One of Adelaide’s brightest companies when they first appeared in 1996, Brink Productions had begun to lose puff and purpose in the last few years. Now, with renewed energy and the recent appointment of Chris Drummond as artistic director, Brink is not only back from the abyss, it is again demonstrating, in this co-production with State Theatre, how well it can gather lively and inventive talent.

The Duck Shooter is listed as a world premiere but it has had previous lives - as the short play, Lime-Green Jelly, and more famously, as the basis for the script of the Australian feature film, Erskineville Kings. Encouraged by Brink and director Michael Hill, playwright Marty Denniss has redrafted his text for a return to the stage and the result is theatrically and lyrically impressive.

It is the story of brothers, adopted brothers and friends, the death of a father, the absence of a mother and the ways in which young men face - and avoid facing - questions of identity and masculine self-worth. The setting is indeterminate; it could be a small town or in the city. Class indicators are ambiguous, the repetitive cadence of the Australian expletive is not. But while the opening scenes are in unvarnished vernacular, as the play unfolds, Denniss ambitiously explores (sometimes perilously) a richer and more poetic language than naturalism alone affords.

When Barky (Cameron Goodall) returns home, too late for his father’s funeral, he stirs up old grievances with his dour brother Wace (Rory Walker) and Coppa (David Mealor) who was taken into the family at fifteen, also fiercely protects his ascendancy. Only the jumpy Trunny (William Allert) knows he can’t move from the bottom of this pecking and strutting order. But, now without the father, the stakes are even higher, especially for...
Barky, already on the outer as a writer, objectifying and betraying secrets. When the others take turns in trumping the disclosures, it is like Edward Albee with cold tinnies.

On Robert Cousins’ serviceable weatherboard set, aptly lit in lurid red and greens by Geoff Cobham, Michael Hill has given his actors room to go wide and, boosted by a gripping and memorable script and excellent ensemble performances they take this production into winning territory. David Mealor is particularly notable as Coppa, ably carrying even the more cumbersome of Denniss’s big speeches. But if there is risk in the rhetoric there is also achievement in its scope. The Duck Shooter sets an old subject in its sights and Brink and Marty Denniss have given us plenty that is new to think about.