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Bennelong's Rise and Fall

Bennelong's was by no means the only Eora face that the first Sydney colonists recognised, yet he is singled out in public memory as an intermediary between the present and the past.¹ Australians, and Sydneysiders most especially, have returned over and over again to the history of the colony at Sydney Cove. In history books, children's books, songs, poems, plays and blogs, Bennelong is often awarded at least a cameo appearance, and is often responsible for conveying something of the larger story of what happened to Aboriginal people after British invasion and settlement. Historian Lyndall Ryan has described the famous Tasmanian intermediary Trucanini as 'a resilient figure in debates about the future of Australian Aboriginals today' and a 'site of struggle for ownership and possession of the colonial past'.² Like Trucanini, Bennelong's life offers considerable dramatic potential to the storyteller: his kidnap by Phillip, escape, convincing display of gentlemanly manners, deep involvement in Aboriginal and European politics, journey to England and back, and death in relative obscurity. Like Trucanini, Bennelong was a go-between,

1 For example, journalist Tony Stephens followed Peter Read in thinking of Bennelong as the first of the 'stolen generations'; however, Read did not name Bennelong. Read was thinking of Arabanoo, Colbee and Bennelong, Phillip's three captives, the other two of whom Stephens did not know about (confirming Brook's suspicions), or did not see as significant enough in the public view to mention. Tony Stephens, 'Bennelong, the First of the Stolen, Comes Back: Sorry Day', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 May 1998 [late edition], 6, referring to Read, *A Rape of the Soul*, 17. See also Brook, 'The Forlorn Hope', 36–47.

2 Ryan, 'The Struggle for Trucanini', 154.

trader, diplomat, and builder and crosser of bridges—his life is rich in possible interpretations, and these interpretations are interwoven with ideas about Aboriginal presents, futures and pasts.

Stories about Bennelong proliferate in what folklorist Linda Dégh has called a ‘fast-breaking process’; indeed, since the 1960s, there has been so much storytelling about Bennelong that it is impossible to trace lines of tradition through a clear genealogy of versions.³ Yet, while stories of Bennelong are myriad, they are not ‘promiscuous’, to borrow a term from Keith Jenkins. That is, they do not make use of just any available narrative form to suit the requirements of the immediate present.⁴ Instead, most popular and public storytellers adhere to a strong tradition, which itself carries many layers of meaning; Bennelong is cast in a tragedy of sorts, in which he rises to the dizzying heights of fame and friendship with the governor, before falling into despair and disrepute on return from his great journey to England. This short entry on Bennelong in a 1980 *Dictionary of Australian History* encapsulates this view:

Bennelong (?–1813). Aboriginal who accompanied Governor Arthur Phillip to England in 1792. Governor John Hunter brought him back to Sydney in 1795. For a time he continued his association with the Europeans but eventually abandoned his clothes and began to drink heavily, becoming an outcast to both Europeans and Aborigines.⁵

Like the story of James Morrill’s story, the story of Bennelong’s story is a tale of repetition; though they wish to communicate a range of historical, political and ethical meanings, storytellers have often followed a well-worn path.

I have become fascinated with how storytellers navigate the later years of Bennelong’s life. Often, I have wanted to defend him: What was the real evidence for his alcoholism? Who can prove he was no longer loved and respected by his community? I have to admit, I have feelings for Bennelong, feelings no more or less well founded than those of any of his storytellers. Walking on the same ground as Bennelong, through the storied landscape of Cadigal Eora country and Sydney, one encounters Bennelong often, at the Sydney Opera House, in the Botanic Gardens, where the first Government House was built, at Manly and on the

3 Dégh, *Narratives in Society*, 361–62; Hamilton, ‘Memory Studies’, 83.

4 Jenkins, quoted in Curthoys and Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, 6.

5 Larkin, *Dictionary of Australian History*, 27–28.

Parramatta River. Sometimes, he seems almost familiar—an 'old friend'. Yet, his presence is also disconcerting, particularly for those, such as me, whose own understandings of the man and his times have shifted and multiplied over the years. American poet Yusef Komunyakaa frequented Sydney in the 1980s and 1990s, became familiar with the city, its history and daily race politics, and gained respect for the land rights movement and the poetry of Aboriginal activist-writers like Kath Walker, Jack Davis and Colin Johnson.⁶ His poem 'Bennelong's Blues' animates an impromptu meeting with Bennelong in the present, looking back. The speaker's address is familiar yet uneasy, admiring but clear-eyed. He feels nostalgic for a happier time, when Bennelong's story seemed simpler too, and acknowledges that Bennelong was always more formidable, and more entangled, than he had realised:

You're here again, old friend.
 You strut around like a ragtag redcoat
 bellhop, glance up for a shooting star
 & its woe, & wander in & out the cove
 you rendezvoused with Governor Phillip
 after Wil-le-me-ring speared him beside a beached
 whale. We've known each other for years.
 You're unchanged. But me, old scapegoat,
 I never knew I was so damn happy
 when we first met. Each memory
 returns like heartbreak's boomerang.
 You didn't tell me you were a scout,
 a bone pointer, a spy,
 someone to stand between new faces
 & gods. I didn't know your other four
 ceremonial names, hero in clownish clothes,
 till another dead man whispered into my ear.⁷

Over the past few decades, there has been a movement to recognise the significance of Bennelong's other four ceremonial names, and to acknowledge that Aboriginal people were not necessarily as they appeared, or as they sounded, to the British colonists.⁸ Historians are attempting to step back from Bennelong and to confront him, as the speaker in Komunyakaa's poem does, as a stranger again, as a person in his own elusive story, as someone we might gain a new understanding of, now

6 Gotera, 'Lines of Tempered Steel'.

7 Komunyakaa, 'Bennelong's Blues', 35. Cited in full with permission of Yusef Komunyakaa.

8 See, for example, Troy, 'Language Contact', 33–50; Karskens, 'Red Coat, Blue Jacket', 1–36.

that more time has passed and Australian history has grown and changed. However, before this is possible, it is necessary to reflect on the powerful association that generations of storytellers have made between Bennelong's story and tragedy.

In her epic novel of 1941, *The Timeless Land*, Eleanor Dark sought to tell, for the first time, 'a story of the white settlement partly from the black man's point of view'. Her drafts featured a long prologue depicting Aboriginal life before the arrival of the First Fleet; the novel was immense and war was looming. Dark decided to focus the story more intensely on a 'clash of values' within white society. On publisher William Collins's suggestion, she funnelled her prologue into a much terser tableau focused throughout on Bennelong, one of her chief Aboriginal protagonists.⁹ So it is Bennelong who both begins and ends her story, transformed from a sweet child trailing after his fictional father, Wunbula, in the first paragraphs, to the broken adult of Dark's epilogue. In the novel's final scene, Bennelong revisits the rock platform where Wunbula had made a carving of Cook's ship, and where father and son had looked out to sea together. He is drunk and angry. When he stumbles across the carving, he throws himself down and starts to vandalise it until he collapses, overwhelmed by alcohol and a sense of loss:

The ground lurched, and the whole world spun. As he pitched forward across the rock a bit of broken bottle gashed his arm, and blood ran into the defaced grooves of Wunbula's drawing. Bennelong lay still, snoring heavily, while the merciful, swift twilight of his land crept up about him to cover his defeat. The End.¹⁰

Dark's Bennelong was drawn into the 'alien world' of the white men by a 'thread of destiny' that would 'hold him there even after death'. Taken captive by Phillip, Bennelong's initial anger subsided as he recalled his destiny and found himself wanting to be like those fascinating strangers—'proud to wear the clothes they gave him, [he] walked often in the sunshine so that he might admire his shadow, which was now the same as the shadow of a white man'.¹¹ Yet, Bennelong was destined to fail. Dark's Aboriginal characters were self-sufficient and creative within their own culture, but, imagined through a Social Darwinist lens, they were depicted as the 'monkey-like' 'children of the human family', hard-wired

9 Brooks with Clark, *Eleanor Dark*, 347–50; Wyndham, *A World Proof Life*, 180–81.

10 Dark, *The Timeless Land*, 539–44.

11 *Ibid.*, 49, 264–65.

to an unchanging existence. All Dark's Aboriginal characters faced an intractable cultural dilemma with the arrival of the colonists. They were a 'timeless' people; change brought the sustaining certainty of their law-governed tribal life to an end.¹² In the light of this preconception, Bennelong's rush towards cultural exchange was Icarus-like.

To fill out her picture of life at Port Jackson, Dark researched Aboriginal life ways across Australia, in the process lavishing a degree of care on her Aboriginal characters that was unusual and daring at the time.¹³ When published, Dark's novel was both celebrated and criticised as being almost closer to history than to fiction, providing an unprecedented view of cross-cultural relations in the colony. The trilogy, of which *The Timeless Land* is the first volume, has been in print in Australia for most of the 60 years since its publication (but without a critical introduction until 1990). In the 1950s, it was set as a school text; in 1980, it formed the basis for a television mini-series broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC).¹⁴

Dark later wrote Bennelong's entry for the 1966 edition of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Her biographical entry was dry and without pathos. She concluded simply that Bennelong had fallen between two stools in his later years, saying that after his return from England, 'references to him are scanty, though it is clear that he could no longer find contentment or full acceptance either among his countrymen or the white men'.¹⁵ Though different in genre and mood, Dark's biographies of Bennelong both rested on a pair of powerful and interrelated narrative elements that have come to characterise much of the storywork surrounding Bennelong over the past four decades; namely, that Bennelong was *culturally* changed (or even damaged) by his contact with the colony, and that this led him

12 Ibid., 151, 177. Dark wrote that Bennelong's wife, Barrangaroo, sensed a danger but could not apprehend it, as 'the passing centuries, going quietly over the heads of her ancestors, had evolved in their brains no machinery for the understanding of Change', p. 406. Reynolds, *Nowhere People*, 67–72; Brooks with Clark, *Eleanor Dark*, 364–65.

13 Humphrey McQueen reminded us that the novel appeared just after New South Wales had 'celebrated its Sesqui-Centenary with an official story that turned its back on the convicts and ignored the destruction of Aboriginal society'. McQueen, 'Introduction', in Dark, *The Timeless Land*, xix, xxii.

14 Brooks with Clark, *Eleanor Dark*, 357–59; Brooks, 'Introduction', in Dark, *The Timeless Land*, vii–viii; McQueen, 'Introduction', in Dark, *The Timeless Land*, xix, xxii. The novel took Australian history to an overseas audience, being a bestseller in the United States in 1941, topping the Times Literary Supplement Christmas Fiction List in the United Kingdom, and later being translated into German and Swedish.

15 Dark, 'Bennelong (1764–1813)'.

to a lonely and (in the view of many of his biographers) disgraceful end, which heralded an ominous beginning for Aboriginal–white relations in Australia.

Manning Clark claimed that Dark's novels inspired him to write his own monumental *History of Australia*.¹⁶ However, Clark was much less interested in Aboriginal protagonists. Although his history was driven by flawed male characters, and infused with a 'historical melancholy' that was partly absorbed from his perception of Aboriginal dispossession, he largely turned his back on the ethnographically informed insights into Aboriginal society and politics that Dark had woven into her story.¹⁷ Bennelong did not rate a mention in Clark's history until he and Yemmerawannie joined Phillip's voyage back to England in December 1792, three years after his kidnap, on Phillip's orders, in November 1789. Bennelong, Yemmerawannie and two convicts who also departed the colony with Phillip are gathered around the great man. Their chief purpose in the narrative is to demonstrate Phillip's magnetism, his 'power to attach people to his person'.¹⁸ Clark's Bennelong was returned to New South Wales in 1795 for the purpose of displaying 'to other aborigines the benefits of civilisation'. Yet, only two pages after his return, Bennelong instead demonstrates the awful and ironic reality that Hunter faced in his task of preparing Aboriginal people for civilisation: that 'the closer his contact with civilisation, the more the aborigine was degraded'. This was the only form of mediation that Clark gave Bennelong credit for—his early intimation of the doom awaiting the Aboriginal people, demonstrated through the course of his own life. Bennelong took to drinking too much and behaving badly; he 'disgusted his civilisers and became an exile from his own people, and rushed headlong to his dissolution as a man without the eye of pity from the former, or affection from the latter'. The next time we meet Bennelong in Clark's history, he is already in his grave.¹⁹

The double 'exile' that Clark and Dark imagined for Bennelong on his return from England was quite different from the way in which earlier storytellers had seen Bennelong's later years. Leon Ducharme, a French–Canadian political prisoner who was interned in the colony in the early 1840s, spent part of his term labouring at a penal settlement known as

16 Brooks with Clark, *Eleanor Dark*, 427.

17 McKenna, 'Clark, Charles Manning (1915–1991)'.

18 Clark, *History of Australia*, 131.

19 *Ibid.*, 143, 145, 346.

Longbottom, overlooking Bennelong's country on the Parramatta River. In his brief and disdainful account, Ducharme wrote that Bennelong—once returned from England:

Was no sooner ashore on his native land than he stripped himself of all his good clothes, cast them aside, and, rushing into the depths of the bush, went off to re-join his beloved tribe . . . he was seen again wandering about just as wild as his brothers, and following all native inclinations.²⁰

Ducharme's protagonist makes a more radical break with the colony than would have been possible for Bennelong in life, but he does so amid his 'beloved tribe'. Similarly, a Bennelong of the 1940s remains in his fine London clothes until a joyful reunion with his old friend Colbee results in the 'awakening' of his old savage self. His wife in the story is greatly relieved to see him return to his pre-kidnap priorities.²¹ In these and many other stories into the 1960s, Bennelong continues to be embraced either by the colonists or by his own people. Even when he appears as a 'quarrelsome' drunk beset by troubles, he is still a social being, unlike the terminally isolated figure Clark depicted, who would increasingly stand in for Bennelong over the next few decades.²² Keith Smith, seeking to 'rehabilitate the received image of Bennelong that has for so long been copied from one history to another with no questioning of the secondary sources or interrogation of the primary historical evidence', found it important to counter this de-socialisation of Bennelong by everyone from Clark to the historically inclined former Labor Party politician, Bob Carr.²³

W. E. H. Stanner, giving the prestigious Boyer Lectures in 1968, thought he could perceive a slow revolution underway, in which the 'Aboriginal question' was rising to the surface in Australian social and political discussions. This was a revolution that he himself had been trying to bring into being as a journalist, anthropologist and administrator since the beginning of his academic career in the 1930s. He felt that a new kind of history, one entirely different from what had gone before, was necessary—one that acknowledged the Aboriginal side to the story.²⁴

20 Longbottom was a small peninsula in the vicinity of today's Exile Bay, Canada Bay and France Bay, named after the French–Canadian prisoners. Ducharme, *Journal of a Political Exile*, 34–35, 46.

21 McCarter, 'They Began It'.

22 For example, Sadleir, *Aborigines of Australia*, 25; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 January 1898, 4; Levy, *Wallumetta*, 10–13; Chadwick, 'Governor Phillip and the Natives', 267–72; Stephensen, *The History and Description*, 321.

23 Smith, 'Bennelong among His People', 8, 21–24.

24 Stanner, 'After the Dreaming', 7, 25–26; D. J. Mulvaney, 'Stanner, William Edward (Bill) (1905–1981)'.

This new history may have been an opportunity for an open-minded assessment of Bennelong's story; yet, Stanner's own view of Bennelong was jaundiced. When he asked his listeners to imagine Aboriginal men and women of 'outstanding ... character and personality', he made the following qualification: 'I am not thinking of mercurial upstarts like Bennelong'.²⁵ A decade later, in an article written for the first issue of the journal *Aboriginal History*, he described Bennelong as a 'volatile egotist, mainly interested in love and war; a tease, a flirt and very soon a wine-bibber; a trickster and eventually a bit of a turncoat'.²⁶

Stanner also credited the readily pleased and soon 'mendicant' Bennelong with being at the head of a chain reaction that 'forced one tribe after another into some sort of dependency on Europeans'.²⁷ In light of contemporary economic realities, this assessment was unfair. Aboriginal people of south-eastern Australia, in particular, continued to feel the effects of a sharp downturn in employment prospects as agricultural practices were mechanised and centralised, and postwar European migrants competed for seasonal employment. The 'dependency' of the many people who lost their paid work due to these developments was new, and had nothing to do with their character.²⁸ It was also something of an about-turn in thinking about Bennelong. Nineteenth-century thinkers had found Bennelong's biography predictive of the lives of Aboriginal people of following generations. The conclusion they usually reached was that Bennelong had been educated in British ways, but had rejected them in favour of his own self-sufficient culture and community. A *Sydney Gazette* article of 1834 echoed David Dickinson Mann (who departed the colony in 1809) when it recalled Bennelong's case to temper public expectations about the 'education' of a group of Aboriginal prisoners on Goat Island. Bennelong, of course, while having great capacity for learning, had 'preferred the freedom of his own wild woods'.²⁹

25 Stanner, 'After the Dreaming', 45.

26 Stanner, 'The History of Indifference', 19–20.

27 Ibid; Stanner, 'After the Dreaming', 7–11.

28 Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 312–14.

29 *The Sydney Gazette*, 11 July 1835, 3; David Dickinson Mann, *The Present Picture of New South Wales* (London: John Booth, 1811), quoted in Smith, 'Bennelong among His People', 19–20. See also Bond, *A Brief Account*, 6–7. Sometimes, Bennelong's case was cited and then dismissed as a failed 'early experiment', with other examples, such as the Aboriginal Institution at Parramatta, providing precedents for success in civilising the Aboriginal people. See George Howe, 'Chronology of Local Occurrences', *New South Wales Pocket Almanac* (1818), quoted in Smith, 'Bennelong Among His People', 19; *Illustrated Sydney News*, 21 January 1871, 3.

Stanner's Boyer Lectures and 1977 article remain touchstones for historians today as we trace the history of the transformation of Australian histories to include and recognise Aboriginal histories.³⁰ The association that Stanner made between Bennelong (and his fall) and the wider 'Aboriginal question' was lasting. Following the 1967 Referendum, and as the much televised Aboriginal Tent Embassy was repeatedly established and removed from the lawns of Parliament House, bringing Aboriginal people and their fight for civil rights and land rights to public attention, biographers of Bennelong increasingly invested his story with explanatory power. Stanner's assessment of Bennelong and his legacy both shaped and was shaped by contemporary anthropological thinking, as discussed below. However, even as later generations of anthropologists and others have re-thought urban Aboriginality, Stanner's portrait of Bennelong as a weak and compromised character has echoed through subsequent biographies.

In the mid-1950s, Bennelong Point was conclusively selected as the site for the Sydney Opera House. This landform was known as Jubgalee by the Eora people, and was the site of a compact brick house built for Bennelong on the order of Governor Phillip. After Bennelong's death, the point was home to Fort Macquarie, completed circa 1819, then a tram depot from 1903, which was demolished for the laying of the foundations of the Sydney Opera House in 1959.³¹ When the Opera House was opened in 1973, Bennelong was accorded a level of interest perhaps unequalled since the 1790s. He appeared in the opening ceremony in the shape of Aboriginal actor Ben Blakeney, who delivered a 'stirring oration' from the topmost peak of the tallest shell, heralded by a Royal Australian Navy fanfare:

Here my people chanted their stories of the dreamtime—of spirit heroes, and of earth's creation—and our painted bodies flowed in ceremony. On this point my people laughed and they sang while the sticks clacked in the rhythm of the corroborees. I am Bennelong—and my spirit and the spirit of my people lives; and their dance and their music and their drama and their laughter also remain.³²

30 See, for example, Attwood, 'The Past as Future'.

31 Kenny, *Bennelong*, 67–73.

32 Ziegler, *Sydney Has an Opera House*, n.p.



Figure 3: Depiction of Bennelong with the Sydney Opera House, *National Aboriginal Day Magazine*, 1981, artist unidentified.

Source: Reproduced with permission from the Department of Training and Workforce Development, Western Australia.

This Bennelong, of heroic proportions, probably did a great deal to bring Bennelong forward in popular imagination, as an accessible and even friendly figure—a mediator between the present and the past. He seems rehabilitated from the crisis that tore him apart at the end of *The Timeless Land*. He haunts the Opera House, certainly. However, where Trucanini has often been imagined haunting modern Australia in a spectral,

reproachful way, violated and inconsolable, as she does in David Boyd's series of paintings and sculptures first exhibited in 1959,³³ Bennelong seemed to give his blessing.

However, the Opera House did not reciprocate Bennelong's sponsorship. Blakeney's script trod a delicate line between the acknowledgement (or, perhaps, the assertion, as Blakeney spoke) of an Aboriginal presence, and the appropriation of a past Aboriginal culture for this new, distinctively Australian, cultural and architectural landmark. Indeed, an embrace of Aboriginal iconography on the national and international arts scene, as well as in tourist literature and elsewhere, was widespread in the postwar decades. Yet, it did not generally reflect opportunities for Aboriginal people to be heard, even as performers of their own cultural inheritance.³⁴ The Opera House's first season gave little space to Aboriginal performance. The Marionette Theatre of Australia derived its children's show, 'Tales from Noonameena', from 'Aboriginal legends'; however, the only Aboriginal performance was apparently subsumed into the all-singing, all-dancing spectacle of the 'South Pacific Festival' produced by Victor Carell and Beth Dean.³⁵

The notion that the Opera House, by virtue of its location, might constitute a memorial to Bennelong has often been invoked. The first issue of *The Bennelong Bugle*, a newsletter circulated among construction workers at the Opera House, declaimed rather circuitously that 'such a remarkable character ... deserves a place in the annals of his native land, and it is not unfitting that one of the famous buildings of the world should occupy a site which bears his name'.³⁶ P. R. Stephensen, also writing as the Opera House was in the early stages of construction, suggested that 'if the Opera House is not to be considered as Bennelong's monument' (he did not elaborate on why it would or should not be), then perhaps some sort of

33 Ryan, 'The Struggle for Trukanini', 161–65. See also Boyd's sculpture 'Trukanini—the offering', and paintings 'Dream of childhood', 'Trukanini and the sealer', and 'Trukanini last of the Tasmanians', in *David Boyd: Retrospective 1957–1982*.

34 Kociumbas, 'Performances: Indigenisation', 134–35.

35 Hubble, *Sydney Opera House Official Souvenir*, n.p.; Kociumbas, 'Performances: Indigenisation', 134.

36 *The Bennelong Bugle* 1 (1962) (Sydney: J. Parks, Sydney Opera House Site): 17. John Kenny declaimed in 1973 that 'who, indeed, was Bennelong for in the justice of history no one can be worthier of sharing the historic and contemporary lustre of the Opera House and Sydney Cove'. Kenny, *Bennelong*, 5. The 1981 National Aboriginal Day magazine declared that the location of Bennelong's exact place of burial is of no consequence as 'Bennelong [sic] has no need of a second memorial. The name, Bennelong Point [sic], will remain as long as Sydney survives'. 'The Governor's Friend', *National Aboriginal Day Magazine*, 1981, 31.

memorial could be erected nearby. That this magnificent building should directly pay tribute to Bennelong was, apparently, not something that Stephenson could take seriously. Instead, its demonstration of Australia's immense wealth and global standing as a modern nation prompted him to think of a modest tribute to this most famous of the colony's Aboriginal people.³⁷

The Opera House did not need Bennelong's patronage. In the *Sydney Opera House Official Souvenir* booklet, Bennelong and his contemporaries are dwarfed by the towering modernity of the building's physical properties and the ingenuity of its construction. Bennelong makes only a fleeting appearance in a role with a laughably official title: 'liaison officer between the commander of the First Fleet, Captain (later Governor) Arthur Phillip R. N., and the Aboriginal people'.³⁸ The Opera House's World Heritage Nomination of 2006 suggested that the building had no need of history, for it appeared to the viewer to be an 'obvious, immediate and evident' part of the landscape 'as though *only* [Utzon's] typical "shells" could occupy Bennelong Point'.³⁹

Two biographies of Bennelong were published to mark the opening of the Opera House. In one, commissioned by the Royal Australian Historical Society, author John Kenny found Bennelong instructive as:

The first of his people to be a well-documented example of their social incompatibility with their conquerors—an incompatibility which has persisted, afflicting the conquerors' conscience and mocking their compassion and ingenuity.⁴⁰

Founding chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs provided the foreword to Kenny's book, and agreed that the relationship between Phillip and Bennelong was 'disturbingly pertinent to our respective positions to-day ... a sombre episode [that], with minor

37 Stephenson, *The History and Description*, 321. As an ardent nationalist seeking to break the ties of Australian cultural life with Britain, partly by enriching it with Aboriginal symbols and ideas, Stephenson may have recruited Bennelong to lend the Opera House an even more 'Australian' quality, rather than to direct the fame of the Opera House towards Bennelong. Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 282–83.

38 Hubble, *Sydney Opera House Official Souvenir*, n.p.

39 Nomination by the Government of Australia of the Sydney Opera House for Inscription on the World Heritage List 2006, prepared by the Australian Government and the New South Wales Government, p. 35, UNESCO World Heritage website, Sydney Opera House documents, accessed 18 July 2018, whc.unesco.org/en/list/166/documents/.

40 Kenny, *Bennelong*, 5.

variations, has been replayed countless times throughout Australia'. In Kenny's account, Bennelong again suffers, not so much from loss of land and resources, political, social and economic upheaval, or loss of family and allies through smallpox; instead, he is, above all, the victim of 'an ignorant and futile attempt to civilise him [that] made him a pathetic victim of confusion of his own and the founders' cultures'.⁴¹ If Bennelong was more pathetic failure than tragic hero, then the notion that his story was predictive of Aboriginal stories across the continent lent the matter a gravity of magnitude.

A second biography was a coffee-table book by journalist Isadore Brodsky. He, too, found that 'the discussion of *Bennelong* is timely in the affairs of the Aborigines in 1973, perhaps as a contribution to their emancipation and proper recognition in Australian life'. To this end, Brodsky set out to do Bennelong's 'memory some justice' by resurrecting his subject as 'a man within his own rights'.⁴² However, Brodsky was not equipped to do this, his lack of historical and cultural insight ultimately undermining his project. Like Eleanor Dark, he understood Bennelong to be a 'Stone Age' man, caught between childhood and adulthood or, more precisely, 'manhood', on an evolutionary scale. Brodsky related Bennelong's inability to meet him 'man-to-man':

It was predictable that it would not be possible to treat *Bennelong* both as a man and a child. You can play with [a child] on the floor, and in fun and with mutual enjoyment. But a man wants to know the rules of the game, what losing entails, and the rewards of winning. *Bennelong* alternated between child and man.⁴³

Marylin Lake's analysis of the 'White Australia Policy', which was finally completely dismantled in 1973, helps to make sense of Brodsky's emphasis on 'manhood'. The policy's proponents argued that, to maintain Australia as a 'civilised community', each man must be equal to the last: self-sufficient, supporting his family and taking part in the body politic on an equal footing. Aboriginal men, and others, had been excluded

41 H. C. Coombs, 'Foreword', in Kenny, *Bennelong*, 1; Kenny, *Bennelong*, 5.

42 Brodsky, *Bennelong Profile*, 10, 16–17. Later, Brodsky described Phillip as wanting to 'afford [Bennelong] the appearance of equality' where of course there was none, p. 57.

43 Brodsky, *Bennelong Profile*, 76. Ironically, it is partly the nature of Brodsky's attempt to address Bennelong as a 'man' that leads to this view of a half man. Brodsky explicitly confined his attention to Bennelong. He perceived Bennelong as acting alone, apart from Aboriginal networks, politics or economy. Thus his 'behaviour' appeared to be inconsistent, 'oblique and bizarre', and seemed to be driven by 'emotional' rather than rational motives, pp. 40, 49, 50, 58–59, 73.

from full citizenship because they were not man enough.⁴⁴ Also in full view for Brodsky was the 1967 Referendum, popularly understood as the admission of Aboriginal people to Australian citizenry and, thus, perhaps in Brodsky's mind, to full Australian manhood.⁴⁵ In the event, Brodsky set up his own objective, of promoting social justice in the present, to fail, for in finding Bennelong part child, he questioned whether Aboriginal men were ready to become, or even be capable of being, citizens.

A few years later, the Tasmanian Aboriginal community was finally able to secure the release of Trukanini's remains from the Tasmanian Museum, cremate them, and scatter her ashes over the D'Entrecasteaux Channel. A small posse of historians promptly made a reactive grab for Trukanini's story. The Tasmanian Museum had recognised the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community; Vivienne Rae Ellis and N. J. B. Plomley published a pair of books arguing strenuously for their extinction. Ellis's book depicted Trukanini as 'actually personally responsible for [the] demise' of her people, and gave graphic descriptions of the exhumation of her body (so recently put to rest) for science. Ellis and Plomley, like Brodsky, were reasserting the relevance of powerful old narratives in response to landmark Aboriginal achievements.⁴⁶ In linking Social Darwinism with the political and social developments of the day, Brodsky's book seemed to suggest that this notion had continued relevance, notwithstanding enhanced rights for Aboriginal people. Like the Opera House itself, Brodsky was a fickle friend to Bennelong's memory; he inflated Bennelong's importance and then stuck a pin in, leaving him something of a mock-hero, and re-relegating Aboriginal history to the dim-distant past. His biography of Bennelong served to legitimise the concerns of a subset of Australians about the absolute legal and constitutional equality of Aboriginal people.

In Brodsky's account, a childlike attempt by Bennelong to become a civilised man constituted *hubris*, an overblown ambition that was punished by fate, a compelling force for a tragedy.⁴⁷ Brodsky sent Bennelong on a value-laden trajectory: a rise towards 'civilisation' and then a fall when he failed to maintain its standards. Despite, at times, attempting to step back from the attitudes he found in late eighteenth-century sources,

44 Lake, 'On Being a White Man', 100–05.

45 Casey, 'Referendums and Reconciliation', 146.

46 *Aboriginal Information Service Newsletter*, April–May 1976 (Hobart: Aboriginal Information Service Inc), n.p.; Plomley, *The Tasmanian Aborigines*, 29, 39; Ryan, 'The Struggle for Trukanini', 167.

47 Wallace, *The Cambridge Introduction to Tragedy*, 3.

Brodsky saw Bennelong as a savage who was raised towards a civilised state during his captivity in Phillip's house. However, not long after his return from England, Brodsky reported that Bennelong's 'newly found standards had slipped' and he tumbled into 'progressive degradation', 'falling from grace'.⁴⁸ Brodsky wholeheartedly sympathised with Judge Advocate David Collins' indignant comments about Bennelong's conduct in 1795–98, including his exasperated summation: 'This man, instead of making himself useful, or showing the least gratitude for the numberless favours that he had received, had become a most insolent and troublesome savage'.⁴⁹ Ironically, a book written for children, published just two years after Brodsky's biography, portrayed Bennelong as a thinker grappling with momentous change. No grand trajectory of civilisation was invoked, no final judgement of Bennelong's success or failure was handed down and, as a result, it perhaps achieved Brodsky's stated aim of showing Bennelong as a 'man within his own rights'.⁵⁰

Some of the generalisations drawn from Bennelong's story seem overblown and implausible; others seem unjust. Many are easy to critique. Yet, I am not advocating a return to a more 'innocent' age, when Bennelong could be depicted simply as an interesting character of early Sydney,⁵¹ such as the journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, which included the following micro-biography by John McGuanne in 1901:

He called Phillip 'Beuga' or father, while Phillip called him 'Dorroow' or son. He went to England with Phillip, was introduced to George III, was lionised, taught to box, to smoke, and drink, and swagger. On his return to Sydney with Governor Hunter he became an intemperate hero, jealous and quarrelsome, eventually ending his days in a brawl among blacks.⁵²

This Federation-era Bennelong is an action figure whose life and deeds can be marvelled at without entering into any consideration of the changes that shaped his life, or their effect on Aboriginal people more generally. This was a form of historiographical hygiene that operated on many levels in the early twentieth century. Past Aboriginality was separated from present, 'authentic' Aboriginality quarantined from the 'Aboriginal problem', and readers kept safely sealed off from their own

48 Brodsky, *Bennelong Profile*, 3, 26–28, 67–70, 75.

49 Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, quoted in Brodsky, *Bennelong Profile*, 71.

50 Phipson, *Bennelong*.

51 See, for example, Heaton, *Australian Dictionary of Dates*, 6; Suttor, *Australian Milestones*, 63.

52 McGuanne, 'Bennelong Point', 9.

outrage, empathy, pity, disgust, shame and other strong feelings about the past and history.⁵³ Now that these matters have risen to the surface again, as Stanner hoped they would, the disjunction seems disingenuous. From the 1960s, some storytellers continued to appeal to McGuanne's carefree 'once upon a time' mode;⁵⁴ however, increasingly, as we have seen, they sought to characterise the cross-cultural exchanges in which Bennelong participated, and thereby to both derive and propound an understanding of Australian race relations. As Benedetto Croce might have put it, the story of Bennelong has re-awoken from its slumber in the Australian chronicle, becoming history once more in an era in which Aboriginal and settler relations again seem pressingly important.⁵⁵

As the 1988 bicentenary of the arrival of the First Fleet approached, Aboriginal people of the Sydney region, in particular, readied themselves for highly ambivalent commemoration, and reflected on the history of first contact at Sydney Cove. Many Aboriginal people and their supporters who had told stories of Aboriginal survival over the preceding 20 or so years had found 'resistance' historiography appealing, inspired by the power and drama of the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggles, and an Aboriginal activism characterised by violent confrontations with the police and the 'belligerent rhetoric' of the Black Power movement.⁵⁶ In a lecture celebrating the discovery of the site of the first Government House in 1984, archaeologist John Mulvaney said he doubted that Bennelong was 'much honoured today by his people'. He anticipated that, as Aboriginal people sought to tell their bicentennial stories, they would turn instead to Pemulwuy, a man who could be remembered as a resistance hero.⁵⁷ Sydney Aboriginal man Gavin Andrews, who traces his family line back to Tharawal ancestors, recalled that many of Sydney's Aboriginal people had indeed come to see Bennelong and Pemulwuy in this light. For Andrews, this 'politicised' way of understanding the past failed to recognise what Bennelong experienced with the arrival of the British colony, and what he survived.⁵⁸ When Sydney Botanic Gardens Aboriginal Education Officer John Lennis was establishing the *Cadi Jam Ora* garden some time before

53 Healey, 'Years Ago Some Lived Here', 18–34.

54 See, for example, *Benelong Bugle* 1 (1962): 16–17; Barnard, *A History of Australia*, 651.

55 Benedetto Croce, 'History and Chronicle' (1921, as reprinted 1959), quoted in Curthoys and Docker, *Is History Fiction?*, 92–93.

56 Reece, 'Inventing Aborigines', 16–17.

57 Mulvaney, *A Good Foundation*, 14.

58 Gavin Andrews, in conversation with the author, 2 September 2011. Geoffrey Moorhouse was also left with this impression after asking some Aboriginal people at The Block, Redfern, about Bennelong in the late 1990s. Moorhouse, *Sydney*, 50.

2002, he was surprised to hear Andrews describe Bennelong as a hero, as other people had told Lennis that Bennelong had 'sold out' to the British. It is Andrews's assessment of Bennelong as a man who 'wanted to know the white man's world so he could explain it to his people' that stands as Bennelong's epithet in the gardens, alongside a short biography that embraces the ambivalence Lennis found when he asked people about Bennelong.⁵⁹

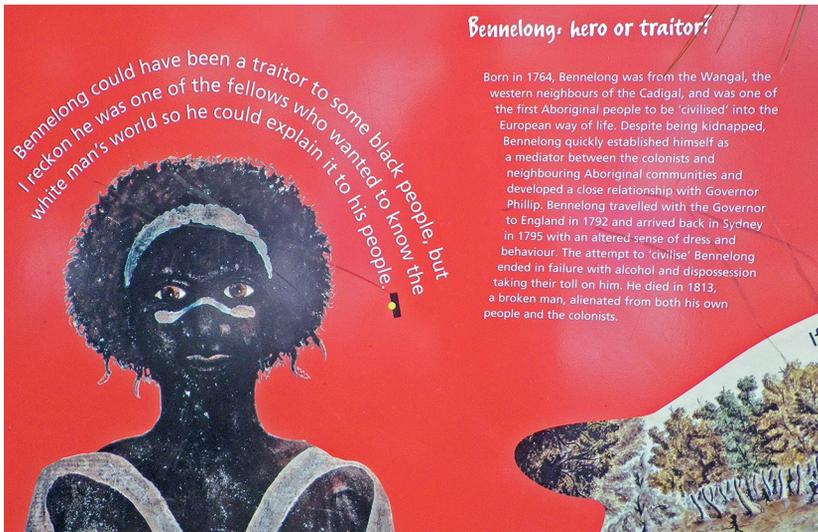


Figure 4: Bennelong featured in the *Cadi Jam Ora* garden panels, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney.

Source: Photograph of the panels taken by author.

A number of other Aboriginal thinkers and writers, grappling with how to represent the establishment of the Sydney colony and understand its ongoing effects, were, like Andrews, unwilling to dismiss Bennelong. Eric Willmot, in his novel *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior*, first published in 1987, certainly depicted Bennelong as a 'loser', but all his characters were losers (except, perhaps, the charismatic Pemulwuy himself). Bennelong was simply the most spectacular loser, with Governor Hunter a close second. However, he was not the pathetic victim of one culture crashing against another, like wave against cliff, as Kenny and others would have us believe. Rather, in Willmot's novel, he played hard at politics and he

⁵⁹ Gavin Andrews, in conversation with the author, 2 September 2011; Hinkson, 'Exploring Aboriginal Sites in Sydney', 65.

fell hard.⁶⁰ He was a ‘good’ loser, the kind of loser one can respect, giving his all for his cause, which was to gain and keep the initiative in dealings with the British.⁶¹ He felt frustrated and ‘used’ by both the British and the Eora at times, and he knew when he had been trumped, but he continued regardless.⁶² Willmot’s Pemulwuy and Bennelong shared the same camp fires and struggled with the same dilemma—how much to resist and how much to adapt to ensure the survival of their people.⁶³

Charles Perkins, contributing to the bicentennial *Encyclopaedia of the Nation*, contrasted the political ‘approaches’ of Bennelong and Pemulwuy as a way of introducing a discussion of Aboriginal ‘political objectives’. Not surprisingly, as a leader deeply involved in the politics of negotiation (Perkins was secretary of the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs at the time), Perkins found Bennelong’s diplomatic style of leadership more instructive. He found Bennelong leading ‘a school of thought among the Eora people ... that the British arrival was an important event from which both peoples had much to gain’, and admired his ‘statesmanship’ and ‘vision’. He characterised Pemulwuy’s brand of violent resistance, along with submission, as a strategy of last resort. That the British had favoured Bennelong, and that he had gained considerable experience in the British way of life, was no cause for Aboriginal people to repudiate him in Perkins’s view.⁶⁴ Perkins himself was one of those ‘difficult young men with overseas experience’ who influential policymakers like Stanner and Coombs, dedicated as they were in the 1960s to improving the lot of Aboriginal people in non-urban northern Australia, found it difficult to comprehend or categorise. Like Bennelong, Perkins was also no stranger to the charge that he had ‘sold out’. In the 1980s, Noonuccal activist and poet Kath Walker exclaimed, ‘public servant, oh yuck! ... [they] buy you body and soul’, citing Perkins as an example par excellence. Particularly in the late 1980s, following the thick tangle of backroom negotiations surrounding the Brisbane Commonwealth Games, and as Perkins faced charges of mismanagement of the Aboriginal Development Commission,⁶⁵ retrospective repudiation of Bennelong may have carried a sting for him, and for other Aboriginal people like him working ‘from the inside’.

60 Willmot, *Pemulwuy*, 30, 54, 173, 219–20, 268–70.

61 Curthoys characterised a ‘good’ loser as being like the ANZACs. Curthoys, ‘Mythologies’, 23–25.

62 Willmot, *Pemulwuy*, 173–74, 192.

63 *Ibid.*, 180–90; Willmot, ‘Beyond Contact’, 4–5.

64 Perkins, ‘Political Objectives’, 235.

65 Read, *Charles Perkins*, 149, 261–63, 330–37; Kath Walker, quoted in Mitchell, *The Matriarchs*, 207.

Alongside the interpretations offered by Perkins and Willmot, others continued to build on a view of Bennelong as a lost soul. Much loved non-Indigenous country singer and songwriter Ted Egan versified:

I couldn't help thinking that Benelong
 Never again sang the eagle song
 For he seemed just like a man whose spirit left him.

Doomed was he forever more
 He lost his way as he lost his law
 And the white sea eagle sings its song alone.⁶⁶

At the beginning of the new millennium, histories popular and official, long and short, across traditional and new media, carried Egan's understanding forward. In a recent children's book, the sections narrating Bennelong's return from England are titled: 'A lonely man', 'Rejecting tribal law', and 'Drunkness and death'.⁶⁷ In the Sydney Opera House's World Heritage Nomination in 2006, Bennelong was relegated to an extremely brief entry in an appendix, which concluded with the line: 'Bennelong dies in 1813, alienated from both Aboriginal and European cultures'.⁶⁸ Similarly, the Marrickville Council website described him as 'increasingly depressed, drunk, aggressive and vengeful' in the period leading up to his death.⁶⁹ In early 2009, Bennelong's entry in Wikipedia concluded that 'Bennelong quickly became alienated from his own people after [his] return' from England and claimed that he was 'marginalised and died in obscurity'.⁷⁰ Thomas Keneally, in the epilogue to his *Commonwealth of Thieves*, wrote that Bennelong 'found himself fully accepted neither by the new administration in Sydney Cove nor by his own people' and cited Bennelong's increasing fondness for alcohol.⁷¹

66 Egan, *The Aboriginals Songbook*, 36–37.

67 Sheppard, *The Life of Bennelong*, 26–27.

68 Nomination by the Government of Australia of the Sydney Opera House for Inscription on the World Heritage List 2006, prepared by the Australian Government and the New South Wales Government, Appendix 10D, p. 112, UNESCO World Heritage website, Sydney Opera House documents, accessed 18 July 2018, whc.unesco.org/en/list/166/documents/.

69 Marrickville Council, Cadigal Wangal, 'Bennelong', accessed 27 March 2012, www.cadigalwangel.org.au/MenulessPages/native_landuse_popup_bennelong.aspx?id=74 (site discontinued).

70 'Bennelong', Wikipedia, updated 26 January 2009, accessed 20 February 2009, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bennelong. On 18–19 June 2010, I revised this entry, providing an account of Bennelong's latter years based on Keith Smith's research and removing unreferenced allusions to a 'tragic' end. I have monitored the entry since then, interested to observe whether Bennelong's tragedy might be reasserted by other editors. To 27 September 2011, although many minor changes have been made, this has not been the case.

71 Keneally, *Commonwealth of Thieves*, 446.

Increasingly, storytellers follow on from the stories of Bennelong's generation with an affirmation of a strong and ongoing Aboriginal presence in Sydney. Lucy Hughes Turnbull, in her 1999 'biography' of Sydney, found that 'there are descendants of the Dharruk and Dharrawal living here today. Many of Sydney's Kooris can trace their ancestors back to the early colonial days'.⁷² Hughes Turnbull did not believe Bennelong's legacy was entirely bleak; however, she found the story of his last years saturated with loss and failure. On his return from England, she noted that he 'moved uneasily between European and Aboriginal cultures, and neither considered him to be part of their group'. Further, he lost the affections of his wife and 'despite (or because of) his new-found "sophistication", he could not persuade any other women of the extent of his charms and so was lonely for the rest of his life'.⁷³

In *Dancing with Strangers*, a widely read history book that was both celebrated and criticised for its re-readings of first-hand accounts, Inga Clendinnen made a close re-examination of the social, political and cultural exchange that occurred in the first years of the colony. In returning to colonial relationships, her project was to recover the fragile optimism of first contact, and to see whether there was any possibility beyond cross-cultural failure. She found in Bennelong a complex and intelligent mediator who nevertheless failed to bridge the cultural divide that defined the relationship between his people and the colonists. When Clendinnen's Bennelong returned from England, he was a virtual 'Englishman' who had 'decided to commit himself to the British account of things'; yet, he found his influence with the colonists far less potent, he experienced terrible luck with women and obliterated his disappointment with rum. Clendinnen concluded:

Baneelon, with his anger and his anguish, simply drops from British notice. He did not die until 1813 ... Over the last years of his life Baneelon abandoned the British in his heart, as they had long abandoned him in the world. At fifty he fumed his way to an outcast's grave. He should have died earlier, in the days of hope.⁷⁴

72 Hughes Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography*, 54. See also Moorhouse's history, in which Bennelong similarly loses his self-respect and independence, and Moorhouse is then incensed by the injustice of Aboriginal deaths in police custody, partly through his conversations with Aboriginal people at The Block, Redfern. Moorhouse, *Sydney*, 47–51.

73 Hughes Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography*, 35–54.

74 Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 265–67, 272.

Clendinnen acknowledged that the last years of Bennelong's life are little known, but she was content to imply that they were characterised by smouldering anger and exile from both Aboriginal and European society. Her final sentence in the excerpt above was almost hyperbolic, and not so different from Eleanor Dark's dramatic curtain fall 65 years earlier.

Keith Smith concluded his 2001 biography as Bennelong sailed for England. His justification was that he saw Bennelong's latter years as discontinuous with the diplomat's life to that point:

In this second part of his life, Bennelong was a changed man. He abandoned the white settlement, took to drink and was frequently wounded in payback battles ... That is another story.⁷⁵

Smith did not want to write a tragedy and felt that curtailing his narrative was the only way to avoid it. However, he has since completed more extensive research on Bennelong's place in Eora kinship systems, and has reassessed the evidence for the latter part of Bennelong's life. In work published in 2006 and 2009, Smith refuted the claim that Bennelong lost respect in the eyes of his own people and the Europeans, referring to sources such as a letter from Henry Waterhouse to Phillip in 1795 mentioning that Bennelong had 'got his old wife' again, and the memoirs of Joseph Holt, who wrote of Bennelong as the leader of a large group of Aboriginal people in the Rydalmere area in about 1802. According to Smith, after his return from England, Bennelong reintegrated himself into Eora networks and patterns of life, which had changed with the presence of the colony.⁷⁶ Somewhat persuaded, Thomas Keneally offered a circumspect view of Bennelong in *Australians: Origins to Eureka*, asking readers to consider the truth of Bennelong's posthumous role as 'archetype of his people's tragedy'.⁷⁷ *The Sun Herald*, reporting on investigations surrounding the location of Bennelong's grave at Kissing Point on the Parramatta River in March 2011, created a redemption of sorts by narrating Bennelong's post-voyage 'exile', followed by a relocation to the northern bank of the river, where he became leader of a local clan.⁷⁸

75 Smith, *Bennelong: The Coming*, viii.

76 Smith, *Wallumedegal: An Aboriginal History of Ryde*, 25–26. See also, Smith, 'Bennelong: Ambassador of the Eora Part II', 79–81; Smith, 'Bennelong among His People', 7–30.

77 Keneally, *Australians: Origins to Eureka*, 219.

78 Eamonn Duff, 'Found: Long-Lost Grave of Bennelong', *The Sun Herald*, 20 March 2011, 9.

Understanding Bennelong's place in Eora networks (rather than viewing him as a man acting on his own, only loosely moored to Eora ways of being and ready to drift towards the British) seems key to this more positive evaluation. As Isabel McBryde began to demonstrate from 1989, Bennelong's was a complex and ambiguous ambassadorship that must be understood in the context of contemporary Eora life and politics. McBryde placed Bennelong's relationship with Phillip among other cross-cultural relationships, and posited political motives for many of the puzzling exchanges in which Bennelong was involved. She examined his role as a key trader in the status-enhancing exchange of the curiosities of each culture, engaging in strenuous diplomatic work and, at times, holding the diplomatic advantage. As Smith was to do, she found that Bennelong's status remained high into the nineteenth century. Although his semiofficial role as mediator had waned, he continued to command attention from 'persons of the first respectability', and continued to play an important role in trade, social and ceremonial life, and in maintaining relationships between his Aboriginal community and the settlements at Sydney and Parramatta.⁷⁹ With a more integrated understanding of Bennelong, we might imagine his motives and self-conceptions quite differently. For example, Gerry Bostock has speculated that Bennelong, as an Eora man, may have remained captive in the settlement longer than he needed to in 1789 so that he could acquit the special responsibilities associated with that place because someone had 'to sing back the spirits of [the Gudjigal people] who died outside their country', even if he was not yet fully trained for the task.⁸⁰

Smith's findings, which he has shared with local public audiences, and Keneally's changed assessment, perhaps indicate that fertile ground for a more sanguine view of Bennelong's final years now exists among middle-class Australian readers and history buffs. The play *I am Eora*, directed by Wesley Enoch, premiered at the Sydney Festival in 2012. Drawing on historiography that contrasts Bennelong and Pemulwuy, and reflecting on Bennelong's changing relevance to Aboriginal people, the play charts a rejection and re-acceptance of Bennelong, the 'interpreter', by Sydney's

79 McBryde recognised 'tragic aspects' in the lives of Bennelong and Bungaree, but did not find this the sum of their lives. McBryde, *Guests of the Governor*, 15, 21, 27–29, 51; McBryde, 'Barter ... Immediately Commenced', 255–60. Attenbrow also depicted Bennelong as an active participant in Eora life and the life of the colony, as one of those Eora people whose frequent and often frank communication with the British allowed her to reconstruct the life ways of Aboriginal Sydney. Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past*.

80 Bostock, 'Colebe', 613–18.

Aboriginal people. Bennelong appears near the beginning of the play as a character thoroughly at odds with his community and its project of cultural revival. However, later (commencing with a rendition of 'tooralai – ooralai – attity / Bound for Botany Bay'), Bennelong speaks as a wise old man who can remember the colony, the time before the colony, and the important stories of his country. He is interpreter, commentator and witness. Slowly, one by one, the other actors sit down to listen to him. When he dies at the conclusion of the play, the warrior Pemulwuy (or his returned spirit) is the reverent bearer of his body.⁸¹

Grace Karskens recently asserted that 'stories of Bennelong as the "first drunken Aborigine", shunned by women of both races, a man hopelessly and helplessly "caught in a void between two cultures" are myths'.⁸² So we must ask, why has tragedy been such an appealing mode for biographers of Bennelong across half a century? My answer to this question is that Bennelong's tragedy seems to storytellers to be true: true to history, true to commonsense, true to human nature. Tragedy has given a comprehensible shape to Bennelong's story, and seems to make sense of the way in which the colonists' opinions of Bennelong changed over the years, the ambiguous clues to his own behaviour found in the primary sources, and the fragmentary records for his later years. Bennelong's cultural crisis and fall into despair and alienation also seems to reflect contemporary reality, and to explain how the present came to be. The tragic narrative maintains a mutually affirming relationship with a nest of notions about Aboriginal history and cross-cultural relations that have held continued claims to plausibility despite radical changes in the making of Australian history. So, while it can be shown that Bennelong's own life is not necessarily best represented by a tragic story, storytellers have found a powerful nexus of overlapping social, moral and narrative truths in his tragedy, that may shift over coming years, or may see Bennelong's tragedy continue to be retold into the future.

81 Bennelong is cast as 'interpreter' in the play, Pemulwuy as 'warrior' and Barrangaroo as 'nurturer'. Bennelong first takes the stage in an old suit, railing against a ceremony about to take place and the right of a young business-suited man to strip to his ceremonial painting. Enoch and Heiss, *I am Eora*.

82 Karskens, *The Colony*, 422–24.

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