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Questions for George

Abstract:

What lies at the heart of our creative and research journeys? Are we always seeking to understand something about ourselves no matter what the subject? What makes writing and the creative journey worthwhile? Is it acknowledgement in our own lifetime or a belief in leaving some form of literary legacy? This script ponders such questions as the researcher explores, in creative form, her journey to answer questions about the life of one of Queensland's early playwrights, George Landen Dann. He came to prominence in 1931 when he won the Brisbane Repertory Theatre playwriting competition with the play *In Beauty it is Finished*. Dann later became one of Australia's leading playwrights. Critics, publishers and directors (Brisbane, 1977; McCallum, 2009, Rees, 1973; Rowbotham, 1962) have long argued that Dann's work deserves greater recognition. This script examines events from the time of a 1930s scandal, making links to events from his final years and the significance of the work of an Honours student who wrote her thesis about him. The researcher's own questioning frames the investigation, creating a Readers Theatre style of documentary script drawing on evidence from interviews, newspaper clippings, letters and other documents in the Fryer Library collection at the University of Queensland.

Biographical note:

Susan Davis is a Senior Lecturer at CQUniversity, a writer and researcher with extensive experience in drama, theatre and education. She has directed dozens of plays and written many scripts, two recent ones include *Epiphany* and *Figments of Eliza*, both published in *TEXT*. Previously, she was a drama teacher and Performing Arts Head of Department, creating many youth theatre performances in collaboration with various industry partners in Brisbane and on the Sunshine Coast. She has an ongoing interest in activating history through drama. Her research about the life and work of George Landen Dann has contributed to the publication of four of his plays, including notable works not previously published.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Creative nonfiction – Drama – Australian theatre

Questions for George

The Characters

This script has been written as a Readers Theatre or radio script. The intention is for a number of readers (probably three or four, including two or three females and one male) to present the script with simple staging and no suggestion of specific locations.

RESEARCHER – A female figure representing the author, who has been researching the life of George Landen Dann.

GEORGE – A Queensland playwright, in his early 70s in the scenes with Deborah, however, in other scenes he is in his mid 20s, at which time he is quite shy and struggling to work out his identity as a writer.

DEBORAH RASMUSSEN – A bright and eager Honours student whose thesis research is about the scripts of George Landen Dann. Through visits and correspondence, they form a warm friendship and her work prompts George to re-evaluate his life and collect together the ephemera of his career.

MOTHER – Mrs Dann is mother to George and two daughters, one of whom is disabled. She also has a husband she has ‘given up on’.

BARBARA SISLEY – The Director of Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society, originally hailing from England and a trained actor, she is a rather grand and charismatic figure.

VOICES – These are played by the cast adopting various attitudes and perspectives as suggested by the content.

(It is possible to have doubling of characters to present the script using two female actors and one male.)

Setting

The set can be quite minimal, with chairs for the readers to sit in.

SCENE 1

- VOICE 1: George Dann? He was a refined sort of bloke, not your average Sandgate boy.
- VOICE 2: He was a loner... just him and the dog. He was just one of those men who never married. We didn't think anything of it.
- VOICE 3: He travelled a lot you know... but in Australia, he was a bit of a bushie, an early greenie too.
- VOICE 2: He was always planning another trip, off to the Kimberleys or Thursday Island, or central Australia – out of the way places...
- VOICE 1: I don't think he ever went overseas – funny really when you think of how he loved the theatre.
- VOICE 2: You'd think he would have made a bit from all those plays, and some of them being on the TV and radio.
- VOICE 3: He gave me a copy of one of his plays, not my cup of tea really. And I remember he said there was some big controversy about his first major play. Was it about the Aborigines?
- VOICE 2: My father said he was never the same after that scandal. I think he had a breakdown you know.
- VOICE 2: Could he have made it big overseas? Interstate? Perhaps... maybe his writing would have been different if he had... it's seen as quite wordy now... but that's typical for the time.
- VOICE 1: Did he find love? Through all the time I knew him - he never had a girl friend, but then I don't think he had a boyfriend either.
- VOICE 2: He was stingy... or perhaps it was just that he didn't have much money ... he had this old car... he never bought a new one.
- VOICE 3: He was gay you know... my father seemed to think so too, even though you didn't talk about things like that in those days.
- VOICE 1: No, he wasn't gay, he was just one of those people who liked his own company. No... I don't think that's right.
- VOICE 3: I'm sure that's why he moved away, wasn't he living with someone?
- VOICE 2: I think he could have been really big if he'd left and gone overseas. I don't know what held him back. I think there were issues with his family earlier in life. I think he wanted to be a Minister actually.

VOICE 1: I used to get quite a thrill to hearing some of his plays on the radio of a Sunday night. You don't think of a boy from Sandgate becoming famous, do you?

SCENE 2

RESEARCHER: Some people say that research is always autobiographical, that we are always searching to explain something to ourselves, to answer a question posed by our life history. So what do you make of this?

I've been fixated on this man. Trying to find out as much as I can about him, what makes, or made, him tick. But it's not what you think. He's been dead for nearly 40 years and may well have been gay – or latently so – he never married, never had children, was known to be a bit of a loner. So why the interest? Well part of it started with a simple coincidence about place.... he happened to die in the town where I live – Eumundi.... or so the records say.

So many questions arise for me as a researcher, as a writer – Why did he write about Aboriginal characters and islands? What powered his interest in injustice and isolation? Why did he stay in Queensland? Why didn't he go when he could? Why didn't he marry – was he gay, did he act on it, or was he constrained by religious beliefs and a fear of social ostracism? Did he experience intimacy with another human being and if not, how do you live such a life? Was he a martyr to his family or did self-doubt prevent him from making the break? And finally, what was his work like, was it any good, what can we learn from it, is it worth restoring to the public record or only of interest for research purposes?

Now Eumundi isn't that big a place, let alone a few decades ago, so I thought it was just a matter of asking at the local museum about him – did he live here, where, did anyone know him... but nobody had heard of him. Later I tracked down people who had known him, a nephew, a Coolool local, a neighbour – some of their recollections were insightful, some contradictory. Dr Google told me that his papers were in a library, a two-hour drive away. There in the Fryer Library I discover the sensory joys of archival research, of photographs, of fragments, of letters and another researcher. A young woman of the 70s, Deborah Rassmussen was an Honours student at the University of Queensland. In the last year of George's life she contacted him and began her own research. What was the question she was seeking to answer?

SCENE 3

DEBORAH: November, 1976. Dear Mr Dann, You don't know me, but I believe Alrene Sykes may have recommended me to you. I am studying for an honours degree and would dearly love to focus on you and your work. I've read many of your plays and have been researching your

life as one of Queensland's foremost early playwrights. I am hoping it might be possible for me to interview you. I can travel up to Noosa to visit you if that would be convenient. Yours most sincerely, Deborah Rassmussen.

GEORGE: Dear Deborah, Alrene had mentioned you in a letter previous to her visit with Katherine Brisbane, when your name came up. Leslie Rees also told me of a person at the university who intended to do her thesis on my work. So I practically feel I have been introduced to you already...

DEBORAH: He lived in a ramshackle wooden hut with his dog on the shores of Lake Weyba, at the end of a dirt road. He only used one room of the house and in it was a bed with a crocheted patchwork quilt, a clutter of old chairs, books, Aboriginal artefacts and a map which highlighted his journeys in Australia. He had a meal waiting for my first visit, crab salad and strawberries.

GEORGE: It's not too bad for \$2 a week is it? More than enough room for me and the dog. Good for fishing and crabbing. Fresh crab for lunch, caught it myself.

DEBORAH: Aren't I the lucky one – all the other honours students are stuck doing book research in stuffy old libraries. And here I am, about to have a homemade lunch with the award-winning playwright George Landen Dann.

GEORGE: You are too kind. I am humbled but pleased that you like my work.

DEBORAH: I admire the way you have approached serious subjects, the Aboriginal problem – but so much more. Are you still writing?

GEORGE: I'm an old scribbler, always was. Mother would chide me saying 'come and sit with us'. 'I'm busy' I'd call back. 'Busy with what?' she's say. 'Oh just scribbling'. And that was how I came to write the play that changed my life. Scribbling away after work in the evenings... it was my time of beauty and escape. Three months it took me to write 'In Beauty It is Finished'... keeping it a secret from everyone. Mother had no idea what I was up to. She never knew until after the official announcement was made.

DEBORAH: I've read through all the press clippings and the plays in the library. You were really quite famous weren't you?

GEORGE: Famous or infamous. Heavens, I never realized how notable I must have been - and all the time I was doing my utmost to avoid the publicity. But it still piled up around me despite my attempts. I never expected the scandal... it didn't go down well at home either.

SCENE 4

- MOTHER: He should be home by now. He's always home by 6.00 pm. There's something going on, some secret. What on earth could he be up to? Running around with these fancy theatre people, I wonder what they've convinced him to do this time. Or maybe he's met someone, he's finally found a girlfriend. I just know there's some secret he's been keeping from us? (*As if hearing something outside*) George, is that you?
- GEORGE: Don't worry Mother, there's no wild women or weddings on the horizon. I've been out at the theatre.
- MOTHER: Getting silly ideas in your head yet again at that theatre. You need to forget about those fancy dreams and just get on with your life. You've got a good secure job now. You're luckier than most these days.
- GEORGE: I am, that's true. But I have been keeping a secret and now I can let you in on it. I just saw the play 'Yellow Sands' with the Brisbane Repertory Society and afterwards they made a special announcement.
- MOTHER: What is it then? Spit it out?
- GEORGE: I've won a playwriting competition. An important one too, the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society's award for best new Australian play. They picked my play over nearly 100 other entries.
- MOTHER: Is that right? And what have you won then? A prize ham?
- GEORGE: No, I've won 50 guineas. And they're going to stage my play as well. At His Majesty's Theatre, holds over one thousand patrons. And Miss Barbara Sisley from the Brisbane Repertory is going to produce it herself.
- MOTHER: That so, is it? And when did all this come about?
- GEORGE: I wrote it a few months ago. I'm sorry Mother, but I didn't want to tell you until after it was official. Just in case they changed their minds. But casting and rehearsals begin next week. It's really happening, this is my big break Mother.
- MOTHER: So you can do what? Leave your job, run off to Sydney. Leave me here with a useless husband, a sick daughter and no way to pay our way. Just as long as you're happy George, don't think about us, will you.

SCENE 5

- RESEARCHER: While dramatic scripts might have turning points and defining moments, do most of us have them in real life, do we recognise them when they occur and are the impacts so easy to identify? I can't say

that for me any single event stands out as such, but I think one did for George Landen Dann with 'In Beauty It is Finished'.

I read the play, wondering if it was still worthy of interest today beyond being noted as one of the first plays to feature Aboriginal characters – albeit played by white actors 'blackened up'. It's not bad, though the treatment of the Aboriginal mother in particular is cringe-worthy. His characters are trapped by a sense of duty but also by place, inspired by the family who lived at the lighthouse on Moreton Island. In the play, a lighthouse-keeper's two daughters take turns living on the island to keep their mother company. The controversy surrounding the play centres on one of the daughters, Marion, who has been earning her living as a prostitute while in the city. Back on the island she begins a relationship with a man named Tom. While initially unimpressed by fact he lives with an older Aboriginal woman, Marion is horrified to discover that he is the son of that woman and is – forgive me for saying it - a 'half-caste'. After her father has a meltdown when he discovers the relationship, Marion escapes with Tom, but the tone is tragic rather than triumphant.

Before the show opened rumours began to circulate that the play contained highly 'sordid' content and the local publication Smith's Weekly requested a copy of the play. The subsequent article sparked citywide interest and one of Brisbane's most famous theatre controversies.

- VOICE 1: 4 July 1931 Smith's Weekly - 50-pound prize awarded to a filthy play - a sordid drama of miscegenation.
- VOICE 2: The title 'In Beauty It is Finished' is totally misleading. The story is a sordid and soiled one of the most dubious romance of a self-confessed woman of the streets and... a half-caste.
- VOICE 1: The Repertory Society must explain how it came to accept this disgusting and unwholesome story for presentation.
- VOICE 2: There are terms and expressions in the script that cut across the accepted traditions of the stage, and reach new depths in the sordid.
- VOICE 1: The whole story, in its exposure of the most degrading aspect of sex, must strike a chord of disgust in the hearts of those who respect Queensland womanhood.
- VOICE 2: Such a lack of beauty is evident in its outlook that the title is a total travesty.
- VOICE 1: The Brisbane Repertory Society seems likely to be rent in twain and can likely expect a swooping visit from the censors either during the performance itself or immediately afterwards.

VOICE 2: With so much discussion in the air everyone is deeply interested, and for the opening-performance a record audience is promised. Next week you'll hear what the verdict is.

SCENE 6

BARBARA: Well George, there's been quite a shindig about your play.

GEORGE: Oh Barbara, I'm so terribly sorry about what has happened.

BARBARA: We'll ride the storm out with you George. Hold your head high.

GEORGE: But have you seen this morning's paper? More letters, some are demanding the play be banned. Sermons are being preached against me. I've had to change the route I take to work, walking the back streets to avoid fuss and attention. And Smith's Weekly keep adding fuel to the fire.

BARBARA: Terribly insincere lot these people from Smith's Weekly. They contacted me and requested a copy of the script for their perusal. They said it was to help provide some additional publicity for the production. I didn't quite anticipate the exact nature of that publicity.

GEORGE: Barbara.... I have to say ... I understand if you think it best not to proceed. I won't sully the good name of the Society.

BARBARA: The board will stand by us.

GEORGE: But what if people aren't ready to see this reality on stage?

BARBARA: George this is an important play. You are an important new writer. Don't doubt yourself now.

GEORGE: I feel eyes on me at every turn. I've had people whispering and pointing as I catch the train in the mornings. Maybe I should stay at my desk, stay with what is safe, hide behind order and reason.

BARBARA: What nonsense George. We can't shy away from a little bit of controversy.

GEORGE: But what about these rumours of censors, of bans and police?

BARBARA: Well it will be a first for Queensland if they do George, and just think of the headlines. So dust off your suit and prepare your victory speech George. This show will go on.

SCENE 7

VOICE 1: (*Reading newspaper clippings*) July 11 - Jottings in The Truth. London theatre managers long ago discovered that the success

of practically any play was assured if it was attacked violently enough by press and pulpit. The rumour has gone around that this play is 'strong meat' ... public interest is quite unprecedented, and there are sure to be bumper houses when the curtain rises.

VOICE 2: 17 July 1931. The acting was good. Miss Scott was excellent, and Edith Rowett as the old gin was amusingly native.

VOICE 1: July 17, The Patriot - Despite the excellent acting and good staging, it is rather a pity that the half-caste question should be placed in the limelight. This is a country advocating a White Australia Policy, and reference to our darker tragedies is a bad advertisement abroad.

VOICE 2: 18 July 1931 - To a certain extent one felt pity for the main character, but of horror there was none. Not even a convenient suicide!

SCENE 8

RESEARCHER: It's about six months since I first applied for permission to copy some of George Landen Dann's manuscripts and documents that are held at the Fryer Library. I can still recall the look on the librarian's face when I handed in the forms.

LIBRARIAN: Oh, I hope you aren't in a hurry.

RESEARCHER: Not particularly, but your form mentions it might take a week to 10 days.

LIBRARIAN: That all depends. It depends on how straight forward it is, who we have to get permission from. For the Dann materials I believe it often takes many months.

RESEARCHER: Why is that? He never married or had children. What is the problem?

LIBRARIAN: Well, there is a major organisation involved but they aren't the sole copyright owners. We'll have to send the application through to the public trustees office, I don't know what the situation was with his family.

RESEARCHER: So began several months of me waiting patiently.... Hoping to get that email telling me it was all clear to copy away... but it didn't come. That is when my researcher as detective work truly began.

Through the wonders of Trove digitalised newspapers I had discovered that George's sister Dorothy married Viv Livingstone from Bellthorpe. They had lived in Woodford and had two children. They went through a rather nasty divorce in 1948 but it seemed likely to me that by 1977, when George had died, that she or the children had still been alive.

Now here's where hunches and following the scent takes over ... my family grew up in the Caboolture area. I asked some of them if they recalled any Livingstones from the Woodford and Bellthorpe area and one did ... she then put me on to her friend who had actually lived in Bellthorpe. Within an hour, I had a name and also the phone number of Grahame - George's nephew and sole living family member – quite a breakthrough! Grahame was more than happy to chat to me on the phone, and then I was able to meet with him and discuss a little more of what he could recall of his Uncle George! Grahame is a friendly, open man who shares George's love of travelling the Australian countryside, camping and the bush. He freely admits though that he is no arts or theatre type and didn't know that much about what his uncle had written.

RESEARCHER: So Grahame can you tell me what the situation is with permissions to use George's work? Why is it so difficult? Did he have a will?

GRAHAME: Oh yes, he had a will, he rewrote it quite a few times, we were in it – Mum and I - at one stage. I think in the last one he pretty much left the lot to the MacMinns.

RESEARCHER: And how did you feel about that?

GRAHAME: Neither Mum nor I were theatre types. The MacMinns, well they were. They let us take whatever we liked. Mum took Uncle George's tele I think. It was all very friendly. He didn't have much of value and he was very fond of Gwen – Mrs MacMinn that was.

RESEARCHER: She had been on the board at LaBoite I think.

GRAHAME: Yes she was one of his old theatre buddies. George probably thought she'd be better off looking after his plays than someone like me. I was a truck driver after all. There wasn't much else of value he left behind. He didn't even own that house he lived in down on the lake.

RESEARCHER: I followed George's footsteps, stood underneath the Lake Weyba mango trees, the house long gone. Drawn to the lake's edge and down into its shallows.

I can understand why George escaped to these places to sooth his soul; with nature being one way he created a beautiful space to retreat to. The other being writing... an escape from a life of family obligation and suffocating small town thinking. A sister who was an invalid, a father who was invisible and a mother who, if you examine most of the mother figures he created, was something of a monster. He would escape periodically, often off to an island. Fraser Island, Hamilton Island, far away from obligation and regulation. A diary entry begins one such journey – 7 April 1932.

SCENE 9

GEORGE: Well Barbara, I have an announcement to make.

BARBARA: Bravo George, Fire away.

GEORGE: I've quit my job. I'm packing a bag and I'm leaving Monday.

BARBARA: How wonderful, where for George? Sydney, Melbourne?

GEORGE: No.

BARBARA: New York, London?

GEORGE: You'll never guess... an island... an island paradise – Hamilton Island.

BARBARA: Oh ...

GEORGE: My dream life. I'm going to escape, leave society and all it's rules and restrictions. I want to live with nature, to exist, to think, to write and be free.

BARBARA: That's quite a dream George.

GEORGE: Yes it is isn't it? I'll fish from the seas and live from the land. What we collect and grow we'll eat and in the evenings, I'll write whatever and whenever I choose, in touch with the wisdoms of the universe.

BARBARA: That sounds quite wonderful dear. I only wish I could come with you? How long to do you think you'll be gone?

GEORGE: As long as possible, forever, a year, who knows?

BARBARA: Have you thought about travel overseas George? I still have contacts in London, I can send them your work. I think there would be interest in this new voice from the colonies. I might even venture back myself if you care to wait.

GEORGE: London. Perhaps, maybe... later... if I feel the call to return to civilization and her laws I'll let you know. But not now. I have to escape Barbara. I have to find my island... my freedom.

SCENE 10

GEORGE: May 1932. I can't write. Nothing. I sit, I drift. Ideas stagnate and die. This life, this drifting, this nothingness. It's rotting my mind, rotting my system. Damn my glorious expectations, damn my foolish dreams of success and freedom.

Twelve months ago - to the very day - I became, to a certain extent - famous. Famous for writing a play and having it produced. It caused a sensation, sent my mind whirling and thinking I could be someone. But it got you nowhere. It had but one effect. It had you basking in a sun of imaginary glory. But now the glory has faded, and you've faded with it. The dream bubble has burst, filled up with hot air from literary people, amateur actors and the intelligensia. You were fool enough to think they meant what they told you. It was nothing. Absolutely nothing. Twelve months of dreaming.

It's time to forget the glorious expectations. It's time to wake up, bloody fool! You're not a writer - you never will be. You're nothing - you never will be anything - only a rotten failure. What hopes, what dreams. From now on I'm going to be an ordinary common individual like the thousands of other common individuals in the world. I'm going to come down from my ladder pointing to the stars and I'm going to roll about in the mud and dust.... to be a common place miserable ordinary individual of the world. And I've got a feeling I might even like it quite a lot.

SCENE 11

DEBORAH: So after your Hamilton experience you went back to Brisbane, an office job and thought you would never write again. But you did of course. Did it take long before you come back to writing?

GEORGE: Not at all, isolation, suffocating family life. It's all there in my play 'Oh, the Brave Music'. It was ironic really. When I had the freedom I'd craved and all the time in the world to write, I didn't, I couldn't. Once I'd returned to something more familiar, I couldn't stop myself. The fragments of experiences and people I met formed voices in my head, characters calling out, their stories tumbled onto the page.

DEBORAH: And you had a lot of success after that. Won all those competitions, had your work performed in most Australian states, in Wales, in London, on national radio and *Ring Out Wild Bells* was converted for television. Then plays published, *Fountains Beyond*, *Caroline Chisholm*, which I understand was almost made into a film. But you still didn't move to the big city centres, go overseas? Your home base Brisbane, then Coolumb, building your house overlooking the sea. Why was that?

GEORGE: I had the family to provide for, and then later, when I could leave, I'd lost the need to prove myself in that way. I wanted to explore the hidden stories and places of our land. But Deborah what about you? Are you going to escape, to travel, to write – how about writing a play of your own?

- DEBORAH: I'm not sure yet. I was going to go straight into work or more study, but I have a chance to go to London and Paris with a friend, and I think I may just take it.
- GEORGE: If you want my advice Deborah ... Do it, seize on all the opportunities you can, they don't come too frequently. By the way I have some news of my own.
- DEBORAH: Have you been back writing?
- GEORGE: I have been working on a novel actually. But the latest news is about 'In Beauty'. They want to re-stage it to honour my friend and mentor Barbara Sisley. They've finally agreed on a way to remember her. There's to be a clock in the new La Boite Theatre, and a restaging of Beauty. It's a season full of Queensland only plays, and I'm happy to say they're keen to promote more Australian work.
- DEBORAH: Well that is the most wonderful news George. I do hope I'm here to see it.
- GEORGE: Would you be my guest at the performance? There's to be two opening nights. I've been invited to present a speech in her honour at one of them. I'd love for you to come with me.

SCENE 12

- RESEARCHER: And so it was ... His first major play, *In Beauty It Is Finished*, was the last performed in his lifetime. It was staged in March 1977 just three months before his death.
- Performed in the intimate space of the La Boite Hale St theatre, Sydney critic Katharine Brisbane was there and reported the surprise of audiences who were awestruck by the emotion of the drama.
- VOICE 1: After 45 years of hibernation, George Landen Dann's dark drama of isolation in the deep north, *In Beauty it is Finished*, has taken its audience totally by surprise.
- RESEARCHER: Brisbane actor Dianne Eden played Marion in the 1977 production and recalls the effect the play had on its audiences ...
- VOICE 2: ... it was electrifying, a black man making love to a white woman! Joe Woodward [who played Tom] wasn't Indigenous of course but he had black hair. It shocked and surprised people. It was a very passionate play. And it was Australian and not British, a different kind of Australian play, not ocker but iconic in a new way.
- RESEARCHER: The personal conflicts and interpersonal relationships at the heart of the drama still rang true. He had touched a new audience. And so his story and his work came full circle.

A few months before he died Deborah sent her Honours dissertation to George. On the shores of Lake Weybe he read it immediately and in his letter to her records how terribly moved he was after the reading ...

SCENE 13

GEORGE: Dear Deborah, The copy of your thesis arrived today. Naturally, I opened the package at once and read and read. Don't conclude from what I am about to tell you that I'm senile, decrepit, over-emotional and childish, but my eyes began to swim and I could scarcely contain my tears. So I walked in a daze down to the Lake and sat on the edge. And then I couldn't bottle up my emotion – I really did burst into tears.

DEBORAH: If by now you have become alarmed by thinking I was annoyed, angry and disappointed, you can put an end to your fears right now. The “matter” with me was that I was so over-joyed for you for having done such an excellent job on your thesis and so very grateful to you for having done it.

GEORGE: Debbie! Your thesis is WONDERFUL. It far exceeds what I expected – and I did expect a great deal of you from the start. With every ounce of sincerity in me – and with a very deep feeling of humility I thank you very, very much. I find I really cannot express in words my appreciation as adequately as I would like to – but be assured I am very grateful to you.

DEBORAH: Life and Death, death and struggle, death and beauty... What do people leave behind? Beauty? “Not dust to dust, not ashes to ashes, Nay. Beauty... only in beauty passes away”. But people also leave their names.

GEORGE: And so I must reveal my humble ambition, I've never told anyone before - and it is this ... I always hoped that my works would live on, that my name would live after I died and not die while I lived...

Your thesis will put me into history Deborah - and for that and all you have done for me I thank you very much indeed.

SCENE 14

RESEARCHER: I found the MacMinns, I gave the library their contact details. I wrote the forewords for four of George's plays, which have now been published and available to new audiences. And this record, this text, this new audience now realises George's humble ambitions and perhaps some of my own. My questions to George - some answered, some not. His story posing questions for my story – questions of partially realised potential, overcoming constraints and insecurities, finding a way to exist with art and realities. He, the talented

Queenslander who achieved so much, but probably could have achieved more ... is that what resonates for me, for others? A desire to see our names, our work to live on? To find moments of beauty, of contentment and even, of grace?

I return to the water's edge, a place not so far from where I live. A connection, some understanding.

I stand within a gentle blueness, it's pale expanse opens up before me. I feel like I could open my wings and glide
From water to air and sky
Floating over and across the land and towards the heavens.
The water's lapping lullaby joined by
A melody of bird cries and songs
A chosen present, perhaps can
Matter as much as what might remain
That, perhaps an answer to my questions - questions to George.

THE END

Research statement

Research background

This script investigates dramatic questions and theatre history through the creative form of a Reader's Theatre script (Donmoyer 2008) in a documentary style. It draws on archival evidence, the work of an earlier researcher (Rasmussen, in Dann 1976-77) and the writer's own empirical research and creative experimentation.

Research contribution

The work combines theatre historiography and creative practice to contribute to the writing of history honouring the legacy of a major Australian playwright through an appropriate creative form – that of a script. It also extends upon an investigation of ways that research may be embodied through creative practice.

Research significance

This work uses the dramatic form to encapsulate research that is both emic and etic in nature, questioning the creative process and the writer's legacy through a focus on researching a significant Australian playwright. The researcher is present in the process and the text, invigorating historical content in a reflective dramatic form. It complements the recent publication of Dann's scripts for Playlab's New Vintage series to ensure his work and name gain wider contemporary recognition.

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