sam tries once again to calm Jimmy but only in vain. Jimmy continues by asking the Sergeant if they have informed their family about their arrest. He does not wait for a reply before he snaps that such a thing would not strike a Whites man’s mind. Thoroughly annoyed by Jimmy’s attitude and confused as he is unable to control him, the Sergeant decides to leave. Jimmy’s bitterness is not satiated even after all this.

JIMMY: I don’t give a damn for any damn man,

That don’t give a damn for me. (33)
Jimmy has a very strong character which he displays from time to time in the drama. He is not a man who is hesitant to voice what he thinks is right and does not fear standing up for his beliefs. This attitude and courage of his commands respect and proves his mettle inspite of all his negligible vices. This aspect of his character also makes one feel that he is an innately good human being and the vices are acquired through the environmental thrust of helplessness. So they are more external than internal which again command sympathy and forgiveness despite his short temper and alcoholism.

On another occasion Jimmy realizing that meat has been cut from their ration, wishes he had known it when he met Mr. Neville. Gran displaying her wisdom again remarks that it is of no use at all as Mr. Neville, leave alone paying attention to Jimmy’s complaints, would not even have acknowledged his presence. Joe shares that he happened to meet the Sergeant at the post office who informed him that Cissie is fit to be brought home from hospital and is in fact waiting for them to pick her up. Milly asks Joe why he did not ask, the Sergeant to give them a lift home. Jimmy replies shrewdly that the ‘Only time blackfellas git a ride of him is when he’s takin’ you to goal.’(45) This is yet another revealing remark made by Jimmy. They were the ‘Stolen Generation’. The Aboriginal children were removed from their families and were put in the missions on the pretext of giving them better education and life. It is obvious that the stay in the mission has made Jimmy literate and awareness on how things work. It has given him an awareness of human rights, notions of equality among citizens, discriminatory practices, etc. The Sergeant once refers to him as
a ‘bush lawyer’. Coupled with this understanding, his natural inclination for justice, pride in his origin, urge to assert the identity of his community, boldness to fight against injustices and assert their identity makes Jimmy a lone voice of unacknowledged and ineffective revolution. These are the aspects which make the character of Jimmy noteworthy.

When the family reaches the Moore River Settlement tired and hot from the travel, they are met by Billy Kimberley, a black tracker at the settlement. He is described as ‘he smokes a clay pipe and carries a whip.’(55) Sam and Cissie imagine him as the then famous actors from the west and Gran out of her ignorance fears he is a magic man and warns the kids to be careful. It is Joe who comforts the family by exclaiming that he is a nothing. Billy introduces himself as a policeman and is very authoritative. He takes obvious pride in as a representative of the Whites. Billy represents the attitudes of those Aborigines who are convinced of Whites superiority. They fall prey to the trivialities held out by co-operation with the Whites and so have decided to help them in the process, demeaning their own culture and people. When the family reached the Moore River Settlement, Billy asks them to wait till Matron comes to see them. He does not show them around nor help them settle in the new place. He has no clue when Matron would visit them. He lives in asserting his authority and in dominating them. It is Jimmy who informs them that Matron is the superintendent’s wife and that she is incharge of the hospital. He also tells them where to get food and sighs that the food is, ‘More like three-course bloody pig swill.’(56) Jimmy also tells Milly not to worry about getting an iron sheet for the
fireplace. He calls out, ‘Come on, Sam, I’ll knock it off, you can watch.’(56) This is another instance where the Aborigines talk of stealing. It also suggests the helpless circumstances that force the Aborigines to steal. It gives a good insight into many aspects of Aboriginal culture and experience: the first part presents the cultural richness of the Aborigines, the second part presents the violence inflicted by the settlers on the Natives of the soil expelling them permanently from the soil, and third the continued atrocities committed, especially on Aboriginal women, by the White settlers in power on those who have managed to survive through the violent acts. This is yet another occasion which shows how the Aboriginal communities are pushed into a web of poverty, helplessness and stark racism by the White governments.

The conditions and strictures of colonial rule culminate in a feeling of kinship among the Aborigines living on the settlement. It also fosters an attitude of contempt towards those working for the Whites authorities. As Jimmy, Sam and Joe prepare for a corroboree they are joined by Billy and Bluey, two black trackers. Their behaviour and attitude to their fellow Aborigines is totally in contrast to that of theirs in most part of the play. They are very friendly to the other Aboriginal men and voluntarily join them in the corroboree. The Aborigines of Australia paint their bodies with different patterns and symbols and take part in their ritualistic dances. Complimenting and sharing the ceremonial paint with others, Billy tells them that it is very hard to find it in the place that he comes from. He says:

BILLY: Eh? You know my country, must be walk two, three
Days for this much. Your country got plenty. (65)

It is interesting to know that Billy uses the expressions “my country” and “your country” in his conversation with Jimmy and others. It only implies that he comes from a clan which has similar, if not the same rituals though it is living under conditions of greater scarcity of many things including paint used to paint the body in ritual dances. Like most primitive societies the Aborigines of Australia are spread over a continent and divided from one another as clans, each of which has a separate set of social and religious rituals and topographical problems. But there is no evidence to believe that these clans were engaged in inter tribal wars. The Aborigines of Australia are uniquely and conspicuously peace-loving communities somewhat isolated from one another but not at loggerheads with one another. The idea of the nation or the country in the modern sense is unknown to them. However their diverse local cultures have many similarities. Therefore when they met one another it was a moment of mutual understanding, cooperation and appreciation. The Whites could have probably coexisted with them peacefully but the European sense of superiority and uniqueness does not permit them. Religion is another big obstacle in any process of peaceful cooperation and reconciliation. Europeans were, especially in the nineteenth century, more for arrogating to themselves the role of saviours in cultural and religious matters. There is least attempt on their part to assimilate local religious habits or ideas. Their own traditional religion has taught them to look upon all non-Christians as people to be saved spiritually and uplifted socially.
From Billy’s mention of ‘you’ one could make out that though he is an Aborigine he belongs to a different tribe or area from that of the new commers. When asked about the song that Jimmy is singing, Jimmy tells them that his grandfather used to sing this song while fishing. It requests the crabs to crawl to the shore out of the river and for the fish to jump up high so that he can catch them. Sam’s attention is caught by Billy’s body painting. Informing them that the painting represents the Goanna searching the berry bushes, at the same time vigilant about the presence of the eagle, Billy starts strange movements as Bluey starts playing the didgeridoo. When Jimmy asks if it is a dance from their place Bluey says that it belongs to a place of cannibals. Sam invites everyone to a group dance.

…They dance with increasing speed and energy, stamping their feet, whirling in front of the fire, their bodies appearing and disappearing as the paint catches the firelight. The dance becomes faster and more frantic until finally SAM let out a yell and they collapse, dropping back to their positions around the fire. (66)

Billy exclaims that they have got plenty of good dances. When Jimmy grumbles that nothing is left now as it is all nearly finished, Billy sighs:

BILLY: No, no, no. You song man, you fella dance men. This still your country. [Flinging his arms wide] You, you, you, you listen! Gudeeah make ’em fences, windmill, make ’em road for motor car, big house, cut ’em down trees. Still
your country! Not like my country, finish … finish. (67)

He shares with them the rest of the story of his clan being uprooted and finally completely destroyed by the Whites.

Neal is extremely disappointed about the election results and as he proceeds to leave, Matron informs him that Joe and Mary have run away. He is very cross about the news. Throwing a stick of tobacco on the floor and asking Billy to fetch food from the store, he orders Billy to hurry and hunt the runaways. Billy is determined to help Neal find them.

As rightly anticipated by Neal, Billy finds Joe and Mary in a clearing at a railway line at Mooloombeeni. Initially Joe expresses to Billy his reluctance to hurt him asking him to go back. But Billy is determined to take Mary back with him for she not only belongs to his tribe but is also a ‘give girl.’ Moreover he adds, ‘Mitjer Neal says she gotta come back’(74) Billy is bound by his master’s command, rather than his kinship with Joe and Mary. Upon realizing that Joe has no intention of obeying he warns him that an Aboriginal secret executioner is sure to get him. Joe is undeterred. Joe leaves Billy without strangling him to death upon Mary’s request. He handcuffs him and throws away the keys. Billy is sure that the Whites policemen would get them as they run away to catch the train. Billy believes that it is not possible to go on fighting against the Whites and completely avoiding their proximity by retiring into Northam. To Billy and many Aborigines like him, surviving in the hostile society of the Whites unquestioningly is a practical and viable solution to their very problem of existence. They also believe that they have to adapt themselves to the new way
of life and, if possible, benefit from it inspite of hostile social environment amid the Whites. Billy’s view point reveals more of his wisdom and survival instincts than of rank opportunism. Actually whoever survived among the Aborigines survived only by knowingly or unknowingly emulating Billy and such people with pliant nature. At the same time Billy is shown as a dull witted extremely obedient servant who can survive only through implicit obedience. People who are more intelligent and original in their responses develop resistance to oppression and suffer more as a consequence – a sad comment on Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest. Competence does not guarantee survival where as compromise and conformity may.

The heights of racism in the then Australian society are presented though Neal’s rebukes on Billy, when Billy’s failure to execute his orders and returns hand cuffed by Joe. He directs an outburst of racist abuse at Billy. Mr Neal is at the heights of his impatience and frenzy when Billy does not manage to even tell the direction of the train that Joe and Mary have taken without Matron helping him through her signs. Neal labels him ‘blithering stone-age idiot’ (76) and when Billy fails to produce the keys of the handcuffs, calls him ‘bloody incompetent savage’ (76). It is Matron who is patient and tolerant with Billy. Inspite of Billy being a very faithful and obedient servant to Neal he does not show any sympathy or consideration towards Billy. He is consumed by frustration at his failure. The episode is very vital in understanding many aspects. Joe’s intelligence and courage is contrasted with Billy’s dumbness and cowardice. Joe and Mary’s consideration for Billy is contrasted with Billy’s
indifference towards their feelings. Initially Joe expresses his reluctance to hurt Billy and asks him to go away. It is Billy’s stubbornness leading to the fight and finally Mary’s pity saves Billy’s life. Joe and Mary’s rationale is contrasted with Billy’s orthodoxy. Joe and Mary are fighters taking charge of their lives whereas Billy is very submissive to the Whites, allowing them to take over his life. Among the Whites, too, there are different perceptions. Matron’s reaction and treatment of Billy are a contrast to that of Neal.

Jimmy’s interaction and reaction to Neal’s queries at the beginning of the scene is contrasted to that of Billy at the end of the scene. When Neal asks Jimmy what he is doing at his office he replies, ‘What’s it look like I’m doing?’ (63). When Neal further tries threatening him by saying that Jimmy is supposed to be at the quarantine camp Jimmy exhibits his mettle again by warning Neal:

JIMMY: Come off it, you know that quarantine camp is a load

Of bullshit, so don’t try and tip it over me. (63)

Billy on the other hand is obsequious toward Neal, eager to carry out all his orders. This contrast is presented by Jack Davis to show the contrast in the attitudes of Aborigines regarding different issues and their different relationships with the White settlers.

White women characters need to be carefully observed to understand better the settler-Native dynamics in Australia. It is also crucial in understanding the downtrodden Aboriginal women in Australian society.
Matron Neal arrives accompanied by Billy and Topsy to examine the families who have arrived at the camp, Billy is presented as an ignorant fool whose is extremely faithful to his masters but crude in his treatment of his own community. He is as obsequious to Matron Neal as he is unnecessarily and ostentatiously harsh to the Aborigines. He threatens and nudges with his whip whoever he thinks is not polite to Matron. Gran and Joe try to convince Matron that they are fine but she insists on examining them as she was informed that they were being sent there on medical grounds and she wishes to rule it out herself. She is a very courteous lady who addresses every one by their full names. She checks Billy when he gets too overbearing with the Aborigines. Having ruled out that they do not have any skin problems she is humble enough to acknowledge Milly’s efforts in keeping her family so healthy. This confirms Jimmy’s doubt regarding their shift from Northam to Moore River Settlement. Matron might be good and kind but her kindness verges on a patronizing attitude to the unfortunate Aborigines whom she is conscious as of inferior race and culture. She gives the Aborigines a few instructions about using the washing facilities, hands over some soap and handkerchiefs for children and proceeds to check the other families.

Matron is described as ‘gloating’ on seeing the disappointment on the face of Neal upon hearing that Joe and Mary have escaped. She is very well aware of Neal’s nature. Neal is not as duty minded and serious as Matron. She is also bold in resisting his outrages against her and guarding herself from his
outbursts. She is sincerely faithful to her cause and considerate in truly helping ‘uplift’ the Aborigines. She sarcastically informs Neal:

MATRON: It seems she was terrified at the prospect of
working at the hospital.

NEAL: They’re all scared of the dead.

MATRON: I think she was scared of the living. (73)

Her remark reveals that Matron is aware of Neal’s lechery. It is also suggestive of the sexual harassment and exploitation Native women were subjected to. Mary had earlier expressed her fear of working on a Whites man’s farm. The following dialogue between Matron and Neal confirms this.

MATRON: As matron in charge of the hospital, I thought it
was my job to allocate nursing aides.

NEAL: I was only trying to help you.

MATRON: Or yourself. (73)

Despite her awareness, Matron fails to take a stand against the atrocities committed against the Aboriginal girls and women in her care.

After giving birth to the baby Mary refuses to allow Matron to see the baby. Matron calls her delirious. She would have been well aware of the things happening in the settlement. On several occasions she has made sarcastic remarks about Neal’s attitude towards the Aborigines in general and towards the Aboriginal girls in particular. Yet her inaction in this regard becomes conspicuous and questionable. On one hand she is well aware of the atrocities happening at the settlement, for which her husband is the culprit though not
explicitly named or accused, and on the other hand she brushes aside Mary’s fear as ‘delirious.’(103) When Matron claims that Mary is fevered Sam retorts that she is not. This justifies Mary’s fears of such things really taking place in the settlement.

Though Gran expresses her desire for Matron to have a look at the baby to see if everything is alright it is quite evident from Matrons remark that Gran’s traditional knowledge and experience have served well enough. Matron applauds Gran’s work.

“MATRON: Gran evidently seems to have done a good job.”(104) When she offers the basics needed to take proper care of the baby, Gran informs Matron that she does not need powder as she would use her own, meaning their own traditional one. Matron now respecting Gran’s expertise in this regard accepts her request and leaves without further insistence on anything else, informing them that she would be back the following morning when Mary would be more tranquil.

Another Whites female character in the play is that of Sister Eileen. Jack Davis introduces the representative of missionaries, Sister Eileen in this scene. She is presented narrating a Christmas story to the children at the Moore River Settlement at the Sunday school. Because of her years of stay at the Settlement Topsy is more familiar with the Christmas story. Cissie notices David entering at a distance only to be caught by Billy and whipped at on the legs for being away from Sunday school. As soon as she notices this she picks up a stone and runs to help free her brother from Billy. Sister Eileen starts running after her to take
charge of the situation. The irony of the situation is brought out through the dialogue of Sister Eileen. She preaches to Billy, ‘but we don’t hit people to make them do God’s will.’ (90) Yet she bribes the kids with ‘humbugs’ to come to Sunday school. It is a richly ironical situation when Sister Eileen teaches a hymn about a ‘happy land’ for them to sing for Neville when he visits the settlement for Australia Day celebration.

There is a happy land,

Far, far away,

Where saints in glory stand,

Bright, bright as day:

Oh, how they sweetly sing,

‘Worthy is our Saviour King!’

Loud, let His praises ring,

Praise, praise for aye!

Bright in that happy land,

Beams every eye:

Kept by a Father’s hand

Love cannot die.

Oh, then, to glory run,

Be a Crown and Kingdom won

And, bright above the sun,

Reign, reign for aye! (91)
One wonders if Australia is a happy land for Aborigines; or is it the Happy land promised to the British by God? The song may in itself be a cheerful song of devotion to God but in the context of Australia it is painfully paradoxical. It is intended to encourage the White settlers to bear with their own condition of exile in Australia – an island far away from England their father land. ‘Be a Crown and Kingdom won’ has a piercing ring of the Whites man’s expansionist designs and colonizing dreams under the pretext of divine protection and permission to ‘Reign, reign for aye!’ Jack Davis suggests the complicity of the Whites man’s church with Whites man’s polity.

During interaction with Sister Eileen, Mr Neal is least courteous and least interested in her service oriented activities. His is a top down approach. He gives instructions without asking if she has any suggestions. His only interest is to fulfill ‘the official’ norms applicable at the reserve. Shoemaker clarifies in Black Words Whites Pages:

The motive for this financial underwriting of mission services was hardly pure philanthropy: the various governments concerned with Aboriginal ‘welfare’ had determined that the Black Australians were to be assimilated and missions were considered to be ‘indispensable agents in implementing this new policy.’ (68)

Sister Eileen’s is a genuine interest in ‘civilizing’ the Natives. Though the genuineness of her cause is questionable, she is more sincere than Neal and Matron in her attitude and dealings with the Aborigines. Her naivété could be
overlooked because service is part and parcel of her vocation as a missionary and not a personal virtue.

Neal informs Sister Eileen that ‘There’s a sort of unofficial directive’ (95) by the Department of Aborigines not to encourage the Aborigines to read. The very fact that the order is ‘sort of unofficial directive’ by itself explains the intentions of the government and the special departments which have supposedly come into existence for the welfare of the Aborigines. Sister Eileen is taken aback. She confesses that she was in fact planning to seek his permission to start a library and seek donations without burdening the Department financially. Predictably Neal is displeased with the idea. Noting her disappointment, he covers up by claiming that he strongly believes in the maxim ‘a little knowledge is a dangerous thing’ (96) from his experience with the Natives there and South Africa and that the idea of starting a library is ‘quite out of the question.’ (96)

When Sister Eileen exclaims that she can’t believe her ears he tries justifying by stating that he has

NEAL: …got a big mob here, over seven

hundred -- you know that – and there’s enough

troublemakers without giving them ideas. (96)

He conceitedly adds that he does not think there is anything else that needs to be discussed in this regard clearly signaling to Sister Eileen that his word is final. She is strong, inspite of his arrogance and adamancy, to tell him that there is another thing that she would like to discuss. She feels that it is better for people to attend her religious instruction classes according to their own will rather than
out of fear of Neal’s ‘Native policemen to enforce attendance.’ (96) Neal, arrogantly brushes aside the suggestion with the retort, ‘If I didn’t make attendance compulsory, you’d have none of them there.’ (96) He adds contemptuously, ‘Look, Sister, if you’re not happy here. I could arrange a transfer for you to another settlement’ (96) Sister Eileen persists, wondering sarcastically what Neal would classify the Bible as. She obviously means that the Bible is the holiest book of knowledge and its holiness consists in its knowledge. Here is a bureaucrat who looks upon books and libraries as sources of trouble and revolt. Sister Eileen, with her rigorous religious training and Christian sense of justice and charity, cannot understand this kind of crudeness in an administrator. The exchange captures the nuances of the Australian society of the time, its many currents and undercurrents unleashed by the different stakeholders. Shoemaker stated in *Black Words Whites Page* that:

> The missionary lobby in the same state was repeatedly ignored and criticized by such influential policy-makers as A. O. Neville, the Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1914 to 1940 and Commissioner of Native Affairs for the last four of those years. (26)

The irony in celebrating Australia Day on the day when the first fleet of British settlers landed on the Australian soil is very obvious. As everyone gathers for the Australia Day celebrations the differences among those present there becomes clear. Sister Eileen’s interest is truly that of a missionary dedicated to ‘the king of kings,’ ‘Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. After acknowledging that they are all
privileged to be living in such a ‘wonderful young country’ she emphasizes the fact that all of them have to be grateful to God who is solely responsible for whatever they have in life. A striking instance of Whites’s writing of history ONLY from the time that they have first stepped on the shores of Australia. Jack Davis is at his best as he makes Sister Eileen say:

SISTER EILEEN: … Even we here today, Mr Neal, Matron Neal and myself, are but His humble servants, sent by Him to serve you needs.”(97)

But this is immediately juxtaposed with the speech of Neville, standing as a representative of the attitude of Whites in authority. The following extract from his speech stands as a touchstone to the way a settler’s mind works:

NEVILLE: … It doesn’t hurt to remind yourselves that you are preparing yourselves here to take your place in Australian society, to live as other Australians live, and to live alongside other Australians; to learn to enjoy the privileges and to shoulder the responsibilities of living like the Whites man, to be treated equally, not worse, not better, under the law. (97)

It is paradoxical not only in the sense that the Whites consider that Australia is a ‘wonderful young country’(97) recently born but in the very fact that Neville thinks that the Aborigines need to be prepared to live in their own country but on the terms and conditions set by the settler, ‘to be treated equally, not worse, not better, under the law’(97); a law that preaches equality only in precept but not in
its implementation. He tells them that they are very fortunate, in the sense that in a period when there are many who do not have ‘many of the essential elements which make for a contented existence’ due to the economic depression after the world war, the Aborigines’ needs are not only taken care of at the settlement but they also have the opportunity to be with their family and friends. As the Whites proceed to sing the hymn ‘There is a Happy Land’ Davis describes, ‘As the Whites continue, the Aborigines break into full clear voice with a parody of the words.’(98)

There is a happy land,

Far, far away.

No sugar in our tea,

Bread and butter we never see.

That’s why we’re gradually

Fading away. (98)

Nevillle, annoyed at the parody of the religious hymn, announces that he would be cancelling many privileges that they have been enjoying till now and would cancel Christmas too. He brands Jimmy a ‘troublemaker, and a ringleader.’(99) Jimmy dares him to come and share food with them that night. In answer to Neal’s rudeness Jimmy gets back with a reminder of the true reason for their relocation as Jimmy Mitchell wanted ‘a Whites little town, a nice, Whites little fuckin’ town.’(99) Jimmy suddenly collapses, becomes breathless and holds his chest. Neal makes nothing of it. But Matron ‘breaks ranks and rushes to JIMMY’s aid.’(99) rushing him to hospital with the help of Billy and Bluey.
The Whites women characters are juxtaposed by Aboriginal women characters to show how the fourth world women are doubly vulnerable and oppressed. All the Aboriginal women are very strong in their character. Gran and Milly are not only bold in showing their dissatisfaction at the removal of items like soap in the ration but also are courageous enough to defend their men when the Sergeant talks ill of them. They also handle domestic trouble caused by their men with tact and shrewdness. an tries pulling them apart by seizing them by their hair only to fall on her backside. She is helped up and is successfully in stopping them from fighting by poking both men in their ribs. She orders Sam to get off Jimmy as he knows that he is very weak. Sam retorts that, ‘He ain’t sick in the chest, he’s sick in the bloody head.’ (30) Inspite of all this unpleasantness Jimmy is still up for another drink. Milly too quick for him as he crawls for his bottle. She is wise enough to know the reason behind such unpleasantness between the grown up men in the house. Pouring the alcohol down into the ground she exclaims, “This is real fightin’ stuff, eh? Real fightin’ stuff.” (30) The incident is typical of any Aboriginal household with alcoholic unemployed men often getting into petty fights disturbing the peaceful atmosphere in the family and the women of the house being wise, brave and strong handling the issues with wisdom and tact. This is where the insight and vitality of women among the Aborigines is beautifully brought out by Jack Davis. Though in the present time Aboriginal women are at a double disadvantaged position they exhibit double wisdom and inner strength. aspect by juxtaposing the Whites and the Aboriginal female characters in the play. Cissie is presented faithfully
fulfilling her duties as the daughter of the family by cooking while her brothers are relaxing and enjoying, obeying David when asked to bowl instead of batting and pushing his bike instead of riding it. On the other hand Gran and Milly are epitomes of womanhood and magnanimity of character. They are adept and competent and their boldness in word and deed is excellently presented in the play.

A comic relief is given in the interaction between Constable Kerr and Gran while the Sergeant is on the phone with Neville. But the interaction, typical of Davis also holds the truths of Aboriginal existence. It brings out Constable Kerr’s overbearing attitude as well as Gran’s wisdom and strength of character.

When the Constable asks Gran to come back later to meet the Sergeant as he is on the phone, Gran is persistent and says, ‘You ain’t the boss.’(42) and when Constable Kerr reacts to this she says, ‘I don’t want any lip from you.’(42)

Besides the meager unemployment allowance and wages that the Aborigines receive and many items disappearing from their rations, Aborigines have difficulty getting things of dire necessity as well. Milly and Gran request the Sergeant to give them a blanket for Cissie as Cissie is sick in hospital.

SERGEANT: Sorry, blankets not here yet, Milly.

GRAN: Her name Mrs Millimurra. Proper church married,

New Norcia, Whites dress an’ all.

Milly: Got paper to prove it, and birth ’certificate.

GRAN: [at the approaching CONSTABLE KERR ] Not like some people, I bet.”(43)
Gran and Milly are at pains to uphold their dignity and self respect by fearlessly stating positions is well displayed above. The Sergeant becomes very sarcastic and suggests:

SERGEANT: Look, there’s nothin’ I can do about it except
Put in a reminder to the Department in Perth. Why don’t
Youse go around o St John’s and ask the vicar?

MILLY: For Blankets? He’ll give us nothin’, he’s like that.

GRAN: [adopting a praying attitude] Yeah, when he come to
Gubment Well he goes like that with his eyes closed and
He says the Lord will help you, and now he prays with his
Eyes open, ’cause time ’fore last Wow Wow bit him on the
leg… musta wanted a bit a’ holy meat. (42)

When the Sergeant tells them that he cannot promise but would check with the Department for the blankets, Gran remarks sharply, ‘An’ you’re supposed to be Native ’tector.’(44)

There are several instances that show Gran’s indigenous knowledge of the Aborigines in the overall well being of their families. When Cissie is disappointed to know that they are no longer getting soap in the ration, Gran cheers her up telling that they can use *tjeerung* bush as she knows where some grows. The indigenous knowledge of Gran about the Australian landscape is a testimony for the innate knowledge of the Aboriginal culture.

The women are shown as good caretakers of their families. Milly inpite of their poor economic conditions manages to take good care of her children. Gran
can make dough without bicarbonate replace soap with local weeds for Cissie to wash her hair or help mothers deliver their babies. Gran, like other older Aboriginal characters of Jack Davis in his other works is a treasure of Aboriginal indigenous knowledge and wisdom. She uses this expertise once again when Mary is badly beaten up after returning to the settlement after their escape. Gran rushes and gets a few medicinal leaves for Mary to recover. Sam and Milly share that it is better to take Mary to the hospital for delivery. Mary informs them that she would like to die than going to the hospital. Gran relieves and soothes her by saying that she has brought Joe into this world and she would as well bring his baby into this world.

The description says, ‘GRAN seems to have aged suddenly. She sits and stares into the smouldering fire, quietly grumbling and singing.’ (104) The description might suggest passage of time. The description might also suggest the plight and courage of Gran’s generation. They are the epitomes Aboriginal knowledge, wisdom and experience from past into the present. Gran has exhibited ingenuity, resourcefulness and thoughtfulness from time to time to help and protect her family through difficult times though the resources are very meager. This is quite evident on several occasions.

The scene in which Mary delivers a baby stands as an epitome of Aboriginal female power. Mary brings her baby into this world assisted only by Gran and Milly who are confident and calm in dealing with the situation. Gran’s experience and skill as a traditional birth attendant are displayed in the way she assists and comforts Mary during her delivery. One is amazed by the way Gran
instructs Mary and Milly and also the way she uses indigenous methods and materials during the process of delivery. She uses a burning stick of fire to separate the umbilical cord and applies fresh ashes to the baby:

GRAN: Firestick! Firestick, live one, quick!

[MILLY races to the fire and takes a burning stick back into the tent.]

I got you a little Nyoongah. Now I cut your cord and tie it, make it real pretty belly button for you, just like your daddy’s. Now cover you in ashes. More better than Johnson’s Baby Powder, eh? (102)

Sam informs them that Matron has come to see the baby. One notices that as Mary goes into labour she panics about the trackers taking her baby away to killing it. She pleads:

MARY: No! Don’t let Matron see Baby. Granny, go and hide him. Please, please, don’t let Matron take him away.”(103)

Already weak from the delivery and because of her first hand experiences of working for the Whites, of Joe being put in the prison and she being tortured badly when she was brought back to the settlement after she and Joe are caught, she is in no frame of mind to hear Gran’s and Matron’s consoling and reassuring words. She once again pleads not to take the baby to the hospital as Neal would then get the trackers to take him away, kill and bury him in the pine plantation. One knows Matron is lying when she claims that Mary is hallucinating. The reason lies in Mary’s story.
Mary is a very strong young Aboriginal woman who has lost all her family/community during the assimilation period. She is now working as one of the housemaids at Neal’s. Joe and Mary meet in the pine plantations one night. She brings some damper for him. As they sit down and eat he enquires how long it has been since she was at the settlement. She says that this is her third Christmas there and wishes she is home as she hates the place. Joe then enquires if the Whites treat her fine. She says that Matron and Sister Eileen are okay, but she is very scared of Mr. Neal. She does not like the way he stares at her and he is always hanging around where the girls are working and ‘always carryin’ that cat-o’-nine tails and he’ll use it, too.’(62) She then informs him that he had threatened to belt her once for rejecting to work on the farm for the Whites. Joe thinks that it is better working on the farm than at this place. But to Joe’s utter shock she says:

MARY: No! [With shame] Some of them guddeahs real bad. My friend went last Christmas and then she came back boodjarri. She reckons the boss’s sons used to belt her up and, you know, force her. Then they kicked her out. And when she had that baby them trackers choked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation. (62)

Thus Joe and his family are exposed to a different kind of reality from that of theirs at the settlement.

Another night, ensuring that there is no one around, Mary approaches Joe. As they sit down to talk Mary starts weeping. She informs Joe that Neal has
started giving her a hard time as he wants her for himself by making her work in the hospital and by threatening that he would send her home to marry an old man if she resists. She is also very sure that Neal would send her home on the pretext that she is a ‘give girl’, that is a girl whose is supposed to be given in marriage to someone or at least whose alliance has been fixed. He would never permit her to marry Joe. Joe is outraged and tells her that they should abscond the very night. She warns Joe that he would get into trouble if he runs away with her. He retards, “I’ll get in bigger trouble if I have to chip that walrus faced bastard. I’ll kill him.”(69) This statement once again validates the fact that Joe takes after his uncle Jimmy. He tells her that he would take her to his home in Northam. The Aborigine’s innocence about the hidden agenda of the Whites is clear when he tells Mary, “Come on. I’m gunna show you my country. Got a big river, swans, beautiful Whites swans” (70). Only when he gets there is he utterly stunned at the state of affairs at his ‘home.’

They share their plans with Sam and Mary. Joe would take Mary to Northam and ‘show Mary the swans.’(71)The naivety of the family especially Joe in thinking that their old homestead which they have left just a few months ago would still be the same exhibits their hope inspite of all the odds. Milly is apprehensive and scared of the idea of running away. She is sure that they would be caught at some point and Joe would be put in prison. Jimmy is fighter. He assures Joe that there is nothing to worry about the goal as it just is ‘a wetjala thing.’(71) Milly suggests that it is better not to wake Cissie and David as the
less they know it is the better. Joe and Mary bid good bye to them with Jimmy’s final words of guidance and caution.

JIMMY: [calling after them] You can jump the rattler ’bout half a mile outside a’ Mogumber. Keep to the gravel country.

Trackers woun’lt find your tracks. (71)

Joe and Mary return to Northam only to be terribly disappointed by the pathetic sight they confront. Only ‘A few burnt out relics of the camp remain.’(79) He shares with Mary nostalgic memories of their home and happy times together. He recalls the promise of the Sergeant that everything would be taken care in their absence. Mary tells him that it is all over now but Joe is not ready to accept it and vows that it will never be over. He does not realize that the carnage is part of a deliberated Whites strategy. Mudrooroo explains in Us Mob:

A problem with this population shift was that it also separated important Indigenous community members from their relatives, thus affecting the sense of community and individual well being. This policy was deliberate and in the Indigenous settlement of Lake Tyers in Victoria, for example, houses were intentionally destroyed to prevent Kooris from moving back into them. (5)

Joe and Mary are got arrested by Neville. Mary is sent back to the settlement and Joe is imprisoned. Cissie and David bring in a letter for Mary from Joe. Well aware that Neal would read or tear the letter without giving it to Mary, Joe sends it through Willy Knapp who has just been released from prison. The letter is in a tolerant and optimistic tone reads:
We are getting married when I get out. If the Aborigines Department give us permission. I am going to ask Mister Neville myself. I’d sooner we got married at New Norcia like Mum and Dad. Though I ain’t really a Catholic. You know, I don’t know what you are, I forgot to ask you. It not too bad here, plenty of Nyoongahs and some from up North. Tucker’s not too bad, better than the Settlement. At least they don’t give us bread and fat, and we get real becca, not nigger twist. Tell Willy to behave himself now he’s out and not to go hitting any more policemen. Well, darling, I’ll close. (94)

Joe is released from the prison and comes home with colourful gifts for the entire family. He is excited seeing his family who are pleasantly surprised as they do not expect him back home for another two weeks. There is an implied contrast between the colourlessness of the life of Aborigines at the settlements and the colourful gifts that Joe brings for the family suggesting the innate strength of Aboriginal culture in striving to make their lives colourful no matter how negative the circumstances and environment around are. Joe wants to name his baby Jimmy, perhaps out of love for his uncle Jimmy. Sam wonders where Joe got the money to buy the gifts. Joe declares,

    JOE: Wages. Earned a few bob and they give it to me when I got out. Not like this place. (106)
This is a clear reflection of the condition of life at the settlement. It is so wretched that prison becomes a better place to live, with better food and wages. It is also a reminder of the Whites’ false promises to better the Aborigines’ living conditions. Joe is enraged when he hears of Mary’s trauma at the hands of Neal when she is brought back to the settlement after they were caught. He rushes to ‘kick his teeth down his fuckin’ throat’ (106) for the way he has treated Mary. Mary stops him saying that he has to control his short temper for her and their son. She suggests that, instead, he should seek permission for them to leave the Settlement. She adds that it is best for Joe to go to meet Neal on Monday when Matron is around as he is scared of her. But if this had really been true many atrocities would not have happened at the settlement.

The penultimate scene of the play mirrors how the dynamics of relationships between Natives and the settler and between the Aborigines themselves change based upon changing circumstances they are in. It highlights, once again, the innate wisdom of Aboriginal women. Joe is presented more sober and merrier at the prospect of being able to go away from the settlement with Mary and the baby and Billy is presented as more friendly towards Joe.

Mary’s wisdom is apparent as Joe follows her instructions and manages to get permission from Neal for Joe, Mary and the baby to leave the settlement. Expectedly, Neal is very impatient with Joe. He hands over a piece of paper for Joe to read but grabs it back instantly as Joe starts reading it slowly. Claiming that he wants Joe to understand it he starts to read it aloud for Joe.

NEAL: ‘I Joseph Millimurra, undertake not to domicile in
the town of Northam, not anywhere in the Northam Shire.
I fully understand that if I return to Northam I am liable
be returned under warrant to the Moore River or other
Government Native Settlement. (107)

The following conversation between Neal, Joe and Billy is worth noting full
length as it gives a clear picture of Neal’s intentions, the innocence of Joe and
Billy and the way the White governments work.

NEAL: [to Joe] Witness.

JOE: Gawd, some witness.

BILLY: Yeah, boss?

NEAL: I wasn’t you to watch him sign this.

[NEAL picks up the paper and shows it to BILLY]

You can understand this?

BILLY: No, boss.

NEAL: Good. [To Joe] Go on, sign it.


NEAL: Good, now get out. The sooner you leave, the better.

JOE: [leaving] I’ll see you one day, in hell. And you won’t have

Your cat-o’-nine-tails.

[He laughs and walks out with Billy] (108)

It is an unspoken fact that the dubious intentions of Neal in getting Billy who
cannot understand the documents to witness and Joe signing it are clear. He is
also sure that Joe would inevitably return to what is close to his heart and what
he considers to be his original dwelling as he has many memories attached to it, that is Northam.

Billy appears a better person than earlier. Thus, he realizes like Joe, that Neal’s behavior weird. The usually obedient and faithful Billy, in a lighter vein, remarks that the Whites people are silly fellows. He gifts his whip to Joe as it might be useful for them in their journey. He asks Joe to remember that Mary might be married but still a girl of his tribe and requests him to take good care of her. Mudrooroo in his work *Us Mob* explains the Aboriginal concept of kinship thus:

> Our classificatory kinship system is so called because it applies the same term to a whole group or class of people rather than a few individuals supposedly related by ‘blood’ as in the European descriptive system. It came from our remote ancestors and they constructed it so that every person could find his place in the universe. There were no strangers – only people we regarded brothers, sister, aunts, uncles, fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers. (5)

The final scene of the play reflects the ongoing struggle of the Aborigines in their quest for identity. As Joe collects a few things that he has stolen, Mary hands out some food and utilities that they can use. The whole family gathers around Joe, Mary and the baby to bid goodbye till they see them next as they start on an indefinite pursuit. When Joe informs them that he plans to go to Northam, Gran once again demonstrating her experience and insight warns Joe
to be very careful as there are a lot of policemen there on watch. He reassures her by saying that he would move from there if it gets unpleasant. Joe and Mary, along with their baby, start their journey towards the unknown with optimism and hope for a better future. Gran starts singing very aptly about not only the journey that Mary and Joe are embarking on but a journey that the entire Aboriginal race is a part of in the greater Australian society. A quest that is uncertain but inevitable, to be taken inspite of all the odds for a better tomorrow.

Woe, woe, woe.

My boy and girl and baby
Going a long way walking,
That way walking,
That way walking,
Pity, pity, pity,
Hungry, hungry,
Walking, walking, walking,
Yay, yay, Yay,
Cooo-ooo-ooo-oooh.(110)

The Aboriginal life is haunted by constant suppression, persecution, poverty, disease, violence and death under the highly discriminatory regime of the White settlers. The trauma is many-sided: physical, psychological, economic, social and existential. Each character shares the same atmosphere of anguish and despair but Jack Davis takes care not to make them uniform in response. The uniqueness of each character is retained by subtle strokes of characterization and
dialogue but their common, shared agony is revealed all through. Each character
finds its own unique way of resolving the inner psychological crisis constantly
surging up at the moments of painful confrontation with diverse adverse
circumstances. The Whites are also individualized by several shades of
contemptuousness and cruelty, tender streaks of considerateness and occasional
gestures of kindness and justice. Jack Davis, while highlighting the trauma in
racial consciousness, is wary enough to avoid hastily arrived conclusions and
solutions which history itself did not reveal. The drama leaves upon the mind of
the spectator and the reader a profound imprint of the contours of suffering
experienced by the Australian Aborigines generation after generation since the
moment the Whites English sailors and soldiers set their foot on the tranquil
shores of Australia.