

Kate Flaherty

‘Dead as earth’: contemporary topicality and myths of origin in
King Lear and *The Shadow King*



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Many meeting places are offered at the intersections of narrative-rich Australian Indigenous culture and the source stories to which Shakespeare gave such durable dramatic identity in his plays. Surprisingly, Australian productions of Shakespeare's plays rarely capitalise on this common ground. More often Shakespeare is used to interrogate the settler/Indigenous inhabitant binary. In this sense *The Shadow King*, an Australian Indigenous 're-working' of Shakespeare's *King Lear* by Michael Kantor and Tom E. Lewis (Malthouse Theatre, 2013), constitutes a radically new form of cultural work. It internalises oppositions offered by the play to explore intra-cultural, not just inter-cultural, crises. My paper analyses performance, promotional material, and discourses of reception of *The Shadow King* to map connections between ancient myths of origin, an early modern play, and contemporary Australia.

Kate Flaherty is a lecturer in English and Drama at ANU. Her book *Ours as we play it: Australia plays Shakespeare* (UWAP, 2011) is the first to investigate contemporary Australian productions of Shakespeare's plays. Her current research connects discourses of power in performance of Shakespeare's plays with the cultural politics of the colonial era in Australia.