

# 银幕上的澳大利亚

## Australian Society on the Screen

( A Coursebook for  
Chinese Students of Australian Studies )

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# Contents

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Preface .....  | ( 1 )   |
| Introduction .....                                       | ( 5 )   |
| A Note on Australian English .....                       | ( 9 )   |
| Unit 1     The Spell of the Bush .....                   | ( 15 )  |
| Picnic at Hanging Rock .....                             | ( 19 )  |
| Unit 2     Mateship and Empire Loyalty .....             | ( 26 )  |
| Gallipoli .....  | ( 29 )  |
| Breaker Morant .....                                     | ( 35 )  |
| Unit 3     Anti-authoritarianism and Sympathy for the    |         |
| Underdog .....   | ( 45 )  |
| Robbery under Arms .....                                 | ( 47 )  |
| Caddie .....   | ( 55 )  |
| Unit 4     Pride and National Innocence .....            | ( 63 )  |
| The Man from Snowy River .....                           | ( 66 )  |
| Phar Lap .....   | ( 73 )  |
| Unit 5     Women's Role in Society .....                 | ( 81 )  |
| My Brilliant Career .....                                | ( 83 )  |
| We of the Never Never .....                              | ( 89 )  |
| Unit 6     The Plight of the Australian Aborigines ..... | ( 96 )  |
| The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith .....                     | ( 99 )  |
| The Fringe Dwellers .....                                | ( 107 ) |
| Unit 7     Post-war Changes in Australian Society .....  | ( 117 ) |
| Newsfront .....  | ( 120 ) |

|         |  |         |
|---------|--|---------|
|         | Silver City .....                                    | ( 129 ) |
| Unit 8  | Post-Apocalypse Prophecies .....                     | ( 135 ) |
|         | Mad Max .....  | ( 137 ) |
|         | Mad Max : Beyond Thunderdome .....                   | ( 143 ) |
| Unit 9  | Relationship between Man and Nature .....            | ( 150 ) |
|         | Storm Boy .....                                      | ( 153 ) |
|         | Burke and Wills .....                                | ( 159 ) |
| Unit 10 | The Modern Legend of the Sun-Bronzed Aussie<br>..... | ( 166 ) |
|         | Crocodile Dundee .....                               | ( 168 ) |
|         | Crocodile Dundee II .....                            | ( 177 ) |
| Unit 11 | Crime and Corruption .....                           | ( 184 ) |
|         | The Empty Beach .....                                | ( 187 ) |
| Unit 12 | Constitutional Crisis of 1975 .....                  | ( 195 ) |
|         | The Dismissal .....                                  | ( 200 ) |
|         | Selected Bibliography .....                          | ( 216 ) |

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## PREFACE

The function of the arts as a reflection of societies is well known. In modern cultures the cinema , itself perhaps the most modern of art-forms , is usually very much more than simple entertainment. Good films aim to analyze important aspects of the societies that produce them and to suggest ways of improving them.

Australia has produced some very fine films in recent years , along with some which are not so good. The good ones do indeed aim to tell the viewer about Australian society , while the less good ones generally end up commenting on society whether they aim to do so or not. Many of the best Australian films produced in the 1980s are actually set in a period well before they were made and they take up issues of concern to the characters within them. However , in many cases the most important concerns are actually with the period when the film was made rather than the era when it is set. A film such as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* does more to advocate equal rights and treatment for Aborigines in the 1980s than at the beginning of the century. A similar point can be made about *My Brilliant Career* and equality for women in Australian society.

This book is intended mainly for Chinese students who are studying the English language and in particular one of the countries where it is the native language of most citizens : Australia. Because it is about Australian films and gives so much detail on them , it can contribute a great deal to the understanding of Australian society in China.

Born and brought up in Sydney I have spent most of my life so far

in Australia. I also developed a deep and abiding love for the Chinese people and devoted my career to the study and teaching of Chinese history and culture. I first taught in China from 1964 to 1966 at the Beijing Foreign Studies University and have returned to China numerous times since then. Perhaps more important is that it was during my first stay in China that I developed many very good friends which have stayed with me ever since , not least among them being with Professor Yu Zhiyuan.

The way in which I came to be involved in this project was because , at Professor Yu Zhiyuan's invitation , I gave a series of lectures about Australia at the Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1990. In the first half of 1986 I was invited to give a series of lectures on " Western Images of China " at the University , but also assisted Professor Yu in teaching about Australia. As part of the work at the University in 1986 I summarized the content of Australian films to make them more easily comprehensible to Chinese students. The fact is that the Australian colloquial language which is used so often in Australian films is not easy to understand and Professor Yu believed that a detailed summary of just what was happening on the screen would increase the value of watching the films both from the point of view of learning the English language and of understanding Australian society.

In 1990 I watched several Australian films together with Professor Yu and wrote out extensive summaries of their stories and content. In 1991 , I revisited the University for a few days and gave lectures on Australian society. Professor Yu asked me to summarize the stories of five further films in Australia : films to which he had no ready or immediate access in China.

Professor Yu has included my summaries of the films in this book. However , I believe it appropriate to note that the whole concept

of this book comes from him , the structure , analysis , activities and ideas are his. I congratulate him on his work in the compiling of this book , and on his contribution to the Chinese study of Australia , not only through film and this book but more generally as well. His achievements are all the more remarkable considering that he is also one of China's leading authorities on Finland and Finnish.

Although Australia is neither a particularly powerful nor populous country , it does have a culture , history and lifestyle which are well worth studying. It is important both for China and Australia that they maintain good relations with one another. I am confident that his work on Australian film and other aspects of Australian society will contribute to that end and benefit the relations between the Chinese and Australian peoples.

Colin Mackerras

Brisbane

1 December 1991



# Introduction

You probably want to know what the purpose of this book is , and what you can expect to learn from it. An important purpose of the book is to help you enjoy Australian films in a meaningful way and learn as much as you can through films about Australian society. So the first thing to remember about this book is that it forms part of a course on Australian culture and society. Before you proceed with this book , there are a few general things you should be aware of in discussing films.

First , why study films ?

Films are an important means of communication. They can tell us things just as books do , or television , or any other means of communication. However , compared with other means of communication , the main strength of films lies in the power of their visual impact. In films we actually see things ; in books we see them only indirectly. A book can describe a beautiful landscape , for example , and with a skilful author we may get quite a clear idea of what it looks like , but with a film we actually see it. Furthermore , in a book we can see only what the author has seen ; if he forgets to describe part of the landscape , then it is not there for us. With a filmed landscape , we can see everything there , even though the film maker himself may not have noticed certain things about it. Therefore , films can show us a great deal more than books could reasonably describe. Films can also show things to us quickly , as fast as they are happening. In such cases , information

comes much more rapidly and vividly through films than it could ever come through reading. Thus we can learn a lot more on certain subjects from films than from books.

Secondly , what do we study in films ?

A well-made film offers a whole world of things to watch. In order to make the most of a good film you must pay attention to the story aspects and the technical aspects of the film.

The story aspects are the plot , characters , and themes. The plot is simply what happens in the film , and why. A good plot holds our interest in some way ; and it makes sense and is consistent. A good plot shows the characters acting in the way people really would act , and there are no parts which do not fit in , or which contradict other parts. Characters are people who act a certain part in a film. As each person in a film has a character , or personality , we can describe this character by traits such as brave , silly , generous , thoughtful , helpful to others , strong-willed , hot-tempered , and so on. These character traits are usually established in the early part of the film , by what the person says or does. Throughout the film , the character should be reasonably consistent , and should not ' act out of character ' unless there is a good reason for the change. By the end of the film you should be able to describe or discuss all the important characters in the film. You should try to reveal all the traits a character has , and give examples of things the character does , or says , that show these traits. Themes are general statements about things the film maker believes are true , and which he expresses in the film. The plot is what happens , whereas themes are the general ideas expressed by what happens. Themes may be about the way people's emotions work , or how people interact and communicate or how people ought to behave. Or they may

be ideas about general subjects such as politics , love or spiritual matters. Themes can sometimes be hard to put into words , but they are expressed through the medium of films.

The technical aspects are the camera work , editing and the sound track. Any scene can be filmed in a number of different ways , depending on where the camera is placed , what lenses are used and what the camera is doing. We need to be aware of these techniques because they influence our feelings and ideas about the film. For example , the camera does not have to be on a level with the subject. It can photograph looking up or looking down. Generally , if the camera photographs a person from below , that person appears strong and dominant , and if the camera looks down on a person from above , they look weak and helpless. Each scene in a film is usually shot several times and the process of choosing which takes to use and putting them together is called editing. The editor has to decide about pacing the film. Fast pacing can sometimes be achieved by quick cutting. The sound track is everything we hear when we view a film. This includes not only the words , but also the musical score , which is very important. Music can affect the way we feel about what is happening in a film.

Finally , a few words about how to use this book.

To make use of the book please note the following things.

( a ) The book has twelve units and each unit is about a particular theme , such as ‘ The Spell of the Bush ’ , ‘ Pride and National Innocence ’ and ‘ Crime and Corruption ’.

( b ) Each unit begins with an introduction. Please read the introduction carefully because it explains the theme of the unit and presents a number of basic points that are important for understanding the films that follow.

( c ) Each film has the following parts :

— A synopsis of the film

This is a detailed summary of what is happening on the screen when you are watching it. You must read it before you see the film.

— Words and expressions you need to know

This consists of words and expressions you are not familiar with , especially Australian colloquialisms. Please study them carefully. They will help you understand the narrative and dialogues in the film.

— Topics for discussion

After you have seen the film , discuss the topics in small groups. The topics are designed to help you find out if you have really understood the film or not. They can also help you sum up what you have learned about the aspect or aspects of Australian society the film deals with.

## A Note on Australian English

We all know that Australians speak English. Moreover , they speak the same English across the nation. There are no regional dialects between the states. Australians understand each other as easily as they understand a person from another English-speaking country.

However , English-speaking visitors to Australia often have difficulty understanding Australians. Why is that ?The answer is that Australians speak English with an accent of their own and that along with a distinctive accent , Australians have their own vocabulary and slang.

In many Australian films , the sound track is the first big stumbling block for audiences of other English-speaking countries. In films about middle-class life , or in the period-historical films , like *Picnic at Hanging Rock* or *My Brilliant Career* , where Australian actors and actresses speak with British accents , understanding the dialogue is not that difficult. But in films which include Aborigines in lead roles , like *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* , or in films about blue-collar life or life in the Australian outback , like *Caddie* or *Crocodile Dundee* , we are likely to be confused about what is being said.

Several key differences in English spoken by Australians stand out when we compare it with English spoken by the British or Americans. There are differences in inflection , emphasis , and pronunciation ; in the rate and tone of speech ; in colloquialism and slang.

What strikes us about Australian speech is its recurrently questioning style. Australians have a tendency to end many sentences on an interrogative note with an upwards inflection , even when they are not actually asking questions. This is sometimes quite confusing to us. Another is that some of the vowels are pronounced differently in Aus-

tralian English. The sound [ ɑː ] , as in father and half is generally fronted to [ aː ]. The sounds [ iː ] , as in sea and feel , and [ uː ] , as in too and you , become diphthongs with a centralized first element. [ iː ] becomes [ əi ] and [ uː ] becomes [ əu ]. The diphthongs [ ei ] , as in lady and day , and [ ou ] , as in go and home , both have a more open and somewhat centralized first element. [ ei ] becomes [ ai ] and [ ou ] becomes [ ɔu ].

Another difference is in the rate and tone of speech. The typical Australian speaks slowly , with a relatively strong nasal twang. They talk through their noses as much as their mouths. A joke claims that this style of speech developed from life in the outback , where it was used to keep the dust or flies out of the speaker's mouth.

However , even if we have become used to the Australian pronunciation and the twang and the blending of words and consonants that form the Australian accent , we still have enormous trouble understanding Australians. This is because Australians have developed a vocabulary and slang of their own.

Roughly 80% of the Australian population is of British origin. The only foreign languages that have exerted much influence on the Australian vocabulary are those of the Aborigines. The early settlers borrowed from them such words as boomerang , koala , kangaroo , corroboree , coolibah , and billabong. Many country towns have Aboriginal names such as Toowoomba , Gundagai , Wagga Wagga , Mullumbimby and so do city suburbs such as Woolloomooloo and Murrumbidgee. Even when they are not Aboriginal , many place-names have their own distinctive Australian flavour such as Possum Gully , Wattle Flat , Mosquito Creek , Pine Ridge , and Seven Mile Beach. The settlers also found that English words such as meadow , brook , field and wood were too gentle to describe the harsh Australian environment. Thus they de-

veloped their own vocabulary. The country became the bush , and the outlaws who roamed it bushrangers. The farm became a station , the farmhouse a homestead. Fields became paddocks and streams became creeks. The early settlers preferred to adapt English words to make them meet the new demands made on them. An example is laughing jackass to describe the bird which is now more often called by its native name kookaburra. New compounds were formed , such as the outback , to describe the country remote from towns. Some of the compounds formed from English words describe aspects of the relations between the settlers and the Aborigines , such as black-tracker , a native used by the police to track down criminals and people lost in the bush. The discovery of gold in 1850 led to a new influx of words and adaptations , such as diggings ' mine , goldfield ' , nugget ' a lump of gold ' , duffer ' a mining claim which betrayed its promise ' ( and cattle-duffing became a term for stealing cattle and falsifying brands ). Other aspects of Australian history are reflected in such words as squatter and selector.

One source of the Australian vocabulary has been the local dialects of British English. Some of the most familiar Australian words may have this origin. Some of these words have been re-introduced into British English from Australia and their ultimate dialect origin has been forgotten. Possible examples are : dinkum ' honest , genuine ' , to barrack ' to jeer ' , tucker ' food ' , and ringer ' for someone who excels ' . Stone the crows seems a genuinely Australian expression , but in fact it is Cockney.

Sometimes the difference between British and Australian English is one of colloquialism. Corresponding to to give up Australian English has to give away. A common Australian comment on something marvellous or incredible is You wouldn't read about it. Some characteristi-

cally Australian idioms result from the use of one part of speech for another , as in to fine up ' to become fine ( of the weather ) ' and to rabble ' to behave in a disorderly manner ' .

A further difficulty with Australian English is that Australians tend to invent and use colloquialisms for every facet of life. Let's take as an example the following description of the most indigenous institution in Australia : the backyard barbie ' barbecue ' .

' On several occasions we had the lot—my pet kangaroo , a friend and his talking cockatoo , smoke blowing wherever we sat , the girls on one side chewing the rag , the boys on the other talking sport , a variety of bangers , snags and mystery bags , and more smoke—not to mention the mossies , midges and blowies and the requisite Esky stuffed with ice and beer. '

( Lenie Johansen , The Dinkum Dictionary , Penguin Books Australia Ltd , 1988 , p. VII )

In this passage , such words as chew the rag ' talk , discuss ' , bangers ' sausages ' , snags ' sausages ' , mystery bags ' sausages ' , mossies ' mosquitos ' , midges ' small sandflies ' and blowies ' blowflies ' are really hard for most non-Australians to understand.

Australians are fond of tacking a ' y ' sound on to the end of words such as toughy , smarty , maggie ' magpie ' , sickie ' a days sick leave ' , Aussie ' Australia , Australian ' ; and an ' o ' sound on to the end of words such as arvo ' afternoon ' , Abo ' Aboriginal ' , compo ' workers compensation ' , Paddo ' Paddington ' .

In Australian English , the word ' bastard ' can be used as a term of affection. If an Aussie calls a friend a ' stupid old bastard ' , he may just be telling him that he is liked and accepted. On the other

hand , if a stranger looks someone in the eye and calls him a ‘ stupid old bastard ’ , it s probably meant , and the latter had better piss off quick ‘ go away quickly ’ or give the stranger a fist full of fives ‘ hit hard ’ , perhaps followed by a knuckle sandwich ‘ a punch in the mouth ’ . So the word ‘ bastard ’ can be used two ways in Australian English.

The word ‘ bloody ’ is more used and used more exclusively by Australians than by any other English-speaking nation in the world. In Australian English , it is just used as an intensive signifying approval , as in bloody beauty , or disapproval , as in bloody nuisance. Bloody hell is an expression of frustration , anger , amazement. Bloody oath is used to express complete agreement.

Similarly , the word ‘ bugger ’ can also be used two ways in Aussie English. For example , in ‘ What are you up to you old bugger ? ’ the word ‘ bugger ’ is used as an affectionate and jocular term of address.

So it has been said that the language of Australia is peppered with the three Bs—Bloody , Bastard and Bugger. Because of its prolific use and ability to signify approval or disapproval , the word ‘ bloody ’ is considered to be ‘ the Great Australian Adjective ’ .

# Unit 1

## The Spell of the Bush

Australia is a huge , relatively empty , island continent. It has a diversity of locations , from deserts and snow country , to the Great Barrier Reef and tropical rain forests , which makes it different from any other country in the world. Therefore , Australia's film-making industry has used the rural landscape to its advantage and produced some good films which have the bush as the background.

However , the Australian landscape is used not as a mere picturesque background , but as a kind of threat or menace potentially hostile to man. This kind of duality— this awareness of menace as well as spectacular beauty— has been a recurring theme in modern Australian films.

The Australian landscape has been used in some films to convey the threatening emptiness of Australia. The most tragic early settlement stories concern the fate of explorers who perished from exposure. The 1985 film , *Burke and Wills* ,( See Unit 9 ) , relates such an experience. In Australian films , the bush is often seen as repository of specifically Australian values and challenges , as a testing-ground for manhood , and as a site for struggles between man and nature. Films such as *The Man from Snowy River* ( 1982 ) and *Crocodile Dundee* ( 1986 ) use the Australian landscape in a romantic way. In depicting the beauty of the bush , they also bring out the noble qualities of the bushmen : courage and endurance , generosity and loyalty to a mate ,

adaptability and resourcefulness. Such qualities were more unequivocally celebrated in the 1920s and 1930s than in the 1970s and 1980s. However , the past two decades have seen a revival of interest in bush-related themes. For example , as late as 1985 , the most expensive film yet made in Australia was another remake of *Robbery Under Arms* , which is based on the story of Captain Starlight , a bushranging hero stereotype so popular in the first decade of Australian feature films. The heroes of Australian films are still very often the bronzed , anti-posh , anti-authority types , casually gallant in war , at home on horse-back , often in silhouette against what is still seen as a wide open country. The bush may no longer be represented as a repository of all the manly virtues but the idea still surfaces in films such as *Gallipoli* , *Breaker Morant* and *We of the Never Never*.

Australians regard the bush as the most mysterious and the most powerful of the forces which have shaped Australia. From the 1920s to the 1950s , every year throughout Australia thousands of school children used to recite in unison the poem by Dorothea Mackellar :

I love a sunburnt country ,  
A land of sweeping plains ,  
Of ragged mountain ranges ,  
Of droughts and flooding rains.  
I love her far horizons ,  
I love her jewel-sea ,  
Her beauty and her terror—  
The wide brown land for me !

( Dorothea Mackellar , ' My Country ' , in  
*The Closed Door and Other Verses* , Melbourne , 1911 )

However , in the 1990s , this poem has been largely dropped from

the repertoire and the following Kevin Gilbert's version is more persuasive now.

Despite what Dorothea has said  
about the sun scorched land  
you've never really loved her  
nor sought to make her grand  
you pollute all the rivers  
and litter every road  
your barbaric graffiti  
cut scars where tall trees grow  
the beaches and the mountains  
are covered with your shame  
injustice rules supremely  
despite your claims to fame  
the mud polluted rivers  
are fenced off from the gaze  
of travellers and the thirsty  
for foreign hooves to graze  
a tyranny now rules your soul  
to your own image blind  
a callousness and uncouth ways  
now hallmarks of your kind  
  
Australia oh Australia  
you could stand proud and free

we weep in bitter anguish  
at your hate and tyranny  
the scarred black bodies writhing  
humanity locked in chains  
land theft and racial murder  
you boast on of your gains  
in woodchip and uranium  
the anguished death you spread  
will leave the children of the land  
a heritage that's dead  
Australia oh Australia  
you could stand tall and free  
we weep in bitter anguish  
at your hate and tyranny.

( Kevin Gilbert , ' The New True Anthem ' ,  
in Inside Black Australia , edited by Kevin Gilbert , 1990 )

Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* ( 1975 ) is one of the best films ever made in Australia. It provides some of the most eloquent visual statements about the physical nature of Australia and its relations to man's place in the continent. It is a good example of the ' double aspect of the Australian landscape : beauty and terror. A picnic in the Australian bush is an idyll , but it is also fraught with danger , as shown in the film through the mysterious disappearance of the three schoolgirls from Appleyard College.

# Picnic at Hanging Rock

## Main characters :

College staff

Mrs Appleyard ( the school headmistress )

Miss McCraw ( the maths teacher )

Mademoiselle de Poitiers ( the French and dancing teacher )

Miss Lumley

Tom ( the handyman )

Minnie ( the maid )

Pupils

Miranda

Marion

Irma

Edith

Sara

Rosamund

Blanche

Juliana

Woodend

Sergeant Bumpher ( the constable )

Ben Hussey ( the coachman )

Lakeview

Colonel Fitzhubert

Michael Fitzhubert

Albert Crundall

Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is based on the novel by Joan Lindsay. The plot of the film seems simple at first glance. It is indeed summarized in words projected onto the screen at the beginning of the film.

On Saturday 14th February 1900 a party of schoolgirls from Appleyard College picnicked at Hanging Rock near Mt. Macedon in the state of Victoria.

During the afternoon , several members of the party disappeared without trace. . .

Yet , although these words describe more than half of the film , they do not mention the many mysteries contained in the plot. Unlike a conventional mystery thriller , none of the clues in the film seem to lead anywhere and none of the mysteries are ever solved.

The film begins on St. Valentine's Day , the fourteenth of February. The schoolgirls at Appleyard College make a great fuss of the cards they receive , but there is no specific mention of lover or beloved. Even for 1900 , the girls are a sheltered lot.

Mrs Appleyard , the school headmistress , has arranged for the pupils to go picnicking at Hanging Rock on St. Valentine's Day. She puts Miss McCraw , the Maths teacher , in charge of the group. Mademoiselle de Poitiers , the French and dancing teacher , goes with the girls , too. The girls are all excited and looking pretty in their best clothes and hats. Sara is an orphan and is often tormented by Mrs Appleyard. This time she is to learn a poem , so she misses the outing to the Rock. Before they start off , Mrs Appleyard tells Mr Hussey , the coachman , to bring the party back at about eight o'clock for a light supper.

When the party reaches the picnic grounds at the Rock , some-

thing strange begins to happen. Mr Hussey's watch has stopped dead at twelve o'clock. Miss McCraw finds her watch too has stopped at twelve. " Never stopped before , " she says. Events are being shaped outside the ordinary structure of time.

Three of the girls , Miranda , Marion and Irma decide to go for a short walk along the creek towards the Rock. As they are moving off , Edith joins in. Before long they pass another picnic party : an old gentleman asleep under a tree ; his wife seated near him ; a young man reading a magazine ; and another young man washing champagne glasses in the river. He is the coachman , Albert. The other young man , called Michael Fitzhubert , is the English nephew of the old couple. Michael , already in love with Miranda , walks up the creek after the girls and he watches them jumping the creek.

The girls , who have decided to climb a little way up the Rock , reach a circular platform surrounded by rocks and boulders. They think they will rest there before returning. When Marion mentions that Sara writes poems about Miranda , Irma says that poor little Sara reminds her of a little deer her father brought home once and which her mother said was doomed. Edith does not understand what " doomed " means. Irma says to her , " Doomed to die , of course ! "

The three big girls have taken off their stockings and shoes. Irma dances on the rock barefoot. Miranda and Marion climb the next rise. Slinging her shoes and stockings about her waist , Irma follows them with Edith trudging in the rear. They come on another shelf and see the rest of the party far below , like ants. " Whatever can those people be doing down there like a lot of ants ? " Marion says in her lecturing voice. " A surprising number of human beings are without purpose. Although it is probable they are performing some function unknown to themselves. " Miranda says , " Everything begins and ends at exactly

the right time and place. " The girls fall into a deep sleep.

A while later they wake and Edith wants to go home. But Miranda gets up and walks away up the rise , followed by Irma and Marion. Edith calls out to them , but they move on , unheedingly. Terrified , she runs back towards the plain. The three girls have disappeared.

There is one important thing that Edith later recalls when she revisits the picnic grounds with the policeman , Constable Bumpher. There was a red cloud just after she passed Miss McCraw. And that reminds her that she saw Miss McCraw , who also disappeared , walking uphill , without her skirt , in her drawers.

Michael becomes obsessed with the search for the lost girls and returns to the Rock yet again. He finally finds a scrap of dress material but then collapses from exposure. Here Albert comes to the rescue and saves both Michael and one of the lost girls , Irma. Michael and Irma have no memory left of their experiences and they both have small scars on their brows , as if they have been scarred supernaturally.

After the slow recovery of both Irma and Michael , Irma pays a final visit to the college , which her parents have ordered her to leave so that she can go to Europe to join them. In an extraordinary , powerful scene she is almost physically attacked by all the girls in the gymnasium. The girls shout hysterically at her , as they want to know the secret of what happened to Miranda and Marion.

The rest of the film follows the lives of those involved in the events of the picnic , and of those who were left behind. Mademoiselle leaves the college to get married ; Tom the handyman at the college and Minnie the maid likewise are to marry , and Tom is to take Albert's job when he goes to Queensland with Michael. Sara is to commit suicide. The film ends with a voice over recounting news of Mrs App-

leyard's death on the Rock , which is also a mystery.

It is not possible to be dogmatic about this film , and this is the source of much of its charm. However , one likely theme is that the film is intended as a criticism of Victorian society. Mrs Appleyard , the model Victorian , is certainly unsympathetic , especially in her treatment of Sara Wayborne. Victorian society is also dull , as depicted in Colonel Fitzhubert's picnic and garden party , and it crushes the life out of things with its rules and restrictions. In the film Appleyard College is depicted as representing a highly-ordered—even repressed society , which tries to crush and reform natural beauty into an unnatural mould. As for the Rock , it symbolizes the untamed forces of nature , giving a sense of threat as well as spectacular beauty , and especially the threat of unknown male sexuality to the virginal girls. The incongruity of the Rock is spatial rather than temporal. It has nothing to do with time , whereas the College is out of place and out of time. Through the disappearance of the girls on the Rock the film eloquently shows us the inevitability of the decline of Australian Victorianism.

Picnic at Hanging Rock is beautifully photographed. Camera techniques are used very effectively to heighten the sense of strangeness and mystery in the film. Hanging Rock is filmed from a distance several times , floating in mists , a strange presence on the plain. At the picnic the Rock is nearly always filmed with the camera looking upwards. This gives it a sense of power and dominance , and at the same time mystery and spirituality , like cathedral spires. The girls , too , are often filmed in the same manner , as if we were looking at angels. In contrast , Mrs Appleyard is always filmed on the level , befitting her straightforward , unimaginative view of life.

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## Words and expressions you need to know :

drag—a four-horse passenger coach with seats inside and on top

Botticelli angel—a fine figure of an angel in one of Italian painter Sandro Botticelli's paintings

stoop—a habitual position with the shoulders bent forwards or rounded

take leave of one's senses—go mad

dunnie—a toilet

molest—attack or annoy a woman or a child sexually

a storm in a tea-cup—a lot of worry over something unimportant

She is quite intact—she is still a virgin

les pantalons—a French word for the drawers , i. e. a undergarment worn below the waist by women and girls

tracker—an Aboriginal employed by the police to search for escaped convicts in the bush

convalesce—spend time getting well after an illness

tidings—news

corset—a very tight-fitting undergarment worn by women to give shape to the waist and hips

rouge—a red substance used for colouring the cheeks , esp. by women and actors

## Topics for discussion :

1. What is the first mysterious happening in the film ?
2. What are some other mysteries that remain unexplained ?
3. Two of the most important characters in the film are Mrs Appleyard and Mademoiselle de Poitiers. How different are their character traits ?
4. Discuss the characters of the five people who ascend the Rock at

the picnic , and tell why you think three of them disappear and two eventually return.

5. What in your opinion does Hanging Rock symbolize ? Why ?
6. What does the film show us about Australian Victorianism ?

## Unit 2

### Mateship and Empire Loyalty

Mateship—the friendship between man and man—is said to be one of the oldest and most fundamental Australian traditions. Australian mateship originated in the early days of the convict period and bush settlements. Marcus Clarke , who studied the records before writing *For the Term of His Natural Life* , gives a number of instances showing how strong and widespread was the code of loyalty among the convicts. But the form of mateship practised by the convicts was rudimentary in character and it failed too often to fulfil the basic element of loyalty. In the bush the harsh physical environment demanded that a man should have a companion for many purposes : to carry out a job of work which he could not do on his own ; to give mutual protection against danger or accident when travelling in isolated areas up country ; to help one another in many ways ; and to gain companionship in the lonely bush. Because men far outnumbered women and females were almost unobtainable in the bush , men naturally turned to each other for companionship. Instead of the group mateship that was inevitable for convicts banded together in chain-gangs , prisons , and settlements , the bush mateship was usually confined to two men , although it was extended on occasion to three or four for certain occupations.

The tradition of mateship was glorified by the writers of the 1890s , especially Henry Lawson. It seems to be dying out now as women attain a status which is less markedly inferior to men than was

once the case , but in the armed forces it is as strong as ever and among workers the mate is still important. In much of Australian society today , male friendship is still more highly valued than male-female friendship.

Mateship is a commonly recurring theme in Australian films. The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke and The Moods of Ginger Mick , two of the earliest films with the mateship theme , were filmed in 1919 and 1920 respectively. Mateship has been celebrated in a number of films produced in recent years , such as Gallipoli ( 1981 ) , Breaker Morant ( 1980 ) and Newsfront ( 1978 ).

In Gallipoli , the central characters are two men involved in a series of adventures. The pair consists of sharply contrasted types. Archy and Frank represent an odd couple , fair and dark , candid and devious , bush and city , Anglo- and Celtic-Australian , winner and second-best , noble sacrifice and survivor , heroine and hero. They both join up. Archy is ready to fight out of blind patriotism to a distant cause he scarcely understands. Frank joins up in the end because he does not want to be left out of things and because he does not want to be separated from Archy. No other relationship in the film can be compared with theirs. Some people have claimed it to be a male love story. Gallipoli is an undeniably moving account of how the bonds of mateship feed into the Australian national myth.

Australia's relations with the British Empire are also discussed in Gallipoli and Breaker Morant. Early in the 20th century , although Australia became an independent nation , it was still part of the British Empire and Britain was still home for many people. At school , children were taught that to be part of the British Empire was a privilege and a blessing , that to be British was to be noble and brave , and that loyalty to the Mother Country must never waver. As in Gallipoli , for

the great majority of Australians , the first World War was a chance to show their love of England and prove themselves to the rest of the world.

However , the Mother Country did not always behave towards Australia the way a mother should do to her children. Breaker Morant is based on the Boer War court-martial of three Australian officers of the Bushveldt Carbineers. The film presents the whole of the trial as unjust and farcical , and the three defendants as scapegoats sentenced as part of the British war strategy against the Boers. The idea is that by putting the three Australians on trial and sentencing them , it becomes possible to prevent the Germans from intervening in the war on the Boer side , and thus obtain a peace on British terms. The film projects patriotism strongly , though mainly indirectly , as anti-Britishness. In Gallipoli , the British are more directly criticized. Because of the blunder on the British side , thousands of innocent young Australians are sacrificed for the sake of the British.

Both Gallipoli and Breaker Morant explore aspects of the period in which Australia may be said to have achieved nationhood. The Gallipoli experience came to be seen as the occasion when Australia underwent its baptism of fire and came of age through the heroic sacrifice of its young men , who demonstrated the ideals of Australian manhood. That the sacrifice was made in an imperial rather than national cause illustrates the paradoxes of Gallipoli in particular and Australian nationalism in general.

## Gallipoli

## Main characters :

Archy Hamilton ( the hero , a country boy )

Frank Dunne ( Archys best friend , a city boy )

Jack Hamilton ( Archys uncle )

Major Barton

General Gardner

Peter Weirs Gallipoli is an Australian movie made about a military subject. It concerns the one key event in Australian military history which has great national significance. This event is the brave , tragic failure of the Australian soldiers in their attempted invasion of the Turkish Dardanelles during the First World War. The ANZAC ( Australian and New Zealand Army Corps ) formed part of the Allied Forces and from 25 April 1915 the Anzacs were put ashore at what came to be known as Anzac Cove. They established a foothold on the ridges above the beach but were unable to make much progress towards winning the summit which commanded the Straits. The Anzacs suffered heavy casualties because of incompetent planning and the unfavourable terrain. The campaign itself foundered and all troops were evacuated in December 1915.

Weir s film is similar to other Australian films of the period like The Man From Snowy River in its sense of some kind of youthful innocent quest except that at the end of the quest in Gallipoli the hero dies tragically.

As the film begins , Archy , a country boy , is being pumped up to race by his uncle Jack. Uncle Jack encourages Archy to push himself to his limits :

“ What are your legs ?” asks Uncle Jack.

“ Springs. Steel springs ,” shouts Archy.

“ What are they going to do ?” barks Jack.

“ Hurl me down the track !” chants Archy.

“ How fast can you run ?” barks Jack again.

“ As fast as a leopard ,” chants Archy.

The ending of the film also shows us the running of a race , but it is a completely different kind of race and ends with the death of the hero.

Through Archy's passion for running , he meets Frank Dunne , another runner and a slightly older , but much more worldly young man. They run a race together , but Archy wins and Frank loses all the money he bets on the race. However , after the race Archy and Frank become good friends.

Just then the recruiting officers arrive at the sportsground , calling on the people to join up. Despite the fact that he is under age , Archy wants to enlist , but he is rejected when the recruiting officer finds out that he is only eighteen. Frank encourages Archy to try again in Perth ( Western Australia ).

The next scene shows Archy and Frank on a train heading for Perth. But they are stranded at a lonely railway siding. The Aboriginal station-master tells them they will not get to Perth for two weeks , “ unless you're game enough to cross the lake. ” They take up the challenge and walk across the desert. But they soon get lost. They are saved from death by an eccentric Outback camel driver. He is completely unaware there is a world war going on and considers them mad for wanting to enlist.

In Perth , Archy joins the Light Horse after he puts on a false beard and assumes a new name ( Archibald Lasalles ). He chooses this name because Harry Lasalles is the world champion of 100 yards , the one he admires most. Hearing people praise the Light Horse ,

Frank decides to join the Light Horse , too. But the trouble is he cannot ride. He is turned down by the recruiting officer. However , he later manages to join the infantry. But his purpose is different from Archy s. Archy wants to fight for the British Empire , while Frank wants “ to learn a trick or two and come back an officer ”. Frank regards the war as an English war which has got nothing to do with Australia.

The second part of the film briefly shows them training in Egypt. Here we see the clash of cultures , the totally different worlds of the local Egyptians , as well as the cultural distance between the autocratic , cold , English officers , and the anti-authoritarian larrikinism of the Australian soldiers. In one memorable scene , the Australian soldiers play a rugby match with the Pyramids looming large behind them.

During one of the training exercises , Frank and Archy meet each other and Frank asks to be transferred to the Light Horse. The Australian military commander Major Barton approves of his request because he is told that Frank is a good runner. From then on Frank and Archy stay together in the Light Horse. Again they run a race up the Pyramids together and have their names carved there.

The third part of the film shifts to another kind of desert—the trenches at Gallipoli , where the troops are pinned down by a fierce , remorseless enemy. The British Command orders the Anzacs to launch a major attack on the Turks. The attack is designed as a diversion to draw the Turks on the Anzacs so that the British can get ashore at Suvla bay. What happens is that the bombardment designed to cover the attack stops 7 minutes before the charge. The Turks have already got back to their trenches when the Anzacs start the attack. Many soldiers are killed immediately after they jump from their trenches. Just at that crucial moment the telephone line goes dead. Major Barton has to go

as planned. However , he sends Frank to General Gardner for his opinion. General Gardner orders Frank to pass on his message immediately to Major Barton. “ Tell Major Barton I'm reconsidering the whole situation. ”

The final scene shows Frank running vainly through the trenches with the message that would have stopped the battle. But it is already too late. Another batch of soldiers have jumped out of their trenches and are being shot dead by the Turks. Frank's mate Archy is among the dead.

Unlike other war films , there is very little violence , or blood and gore shown in Gallipoli. Only in the final battle do we see the appalling slaughterhouse conditions of trench warfare for which the war was notorious. What the film attempts to show is the bravery , idealism , and even the beauty of the young Australian soldiers. In one underwater sequence , Weir shows several of them swimming naked in the crystal clear water. This heavenly image is shattered by an artillery barrage , and we see fragments of shrapnel whip angrily through the blue water , which quickly becomes stained with blood.

Despite its title , Gallipoli is less a film about a place and a war than one about Australia. The film takes as its focus what it meant to be Australian in 1915. In relation to Gallipoli and the First world War , the film presents two contrasting attitudes : patriotism , not so much for Australia as for England and Empire , and the isolationism of Australia in relation to world events. Archy represents the former. He has only a vague and emotional idea of what the war is about , but he is in no doubt that he must join up and fight for his country. “ You ought to be ashamed of yourself if you don't fight for your country , ” he tells Frank. However , in Frank we see one aspect of isolationist Australia. For him it is “ not our bloody war. It's an English war ” , and he

finally joins up because he feels a little out of things. The meeting with the camel driver reinforces the sheer physical isolation of Australia. The old man has not heard of the war , has not even been to Perth. He once knew a German , he says , but he is essentially incurious about the war. In the end , it is mateship , not patriotism , that leads Frank to the war.

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## Words and expressions you need to know :

You're on ! —I accept your bet

ride bareback—to ride on the bare back of a horse ; without a saddle

join up—to enlist for military service

under age—in this case too young to join up

quid—dollar

skin someone alive—to scold someone severely

bugger it ! —an exclamation of annoyance or frustration

cockatoo—an Australian bird ( a type of parrot ) with a crest on the top of its head

toff—a person of the well-dressed , wealthy upper class

class—good style ; elegance

antiquity—great age

horizontal refreshment—sex

doc—doctor

arse— buttocks ; bum

barrage—the continuous firing of a number of heavy guns to give protection to soldiers as they advance upon the enemy

it's the thought that counts—the affection , goodwill , etc. that lie behind an action or gift are more important than the action or gift itself

## Topics for discussion :

1. What does the ANZAC stand for ? What does the ANZAC spirit mean to Australians ?
2. Discuss the characters of Archy Hamilton and Frank Dunne. What are their differing character traits ?
3. What is mateship ?  
How is mateship celebrated in the film ?
4. What does the film show us about the relationship between Australia and Great Britain during WWI ? Do you think the film is anti-British and anti-Empire ? Give your reasons.
5. The ending of Gallipoli repeats the motive of running a crucial race , which also begins the movie. How effective is it ? What point is it making ?
6. What is the effect of the music in the film ?

## Breaker Morant

### Main characters :

- Lieutenant Harry " Breaker " Morant ( the main defendant )
- Major J. F. Thomas ( the lawyer defending the three defendants )
- Captain Alfred Taylor ( a friend of Harry Morant )
- Lieutenant Peter Handcock ( the second defendant )
- Lieutenant George Witton ( the third defendant )
- Captain Simon Hunt ( a commander in the Bushveldt Carbineers )
- Lieutenant Colonel Denny ( President of the Court Martial )
- Major Charles Bolton ( the main British prosecuting lawyer )

Reverend H. C. V. Hess ( a German missionary )

Visser ( a Boer prisoner )

Colonel Ian Hamilton ( a senior British officer in the service of Kitchener )

Lord Kitchener ( the British commander-in-chief of South Africa )

Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* ( 1980 ) is based closely on a true story. It is set in South Africa at the time of the Boer War between the Boer ( mostly Dutch ) population and the British colonialists. By 1910 , when the story takes place , the British had occupied most Boer territory but had difficulty winning an outright victory because of mobile Boer guerilla forces. The focus of the story is a military law case , or court martial , against Lieutenant Harry ( nicknamed Breaker ) Morant , an Australian soldier serving in a British unit against the Boers , and two other Australian comrades.

A very pronounced feature of the film is the way in which it alternates scenes in the court with flashbacks showing precisely what happened from the point of view of the person giving evidence. Other flashbacks show the previous experiences of the three defendants , in order to put forward their case or establish their strength of character. Several scenes show the defendants together during breaks from the court martial , while others show the dreams of the defendants about their own happier past.

As the Boer War moves into its final phase , a unit of the Bushveldt Carbineers , a special force raised by Lord Kitchener is ordered to deal with the Boer guerillas. The unit is composed mainly of Australians fighting on the British side. It is ordered to fight the Boers on their terms and take no prisoners , nor kill them.

As the scene opens and the trial begins , a flashback shows Cap-

tain Simon Hunt , the head of the Bushveldt Carbineers unit , killed by a Boer attack. His body is left with the enemy , and the Australian soldiers retrieve it. Lieutenant Morant , a close friend of Captain Hunt and also one of the commanders of the unit , wants to take revenge on the Boers and orders some Boer prisoners to be killed. In addition , a German missionary was killed by Lieutenant Handcock. Since the killing of prisoners is against the ethics of war as it had been fought up to that time , the British decide to court martial Breaker Morant and two other Australian junior officers , Lieutenant Peter Handcock and Lieutenant George Witton.

Harry Morant is called Breaker , because he is a horse breaker , said to be the best in Australia. He is also quite a good poet. In addition , he is able to recite poetry and does so on several occasions during the film. Handcock is a much more flamboyant character , with a quick temper. He is quite happy to interrupt the court proceedings and shout at the judge or prosecutor. Witton is the youngest of the three and much the least tough.

It is central to the film that the rules of war changed because of the guerilla tactics which the Boers employed. The British knew this , but the real reason for the court martial was political. The Germans wanted an excuse to enter the war on the Boer side , and the killing of a German missionary was just the kind of pretext they wanted. The British were determined to prevent them from entering at all costs , because they thought , rightly , that they could win quickly if the Germans did not intervene , and also because the German Kaiser was related to the British Queen Victoria , who had died just before the film's events took place. Kitchener adds that he believes also that the Germans are interested in obtaining South African diamonds , and entry into the war would help them in this endeavour. He adds this very

casually , but it is probably the most important of his reasons for not wanting the Germans to enter the war.

The British command want the three Australians to be convicted , and they order a British military lawyer , Major Charles Bolton , to deal with the case. Major J. F. Thomas is the Australian defending officer , who is doing his first defence case. He has absolutely no experience in defence law.

Breaker Morant has no interest in the British Empire. Handcock feels the same way , and only came to fight because he couldn't find a job at home. Of the three defendants , only Witton feels loyalty to the British Empire.

As the court martial opens , Major Thomas asks for an adjournment , on the grounds that he has not had enough time to prepare a defence. This is rejected. He then says the court martial is unconstitutional because Australia is now an independent country. ( The time the film is set is just after Federation in Australia ). That request is also rejected on the grounds that they were fighting in a British-led army unit.

The Judge reads out the charges. All three are charged with having killed seven Boer prisoners , in particular one called Vis-ser. Handcock and Morant are also charged with having killed the German missionary. All three plead not guilty of all charges.

A witness for the prosecution , Captain Robertson , formerly commander of the Bushveldt Carbineers , claims that the Australians had no discipline and were prone to stealing and other breaches of war. He states that Handcock , in particular , had no regard for prisoners of war. Major Thomas is able to establish that in fact it was quite normal to leave prisoners where they could be hurt , because it was effective practice against the Boers , even though it was irregular and not good

practice.

Right from the start , the Judge or President of the Court Martial , Lieutenant Colonel Denny , shows himself as totally against the Australians. He makes it clear that he is not really willing to hear evidence , but has decided that they are guilty.

Sergeant-Major Drummond is the next witness. There is a flashback which is background to his evidence. It shows Morant as convinced that the Boer prisoner Visser is guilty of having killed Captain Hunt , his reason being that Visser is wearing Captain Hunt's uniform. Morant authorizes that Visser be shot on the spot for this. Drummond was one of those who accused Morant of having allowed the execution of Visser without a fair trial. Major Thomas establishes clearly that some of those who had been disciplined were now witnesses for the prosecution. He is suggesting that their evidence is unfair.

Morant gives evidence. He reveals that he was engaged to be married to Hunt's sister in England. He claims that Hunt was mutilated. He puts forward his main argument which was that although he did indeed have that Boer prisoner shot for killing Captain Hunt , he was acting under Rule 303 according to which one shot as many of the enemy as possible. He raises his voice greatly for which Thomas criticizes him on the grounds that his flashes of temper are helpful to the prosecution.

Captain Alfred Taylor was a member of the Bushveldt Carbineers and gives evidence on Morant's behalf. Taylor calls Morant impulsive but says he is a good soldier. Taylor also claims to have known Captain Hunt well. But his most important statement is that there were orders from the very top , i. e. Lord Kitchener himself , to execute Boer prisoners. The judge and Major Bolton counter that these orders were not written and consequently irrelevant. Thomas argues strongly that

the precedent is indeed relevant , but is overruled. Bolton is able to establish that Taylor is shortly to be court martialed himself for killing Boer prisoners , which means that his word on Kitchener's orders cannot be trusted.

The court martial is interrupted by a Boer attack on the prison and court itself. The three Australian defendants take part in the battle to repel the attackers. Because of this Major Thomas argues that they should be pardoned , but the British Judge Denny refuses this outright.

Despite the interruption , it becomes very important to test whether Kitchener himself acknowledges having issued unwritten orders that killing Boer prisoners was legitimate. Major Thomas requests that Kitchener be asked to attend the court room. Of course the judge refuses , but Thomas proves that indeed anybody can be asked to give evidence.

The British prosecutor Bolton tries to persuade Thomas to withdraw the request for Kitchener to attend the trial. He makes it obvious that the various governments want the Australians condemned because that is in the interests of the British imperial side in the Boer war.

Kitchener refuses to go to the court but instead sends a senior officer named Colonel Ian Hamilton , who , as instructed , lies blatantly to the court about Kitchener's intentions. In fact the judge has no intention of believing Thomas's claim that Kitchener had given orders to kill Boer prisoners.

Mr Hess is the German missionary whom Handcock is accused of having killed. He was passing by as the crisis over the Boer prisoners was erupting. He is accused of disobeying orders not to speak to the Boer prisoners , but responds that he did so because the Boers are religious men and he could not refuse to pray for them.

As the issue of Hess's murder comes before the court , Corporal

Sharp , who was on sentry duty the day Hess was killed , gives evidence that Hancock was very agitated at the time. Hancock reveals to Thomas that he made promises to two women friends , who happened to be Boers , not to reveal what had happened. Hancock tells the court that he was on very good terms with two Boer women and went to visit them just after the time that Hess was killed. There is a flashback showing his relations with the two , which the Judge describes as “ intimate ”. Thomas presents written depositions from both the Boer women that they had seen him just after he was supposed to have killed the German missionary.

Hancock admits to Witton and Morant that he has in fact killed the missionary , but will not reveal this , even to Thomas. Witton is very shocked at this deceit , which he thinks is dishonourable , but Hancock and Morant declare that they are not the only ones who are lying and that this is a “ new kind of war for a new century ” , one in which the enemy include not only soldiers but also women , and even missionaries. They were convinced that Hess was actively helping the Boers.

In his final summation of the defence case , Thomas puts to the court that Witton has nothing to answer for , other than that he shot a Boer in self-defence. He argues that the Boer war is different from any previous type of war and that this justifies a new type of defence. He says that good soldiers should not be accused of murder just because they obey orders. Thomas declares that “ soldiers at war are not to be judged by civilian rules , as the prosecution is attempting to do ”. He emphasizes that guerilla war brings the whole dilemma about the rules of war and obedience to orders into particularly sharp focus. He argues that it is not possible to judge the actions of the three defendants unless one has been in a situation similar to theirs.

As the three accused drink together after Thomas's main speech in their defence, Morant and Hancock repeat that they believe themselves to have been fighting in a bad cause. Witton is again shocked by this. Morant recites a poem by Byron.

It is announced that Hancock has been officially acquitted of the charge of murdering Hess. Although Hancock expresses delight, that is not the end of the matter. Captain Taylor offers Morant a means of escape from prison, but he declines.

They return one by one to the court to hear the verdicts. The judge declares to Witton that he has been found guilty of murder and sentenced to death, but that Kitchener has commuted the sentence to penal servitude for life. Morant and Hancock are both told that they have been found guilty and sentenced to death.

Thomas storms in a fury to see Kitchener with the aim of trying to have the verdicts reversed, but is told by Colonel Hamilton that the death warrants have already been signed. Kitchener refuses absolutely to see him. Cynically Hamilton describes the whole affair as "a side-show of the war", adding that there is a peace conference in the offing. "Soon we can all go home".

Hancock writes a letter to his wife, saying that he believes he has done his duty by his country and his God. He writes "Australia for ever" prominently on the outside of the letter.

In the last scene Morant declares to Witton that they have been made scapegoats for the war. Morant asks Thomas to get his last poem published, just as he is led off for execution. Both Morant and Hancock refuse to see a priest on the grounds that they are pagans, which Morant defines as somebody who does not believe in a divine spirit dispensing justice to mankind. "This is what comes of empire-building" is Morant's comment on the whole affair. "Shoot straight you bas-

tards. Don't make a mess of it ,” he says as his last words before dying.

Witton served only three years of his sentence and was released. He returned to Australia and wrote a book called “ Scapegoats of Empire ”. Major Thomas later became a lawyer in Tenterfield in Northern New South Wales and died in 1945.

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### Words and expressions you need to know :

bastard—a person whose parents are not married ; often used in Aus-

tralian slang , sometimes quite affectionate , but usually insulting

breaker—a person who breaks in horses. Young horses usually require

“ breaking in ” before they will allow people to ride on their backs

colonel—a senior officer in the British army , or armies modeled on the British

commandoes—guerilla fighters

corporal —a very junior rank , below officer , in the British army , or armies modeled on the British

court martial—prosecution or law case in the military

defendant—in law the person who is accused or prosecuted

lieutenant—a junior officer in the British army , or armies modeled on the British

major—an officer in the British army , or armies modeled on the British ; in rank major is between lieutenant and colonel

mutilate—to cut off limbs or disfigure a body in some way

penal servitude—imprisonment with hard labour

prosecute —to accuse someone of a crime in front of a law court

scapegoat—a person bearing blame due to others

sideshow— a minor performance attached to the main show

warrant—a formal legal document authorizing legal action , such as death warrant or warrant for arrest

### Topics for discussion :

1. What are the problems involved in the case of Breaker Morant ?
2. Do you think the whole trial is a charade ? Give your reasons.
3. Discuss the characters of Breaker Morant , Peter Handcock and George Witton. In what ways do they deserve or not deserve their sentence ?
4. What do you think of Lord Kitchener ? Is he wrong in his handling of the Breaker Morant case ?
5. Discuss the use of flashbacks in the film. Would you tell the story differently ? Why ?
6. What are some examples of irony in the film ?

## Unit 3

### Anti-authoritarianism and Sympathy for the Underdog

Australians favour the sorts of heroes who dare to resist authority and take the law into their own hands or those who can be viewed in some way as underdogs. The bush is regarded as the cradle of the 'dinkum Aussie' heroes. Ned Kelly (1855-1880), who had three glorious years of defiance of law and order, embodied the sentiments, values and aspirations that the bush people believed they were fighting for. He was so brave that within a decade of his death a new idiom had been added to the Australian language—'as game as Ned Kelly'.

Few people who have visited Australia have not heard Australians sing *Waltzing Matilda* which means taking to the road with your swag (bed roll and other bare essentials). The song celebrates the fate of a swaggie who has been caught by troopers in illegal possession of a sheep and, in an act of defiance, jumps into a 'billabong' (the ana-branch of a river). He is said to have drowned himself rather than bowing to authority. The song is not their national anthem, but most Australians treat it as if it were. In moments of national pride, they burst into the refrain, forgetting what their real anthem is.

Anti-authoritarianism can also be seen in the kind of attitude many Australians have towards the police and army officers. Brawls often erupt at football matches and race meetings between the police and public. Politicians and government officials are distrusted and the

police are often hated , as exemplified in the news report of a driver who failed to give right-of-way at an intersection to an off-duty policeman and was forced to pull up. When the policeman revealed who he was , the driver jumped out of his car , shouted at the policeman , knocked the constable unconscious and drove off !

Some of the best films produced in the last decade exhibit the varied manifestations of this anti-authoritarian image. Captain Starlight , the hero of Donald Crombie's *Robbery Under Arms* , is greatly admired for his daring disregard for the laws. Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* presents the British in a poor light. They are either stupid types like the mounted officers in Cairo , whom the Australians mock with cries of ' Tally ho ! Tally ho ! After the fox ? ' or the chilly upper-class officers at Gallipoli itself where , it is said , with perhaps dubious accuracy , the British used the Australians as cannon fodder. The British are described as ' sitting on the beach and drinking tea ' . The anti-British , anti-boss attitudes ( in a war in which the British are the bosses ) are clearly revealed in the film.

Along with anti-authoritarianism , Australians often have an instinctive sympathy with the underdog. Films such as Crombie's *Caddie* and *Robbery Under Arms* offer sympathetic accounts of those who find themselves at odds with the times they live in or with the prevailing hegemony. *Caddie* , deserted and Depression-hit mother of two , is described as a true battler in her efforts to deal with the vicissitudes of her life. Crombie has a real sympathy for the underprivileged , and , in *Robbery Under Arms* that sympathy is quite apparent in the treatment of the Marston brothers and their families. In Australia , the battler is now almost a figure of myth. It is generally believed that those who contend with adversity are the ones who display genuine Australian characteristics.

## Robbery Under Arms

Main characters :

Captain Starlight ( the hero )

Dick Marston

Jim Marston

Ben Marston ( the father of the Marston brothers )

Warrigal ( Starlight's Aboriginal partner )

Aileen ( Ben Marston's daughter )

Gracey Storefield ( Dick's girlfriend )

George Storefield ( Gracey's brother )

Goring ( the police superintendent )

Sir Ferdinand Morringer

Kate Morrison

Jeannie Morrison

Donald Crombie's *Robbery Under Arms* is one of the biggest films ever produced in Australia. It tells the true story of the legendary and daring bushranger—Captain Starlight. Starlight is the renegade of a noble English family with a taste for fine wine, romance and other men's cattle as well as a talent for robbery under arms. Aided by the two brothers, Dick and Jim Marston, their father Ben, and Starlight's Aboriginal partner Warrigal, they set out on a trail of adventure and action that takes them through many parts of Australia, mostly in defiance of the law.

The film begins with a train robbery by Starlight and Warrigal.

Thinking there is another train on the track , the engine driver brakes suddenly to avoid the crash , but it is too late. However , the obstacle the train collides with turns out to be a mirror Starlight and Warrigal had deliberately set up to stop the train. Warrigal jumps onto the train when it comes to an abrupt stop. With a gun in his hand he threatens to kill the passengers if they refuse to give up their valuables. Starlight who disguises himself as an English gentleman is already on the train. He pretends to be forced by Warrigal to take the collection. Then with the valuables they jump off the train and go back to their secret hide-out to celebrate their successful “ outing ”. From there , the film cuts quickly to an open field , where Dick , Jim and a farmer called McIntyre are fighting with each other for fun. Then comes along Mr Falkland , the district s magistrate. Provoked by Falkland Dick knocks him down and starts running back home. Back at home they find the police are looking for their father Ben , who is accused of stealing cattle. Goring , the police superintendent , wants the Marston brothers to help the police to find Starlight , but they refuse to do so , because they secretly admire Starlight , whom they look up to as a hero , not as a wanted criminal. Then Dick goes to see his girlfriend Gracey. They often quarrel even though they are head over heels in love with each other. Gracey s brother George wants Dick to stop wandering about and settle down as soon as possible.

Dick and Jim are excellent farm workers and can fence and ride and cope with all aspects of country life. They go astray because of their father , who tells them to brand some cattle he has duffed ( stolen ).

In Terrible Hollow , the hidden valley where Starlight s gang get together the huge herd of duffed cattle , Dick and Jim are introduced to Starlight by their father. Before they join the gang , Starlight asks them

to think hard first. " It's a criminal world , " he says to them , " there's no returning once the borders have been crossed. " Dick is still undecided. Finally a decision is made by a toss of a coin.

Next the film shows Starlight and his gang driving the cattle from New South Wales down to Adelaide to sell them at the auction. There Starlight again passes himself off as a rich English gentleman under the assumed name of Carisforth. He manages to sell the herd of stolen cattle for the highest price he could wish. In Adelaide , Dick and Jim meet the sisters , Kate and Jeannie Morrison and they are immediately attracted by the girls.

After the auction , the gang divide up their spoils and part company. Dick and Jim decide to wash their hands of the whole business and turn over a new leaf. On their way home , Dick reads about " the biggest cattle theft in history " in the newspaper and learns that the police are after them. As for their relationship with the girls , Dick wants to finish with Kate because he is still in love with Gracey , but Jim takes his affair with Jeannie quite seriously.

Back at home Dick and Jim are soon joined by their father , from whom they learn that Starlight has been captured by the police but that Warrigal is still at large. Ben suggests that they should go to Terrible Hollow immediately. Dick refuses to do so , saying that he would like to start a new life. " We'll give it all back , every penny. We are not criminals. " Ben thinks it is too late. " We were damned the day we left Hollow , " he says to Dick.

It is Christmas day. When they go back from the church service , they find the police are waiting for them inside the house. Dick is captured and sentenced to five years in Berrima Gaol , along with Starlight. However , Dick manages to run away with another convict , who is later shot dead by the police.

After Ben , Dick , Jim and Warrigal help Starlight escape from prison , Aileen , Dick s sister , out of sympathy , nurses him back to health and he falls in love with her.

In the next sequence , we see Starlight and his gang bushranging along the highway. However , the news of the discovery of gold eventually seduces Dick , Jim and Starlight to Dusty Creek , where they have some success as miners. On the goldfields they meet Kate and Jeannie again. Jim and Jeannie get married there. Kate , however , has married , but unhappily , and runs a hotel on the goldfields. She tries to seduce Dick. However , when she discovers Dick s love for Gracey , she betrays the brothers. Jim is captured but rescued by Dick , Ben and Starlight.

Back at their secret hideout , they embark on a second series of bushranging adventures.

First , we see the gang robbing a coach which goes down to Sydney with ten to twelve thousand ounces of gold. Dick , Jim and Starlight have always been conscious of impending doom. They would get out of the bushranging life if they could , cross the sea to America and begin again. Not so the boys father , old Ben , who is an ex-convict with scars on his soul , as well as on his back , and a grudge against the world for the injustices he has suffered. Warrigal , Starlight s devoted Aboriginal partner , is at one with the country he lives in , as even native-born bushmen like Dick and Jim can never be. When he learns that Starlight and the Marston brothers plan to go to America , he shouts :“ I belong here. ”“ If I go to America , I will die there , away from my own place. ”

Next the gang set out on a big bank robbery to get money before they head for Queensland , the first stop on their way to America. Here we see Starlight dancing with Aileen in the presence of the Police

Commissioner , while the police under Sir Ferdinand Morringer are looking for him elsewhere. When the people are enjoying a fireworks display outside , Starlight and his gang succeed in getting into the bank. With explosives they open the safe and take all the money.

The next scene is the Falkland Cup ( a horserace ) which Starlight says he must win as he has promised to his horse Rainbow and he wants the Cup as a wedding present for Aileen.

En route to Queensland , Starlight is to meet Dick and Jim at the border bridge between New South Wales and Queensland , but they are betrayed by Warrigal who wants Starlight to get away safe. It is already too late when Starlight catches up with Dick and Jim and tells them that it is a trap. In the ensuing battle with the police , Starlight and Jim are killed and Goring is also killed.

Then the film shifts quickly to Berrima Gaol , where Dick is serving his sentence. Actually Dick is released from gaol twelve years later on account of his good conduct while in gaol. When he gets back home , he finds Gracey still there. When she sees Dick , she runs forward and throws herself into his arms. Dick marries Gracey and at last achieves what he and his companions lives have symbolised but never achieved—freedom.

In Robbery Under Arms , the Marston brothers and Starlight , are , despite their misdeeds , good men gone wrong. They are thoroughly decent characters who would never do anything dastardly like shooting a man in cold blood or molesting a woman. Starlight is a double exile , outlawed like Dick and Jim not only from ordinary blameless life , but also far removed , for some never-to-be revealed misdemeanour , from his aristocratic English birthright. The Marston brothers have a strong sense of independence. They go wrong almost by chance , helping their father brand some cattle he has duffed. On several occasions ,

Dick tries to give up bushranging and start a new life , but circumstances always force him to go on.

The film has a real affection for Starlight and the Marston brothers , who are accorded near-mythic status as they take the laws into their own hands. There is a Robin Hoodish element in the film which evokes sympathy as these characters defy the rich and powerful , but it is their daring disregard for the laws which distinguishes them as Australian folk heroes. It is this anti-authoritarian image that makes the film so appealing to the Australian audiences.

Played out against a backdrop of the Colonies during the rollicking gold rush years , Robbery Under Arms features breathtaking outback scenery superbly captured on film by noted local directors Ken Hannam and Donald Crombie. This major motion picture , in the tradition of The Man from Snowy River , is nothing less than an Australian classic.

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Words and expressions you need to know :

a chucky on the horse—an Aborigine riding on the horseback  
marauder—a person who is moving around in search of something to  
steal , burn or destroy

black heathen—a black who is regarded as wild and uncivilized  
cheeky—impudent , rude

hold-up —a delay of traffic or an attempt at robbery by threatening  
people with a gun

troopers —policemen

pinch—to steal

game enough to take anybody on —brave enough to fight with anybody

Rainbow—Starlight's favourite horse

till the drought breaks—till the drought comes to an end

head over heels —completely

sneak—to go quietly and secretly so as not to be seen

cattle duffing—illegal theft and trading in the cattle industry

Pom—an Englishman

Terrible Hollow—a hidden valley where Starlight and his gang go into hiding

Drongo—a stupid person

marinade—a mixture of oil , wine and vinegar in which meat or fish is kept before cooking to make it tender and give it a special taste

outside chance—a slight chance

money-grubber—a person who is devoted entirely to the making of money

gold nugget—a small rough lump of gold found in the earth

squatter—( formerly ) a person who settled on Crown land to run stock , usually sheep , without legal title

make a rendezvous—to meet at a certain time and place

No one dies in my place—I don't want anyone to sacrifice his life for my sake

hunter—a hunter

### Topics for discussion :

1. What sort of person is Starlight ?

Why is he so admired by the Marston brothers ?

2. How would you comment on the character of the Marston brothers ?

3. Discuss the relationship between Ben , the father , and his sons.

4. Why are Starlight and the Marston brothers accorded near-mythic status in the film ?

- Does the positive treatment of Starlight and his gang in the film show us anything about Australian national characteristics ?
5. what do the gold-digging scenes suggest about life in the Australian outback during the gold-rushes ?
  6. Discuss the characters of the Morrison sisters. In what ways are they different from each other ?

## Caddie

Main characters :

Caddie ( the heroine )

John Marsh ( Caddie's husband )

Terry and Ann ( their children )

Esther ( John's lover )

The SP bookie ( one of Caddie's customers )

Peter ( a Greek Australian )

Donald Crombie's *Caddie* ( 1976 ) is based on the autobiography of a Sydney barmaid. Caddie is married to a middle-class man called John Marsh and they have two small children , Terry and Ann. But she is deserted by her husband who has an affair with her best friend Esther. Caddie is told to leave her children behind but she refuses. In order to support them she gets a job in a Sydney bar. During the 1930s Depression , she has great difficulties in making a decent living. She travels downward socially through Sydney blue-collar life. En route she falls in love with a handsome Greek Australian and goes through some very hard times. The film *Caddie* is essentially a story of

a female Aussie “ battler ” , an underdog who keeps hanging in there against all the odds.

The film begins with a quarrel between Caddie and her husband. John tells her to go without the children , but she says she will take the children and work to support them.

Caddie is a strong-minded woman. She goes into the city with almost no money. She rents a very dirty room for 12 shillings a week and finds a woman , Mrs. Platt , to look after the children so she can go out to work.

She gets a job as a barmaid at two pounds ten shillings a week with a rise of ten shillings when she is experienced. Then the film shifts to introduce Caddie s first day at work as a barmaid. It is the first time in her life that she has set foot in a bar. She has immediately to get used to the bad language and the dirty stories male customers tell in front of barmaids. These are still the days of the dreadful “ six o clock swill ” at closing time , and a barmaid has to learn how to be popular with the customers while keeping them at a distance. Caddie is like a kid at a new school and soon becomes a popular barmaid.

She is initially christened Caddie by one of her customers at the bar. The man is a local SP bookie , a person whose job is to take bets risked on the results of competitions , especially horse races. When she asks him why he calls her Caddie , he points to a very big car standing in the street. He says he has just bought an eight-cylinder Cadillac , a superior brand of motor car. “ You remind me of my car , ” he says , “ you are my Cadillac , beauty and class. ” In this context “ class ” means “ a stylish quality , for example , in clothes or social behaviour , that attracts admiration ”.

Caddie has to cope with all the problems of being a single mother. Moreover , Mrs Platt turns out to be a horror. As fate always seems

to kick anyone who is already down , so Ann falls sick and almost dies. She suffers from diphtheria and must be hospitalised. But finally she comes through the operation.

The SP bookie invites Caddie for a drive in his new car. He tells her that he is in love with her and wants to marry her. However , soon she discovers that he is already having an affair with another woman , so she refuses him.

A few years later , Caddie happens to meet a Greek called Peter who is engaged in clothes making business. He falls in love with her and is very kind both to her and her children. Although it is clear that she and Peter love each other , it is several months before they go to bed together , and it will obviously be many years before they can both be divorced and marry as Peter s wife is still living in Greece. It so happens that Peter s father is very ill in Greece and he has to go there to help out in the family business. Before he leaves , Peter promises to be back as soon as he can.

Meanwhile in Australia the Great Depression strikes and many people are unemployed. Caddie has a hard time , too. Like many other blue-collar workers in the city , she has to go on the dole. She falls ill through malnutrition and nervous exhaustion. However , her working-class friends take care of her to tide over the crisis. They look after the kids and find enough money to buy the medicine for her.

The Child Welfare Department will not officially allow her to take a job , so she becomes an SP bookie too. As she remarks , there is money in those sorts of activities whereas there is little in honest toil.

One day Caddie happens to meet Esther in the bar. She looks very ill. She tells her that John left her years ago and that she has been in the sanatorium twice because she has had TB. She envies Caddie for what she has done during these years.

Three years go by. Caddie continues to get letters from Peter in Greece. He tells her that his divorce is through but that he cannot leave his business for a while yet. He wants her to go to Greece. He says he will send the fare and enough money to put the kids to school. When her divorce is through, they can get married. However, Caddie cannot go to Greece and leave her children behind because her former husband could claim custody of the children, or bring them with her to Greece. Under Australian law the husband's permission was necessary before they could go overseas. It is still one more year till her divorce will go through.

A year later, Caddie gets a letter from Peter saying he is coming back to Australia. The film seems set for a happy ending. There is indeed a happy reunion, but the day before they are to be married, Peter is killed in a car accident. Caddie is fated never to have an easy life.

However, Caddie is anything but a bleak film. It portrays the heroine sympathetically as she braves the swirl of the Sydney pub and the rigours of Depression poverty. The film shows the Depression as a time not only of bitterness and poverty but also of conditions favouring mutual support and the enshrinement of the "Aussie battler" image.

\* \* \* \* \*

Words and expressions you need to know :

Madam Melba—one of Australia's foremost sopranos ( 1861—1931 ) ;

used in this case to describe a person who is acting as if she were better than Melba

toff—a person of the well-dressed, wealthy upper class

brat—a child, but particularly an impudent one

‘ Here s looking up your kilt ’—an expression used like “ cheers ”  
when one drinks

ladies parlour—in the past men and women were not allowed to drink  
together in the pub ; women could drink only in the ladies parlour ,  
a separate room in the pub

six oclock swill—a session of heavy drinking , often hurried , just be-  
fore the pub closed at six oclock

S. P. bookie—a starting price bookmaker who was engaged in illegal  
gambling by accepting bets of others off the race course ; now it has  
been legalised but is government-owned

the best Yank job on the market—the best American-made car on the  
market

coppers—policemen

“ Ill put the kybosh on you ”—“ Ill make it bad for you ”  
quicker in the pick-up—quicker to understand the situation  
old man—husband

knock around with someone —to go out with someone  
old people—parents

have a heart—to be kind , reasonable or sympathetic  
on the level , fair dinkum , dinky-di—honest and straight  
sly grog—illegally brewed and sold beer

two-up—an illegal gambling game , consisting of throwing two coins in  
the air and betting whether they will land two heads or two tails  
put the hard word on someone—ask someone to have sex  
lav—lavatory , toilet

“ I went to a woman and got fixed up ”—this refers to an illegal or  
‘ backyard ’ abortion

hag—a repulsive , often malicious old woman

“ I was four months gone ”— four months pregnant

maulers—hands

lay off—to stop harassing ; in this case , stop being involved with  
feel a bit of a goat—to feel like a fool

slut—a term of abuse for a woman , usually a promiscuous woman  
cut it out—to stop talking nonsense

chooks—chickens

gold-digger—a woman who uses her physical attributes to wheedle  
money out of men

four sheets to the wind—somewhat drunk

Plimsoll line—a line on a ship above which one must not load cargo ,  
colloquially , refers to the manufacturer's label on the beer glass

tick—a second , a very short time

Buckleys—little hope , very poor chance

Valentino—from Rudolf Valentino , a famed ladies man

“ Here s to our wives and sweethearts. May they never meet ”—this  
implies that although married , these men also have a lover or mis-  
tress on the side

go the whole hog—to go the full way ; in this case , to having sexual  
relations

Someone else will get his thing in the air—someone else will excite  
him sexually

moon after—to be in love with

frump—a dowdy and unattractive woman

rag trade—clothes making business

buck-up —something to make a person feel better

smart alecs —people too clever for themselves

take to the bottle—to become an alcoholic

period—the time of menstruation

“ If it was raining gravy , we d be the ones having forks ”—a typical

Australian irony , meaning they are always unlucky , because you  
can't catch gravy with a fork  
get the boot—to be discharged  
go on the dole—to receive money from the government because one is  
unemployed  
bottler—something really good  
cut the comedy—men are typically shy of compliments and this ex-  
pression means ' stop embarrassing me '  
learn the ropes—to learn what to do  
go off—to get arrested  
squeal—to tell the police

### Topics for discussion :

1. Describe the character of Caddie.

What are the qualities in her that enable her to battle against heavy odds ?

2. What have you noticed in the film that can be regarded as signs of the effects of the 1930 Depression in Australia ?
3. What does the film tell us about the position of the single woman in Australian society in the 1930s ? Does this issue still have any relevance to Australian society today ?
4. Give examples of how the 1930 Depression also creates conditions favouring mutual support among working class people.
5. Discuss the relationship between men and women in 1930 Australia. In what way has it changed today ? Or has it remained the same ?
6. What do you think of the ending of the film ?  
Would you prefer a happy ending ? Give your reasons.

# Unit 4

## Pride and National Innocence

Australians are proud of their country. They are proud of being Australian. Some people even regard Australia as ' the best place in the world to live in '. Writing in the Bulletin in October 1989 , Governor-General Bill Hayden remarked that ' Australia is one of the freest , most tolerant and open societies anywhere. Couple that with general living standards , lifestyle , climate and environment and I cannot think of any country that equals it , let alone surpasses it. ' Whether this is true or not is still open to discussion , but there is good reason to believe that most Australians do love their country and that they are optimistic about their future.

This sense of optimism is reflected in many Australian films such as *The Man from Snowy River* , *Phar Lap* , and *We of the Never Never*. These films all glow with a sense of national pride and innocence , with the young heroes confronting authority in various forms and overcoming it. These films lay emphasis on the characters moral search for identity and purity. They are opposed by the family in *The Man from Snowy River* , by criminals in *Phar Lap* or by hardship and isolation in *We of the Never Never* , but these films are mostly optimistic about the possibility of resolving such conflicts.

Soon after it was released in 1982 , *The Man from Snowy River* became the No. 1 box office movie in Australia , breaking all records set by any previous Australian film , and holding that record until the

release of *Crocodile Dundee* in 1986. As Geoff Burrows , the producer , and George Miller ( no relation to the George Miller of *Mad Max* ) , the films director , explained in an interview , the film is “ a love letter to the mountains. . . to Australia ”. They also cited the reaction of an Adelaide audience that clapped at the end when the hero Jim brought the horses back : “ Because the film is intrinsically Australian , it is socially and culturally specific to Australia , when Jim wins , Australia wins. ” Some girls at the Perth première reported that the film had made them proud to be Australian. In the Queensland city of Rockhampton , a young police constable drove 110 kilometres to take his girlfriend to see the film in a drive-in—his fourth viewing of the film , her first. They left before the second film so that his experience of the film was not cluttered by another film. As Tom O Regan , a well-known film critic , puts it , the film was so popular in Australia because many of the concerns of the film such as feminism , animal liberation , ecology and country mobility had a contemporary resonance at the time of its release in 1982.

By the end of the film , Jim , the hero , has done what he has got to do. He has found the colt that killed his father. Spur says to his brother Harrison : “ He s not a lad , brother ; he s a man. ” “ The Man from Snowy River ” , intones Clancy , as the soundtrack strikes up “ *Waltzing Matilda* ”. This final scene cleverly combines the manhood of a boy with the nationhood of a country. It is this sense of national pride that the film emphasises that makes it so attractive to Australian audiences.

Simon Wincer s *Phar Lap* celebrates Australia s most famous racehorse ( born in New Zealand ) which died in America in 1932 after acquiring a legendary name as underdog-turned-hero in Australian sporting annals. It is a de facto sequel to *The Man from Snowy River* with

Tom Burlinson again in a lead role and Simon Wincer as the co-director who has been co-producer on *The Man from Snowy River*. As in *The Man from Snowy River*, the main theme in *Phar Lap* is pride and national innocence. This is shown in Tommy Woodcock's devoted love for *Phar Lap*, and also considered in terms of the difficulties of people keeping their integrity when confronted by success. Other traditional Australian stories like the Anzac legend in Gallipoli, focus on losing bravely, but *Phar Lap's* emphasis is on winning. Like Jim in *The Man from Snowy River*, Tommy in *Phar Lap* is also initiated into manhood through his confrontations with Davis in the United States over how *Phar Lap* should be trained.

There is another important theme to the film's story as well. The success of *Phar Lap*, and his owners Telford and Davis, is distasteful to the narrow-minded, in-bred elite members of the Victorian Racing Club that controls the sport. They try to change the club rules to make it impossible for *Phar Lap* to win. They force the horse to carry a greater weight than any horse before has been handicapped with. After this causes his defeat in the Cup, the class antagonism between the ordinary people at the track and the upper class people in the club boxes is shown vividly. This theme of an outside force as a threat to personal innocence and integrity is restated in some of the film's scenes in the United States. However, despite the threats from older, established social forces *Phar Lap* becomes a hero. *Phar Lap* is not just a prize-winning horse; like Jim in *The Man from Snowy River*, *Phar Lap* is the symbol of Australian national identity and many Australians are proud of being part of it.

# The Man from Snowy River

Main characters :

Jim Craig ( the hero )

Henry Craig ( Jims father )

Harrison ( a rich cattle breeder )

Jessica ( Harrison s daughter )

Spur ( Harrison s brother )

Clancy of the Overflow ( the legendary Australian horseman that the original Banjo Patterson poem centres on )

Jessica s aunt

George Miller s *The Man from Snowy River* is based on a very famous Australian poem of the same name by A. B. Paterson. The original poem is about the search for an escaped colt. It illustrates the sense of plain nobility and courage that the legendary Australian bushman has personified. However , the film adds a contemporary element with its plot about family relationships and romance.

The film begins with a brief , warm scene between Jim and his father. They live in the mountain reaches of interior New South Wales , where they are looked down on by other local people as being crazy hillbilly types. Shortly after the film begins , Jims father is killed in a logging accident caused by a herd of wild horses. One of them is a wild stallion which Jim had persuaded his father not to shoot. After his father s death , Jim is hunted off his father s land in the mountains and is told by the other mountain men not to return to the mountains until

he redeems himself. They believe that Jims carelessness was responsible for the accident.

Jim's father's partner is called Spur, a funny, crazy old miner who has been looking for gold for twenty years and remains convinced of finding it tomorrow. With the death of Jim's father, Spur becomes a surrogate father to Jim, giving him a horse of his own to go on his quest. "A man without a horse," Spur says, "is like a man without legs." As Spur is one-legged himself, this is amusing, but it also draws attention to the central role of horses in Jim's quest.

Next we see Jim in a nearby town looking for work. There he happens on Harrison unloading his new, expensive colt from a railcar. He offers to help when he sees Harrison's daughter Jessica struggling with the colt, but she rudely rejects the offer.

The film briefly shifts to introduce Clancy of the Overflow, a kind of hero image in Australian mythology. Clancy has come to visit Spur and learns about the death of Jim's father. The main theme is then taken up again with Jim approaching Harrison for a job on his cattle station. Harrison is a rich, powerful American who has lived in the district for a long time and runs his property with a rod of iron.

As Jim has helped in controlling the colt earlier, Harrison gives him a job but quickly makes it clear that he sees Jim's mountain background as a character stain. At the first sign of romantic interest Jessica shows for Jim, Harrison does his best to destroy the relationship. Jim's new job is also made difficult by the hostile reception he gets from some of his fellow stockmen.

Then Clancy arrives at Harrison's station. At a dinner party with Harrison, Jessica and her aunt, he criticises Harrison for his ambitions to develop the mountain country. Clancy shows great concern about the environmental consequences of Harrison's ambitions. He dis-

likes Harrison's remarks against the " mongrel qualities " of the mountain people and asks him of his brother's whereabouts. Harrison flatly denies he has a brother , but events soon prove him to be lying.

When Jim is left behind while Harrison and the other men go mustering , the romance between him and Jessica catches fire. Jessica does not want to become a lady or take her piano lessons , while Jim is angry about being left out of the muster. Both Jim and Jessica have lost their mothers. Jim's mother had died and Jessica had never known hers. Their shared frustration at following Harrison's orders leads them to rebel. Jessica encourages Jim to " break in " the new , expensive colt. He is succeeding when the same wild black stallion and herd of brumbies involved in the death of his father reappear , this time nearly killing Jim.

When Harrison finds out that the precious colt has been ridden , he is furious and demands to know from Jessica what has happened. Jessica tells him but defends Jim's actions. Harrison responds by dismissing Jim and ordering Jessica to go to a boarding school. When she refuses , he brutally strikes her on the face and shouts at her , saying she is as deceitful as her mother.

Jessica rides out after Jim to warn him what has happened. In the process she runs into a storm and is thrown from her horse , falling part way down a cliff. Jim finds the horse and knows she is in danger , but eventually saves her. The two fall in love. Jessica declares she will not return home , but Jim says he must finish his present job , that is , bring home the cattle , before leaving Harrison's employment.

So far the relationship between Harrison and Spur has remained a mystery to us. Actually they are brothers who once loved the same woman , Jessica's mother , Matilda. Matilda could not decide which suitor she should take , so , in true fairy-tale tradition , she decided she

would marry the first one to make his fortune. Harrison gambled luckily on a horse and won , while Spur went looking for gold and never found it. Later , when Spur gave Matilda a new colt as a wedding present , Harrison became so jealous that Spur had to turn the colt loose to save it. Catching Spur in the act , and suspecting Spur of having an affair with his wife , Harrison shot Spur , resulting in the amputation of his leg. The stallion that now leads the brumbies was actually the colt Spur originally gave to Matilda.

At last Spur finds gold. Jim and Jessica come past on the way back. Jessica thus meets Spur for the first time and discovers that he is her uncle and was in love with her mother. Spur takes her home while Jim returns to bring back the cattle. Harrison finds out that Jim has saved his daughter , but he is furious to learn also that Jim is in love with Jessica. At this moment , Spur comes in. When Jessica finds out what had happened between her father and Spur , she is furious with her father.

Harrison's fears concerning Jessica are a replay of his earlier fear of losing her mother. He obsessively dwells on the idea that Jessica is not really his daughter—even though she is—but Spur's. The fairy tale , however , comes to a happy ending , when Spur finally tells Harrison that his fears are groundless.

Jim leaves after a fight with most of the other men , who are jealous of him , and they set loose the colt which Jim had broken in. Jim joins Spur and Clancy in the mountains. Clancy invites Jim to help find the colt again , which has joined the wild horses , and after refusing several times , Jim finally agrees. A large group of men go off to recover the colt , including both Jim and Clancy. Harrison offers a reward of á 100 —if the colt is recovered. Of course it is Jim who , amid extreme danger , succeeds. He recovers the colt , defeats the

black stallion and earns the right to return to live in the mountains.

Harrison offers the á 100 to Jim , who refuses it but says he will later return to claim the mares which can reproduce more horses. He intends to make money from horses too. Jessica bids him good-bye , but the relationship between her and Jim is accepted by Harrison and they seem destined to marry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Words and expressions you need to know :

nought—zero

high country—hilly land on mountain approaches used for pastoral purposes

hire out—to give the use of one's services for payment

Bessie—the name of a mare ( female horse )

thoroughbred—( an animal , esp. a horse ) descended from parents of one very good breed

spur—a length of high ground coming out from a range of higher mountains

brumbies — wild horses

Old Regret—the name of the cattle station owned by Harrison

colt—a young male horse

Andrew Patterson—the well-known Australian poet who wrote the poem The Man from Snowy River

wallaby—a small Australian animal related to the kangaroo

get the hang of something—to learn how to do something

claim—a piece of public land to which formal claim is made for mining or other purposes

trifle—a British dish made of plain cakes set in fruit and jelly covered

with cream

have a way with horses—to have an attractive quality which pleases horses

port—strong , sweet dark Portuguese wine , usually drunk after a meal  
mongrel —any animal resulting from the crossing of different breeds

break in —to teach a horse to obey

stick it out—to continue ; to endure

stallion—a fully-grown male horse kept for breeding

buck off—to throw off a rider by jumping up with all four feet off the ground

flare—something that provides a bright light out of doors , often used as a signal

dumb—stupid

### Topics for discussion :

1. What are the social issues that the film deals with ?

Do they have any relevance to Australian society today ?

2. What is the family history of Harrison and Spur ?

What do you know about Matilda , Jessica's mother ?

3. Why is Jim made to leave the mountains after his father's death ?

What is he told to do in order to earn his place in them ?

4. How does the romance between Jim and Jessica begin ?

What sort of girl is Jessica ?

5. At the end of the film , as the credits appear , Australia's unofficial national anthem , ' Waltzing Matilda ' is played. What does this final scene show ?

6. Discuss the unusual camera techniques used in the film , and how successful they are.

# Phar Lap

Main characters :

Phar Lap ( a race horse )

Dave Davis ( Phar Lap s owner )

Mrs Davis

Jim Pike ( a jockey who rides Phar Lap )

Harry Telford ( Phar Lap s owner )

Mrs Telford

Mr Lachlan McKinnon ( a famous trainer and business tycoon , very influential in racing circles )

Sir Samuel Hordern ( a famous trainer and influential in racing circles )

Tommy Woodcock

Emma ( Tommy s friend , later wife )

Simon Wincer s *Phar Lap* ( 1983 ) is based on a true story. Phar Lap is a big chestnut horse , which reigned as king of the turf in the Depression which gripped Australia of the 1930s. From humble beginnings the New Zealand bred horse raced on to become the hero of the nation. With fame comes envy , intrigue and danger including an attempt to kill the champion. On Melbourne Cup Day Phar Lap passed into history with yet another win. Phar Lap s fame spread to the United States. He won the Agua Caliente stakes , the world s richest race effortlessly , despite an injury. Success bred hatred. Only 16 days after the race Phar Lap is dead. Australia is in mourning. Phar Lap s death

remains a mystery but the legend remains.

The scene opens in California , April 1932 , with the big red Phar Lap being fed in a stable. As his trainer Tommy Woodcock sleeps , Phar Lap whines in apparent severe illness. The vet arrives quickly , but fails to save Phar Lap , who lies down and dies quite soon after , to the evident grief of his trainer.

The death of Phar Lap caused an enormous stir in Australia , with many people suspecting strongly that he had been deliberately poisoned in the U. S. .

The film begins at the end , showing the horse's death. From then on , it goes chronologically , beginning in Sydney in 1928 , with Phar Lap landing in Sydney from New Zealand. His owner is Dave Davis , but his trainer Harry Telford takes a lease on the horse. Davis has no faith at all in the horse , while Telford is convinced he will be a champion. Telford's wife does not share his confidence at first , and she puts a great deal of her own money into keeping the family while Phar Lap is still unsuccessful.

Harry Telford proves himself able to control Phar Lap , when nobody else can do so. He is named Phar Lap because in Persian that means ' lightning '.

Telford's strategy in training his horses is to work them extremely hard. One of the stable hands , Tommy Woodcock , thinks Phar Lap is being overworked. Harry Telford is very angry at the criticism and immediately gives Tommy the sack. However , later he gives him back his job as a stable hand.

Still Phar Lap does not do well and Davis sneers at him. Mrs Davis , his wife , on the other hand , is rather confident about his eventual success. Tommy tries another method to get Phar Lap to run fast , which is to hold him back at first and then give him his head. This

proves successful in an informal setting and becomes quite central to Phar Lap's style in later races.

Harry's wife takes in laundry to try and make money. Harry is furious at her because he finds it humiliating that she should behave like a servant for money. He still thinks that Phar Lap will become a champion, even though she says people are laughing at him because they don't think Phar Lap will ever be successful.

Harry offers a jockey called Jim Pike the chance to ride Phar Lap at the Derby, which is the name of a famous horse race in Sydney. At first he refuses. Dave Davis agrees to let Phar Lap ride in the Derby as long as his name is not used and Harry agrees that Phar Lap is to be sold if he does not win. As Davis and his wife enter the race-course to watch the race they meet Lachlan McKinnon and Sir Samuel Hordern, both of them very influential in racing circles. In particular, McKinnon is a famous trainer and, according to Davis, "practically runs racing" in Australia. McKinnon is clearly jealous of any rivalry to his own horses and openly sneers at Phar Lap. At the last minute Jim Pike agrees to ride Phar Lap. Against all expectations he makes up ground from last place and wins.

Dave Davis claims to have had absolute faith in Phar Lap from the beginning, which is actually not true. Telford gets £7135 for the victory, and although he has to give one-third of it to Davis, he is still richer than ever before. His wife still wants to buy a property with the money, which was an enormous sum in those days. But Harry Telford is now determined to persist and believes he knows more about training horses than anybody else in Australia.

Phar Lap continues to win race after race. McKinnon believes that Telford is putting too much pressure on him, but this is a view derived from jealousy.

Harry and his family move to Melbourne , where Harry says the main races and the main racing community live. He continues to trust himself as a horse-breeder and sets up a horse-breeding farm in the Melbourne property.

Harry brings Phar Lap to race in the Melbourne Cup , the most important horse race in Australia. In the meantime he finds that he is overdrawn at the bank. He is not particularly worried , because he is very confident that Phar Lap will win not only the Melbourne Cup but also the Caulfield Cup.

Davis has devised a plot to make money out of persuading Harry to withdraw Phar Lap from the Caulfield Cup. Harry initially refuses. He still has faith in himself as a trainer , believing not only that Phar Lap will do well but several yearlings he has trained too.

Telford receives a phone call threatening to kill Phar Lap ( “ he s gonna end up as dogs meat ” ) unless he is withdrawn from the Cup. He begins receiving threatening letters in the mail. Davis is persuaded to hire a guard to protect Phar Lap.

One day somebody from a car fires twice at Phar Lap. Although he misses , Harry is seriously alarmed. McKinnon also expresses alarm at the fact that somebody could try to shoot Phar Lap. He says it is a “ day of profound national shame ”. However , he is somewhat hypocritical in his statement , since he actually wants Phar Lap out of the way through jealousy.

Shortly afterwards Phar lap takes part in the Melbourne Cup , with Jim Pike as his jockey. It is a big national event and all the people , of all classes and professions , are shown gathering. The Melbourne Cup is a big social event in Australia and was one way in which people could forget the Depression which was very serious at the time.

As the 1930 Melbourne Cup begins , Phar Lap has not arrived and Davis and Telford are seriously worried. McKinnon threatens to have him disqualified if he does not come very soon. Finally he turns up , and as he enters the ring the crowd bursts into cheering and applause. After great excitement Phar Lap again comes from behind to win the race. This is a particularly exciting part of the film. McKinnon is visibly upset at the victory , but almost everybody else is delighted.

At a victory party Telford demands a half-share in Phar Lap. He says nobody else but him could train Phar Lap so well. Davis is very angry at the demand , regarding it as a threat.

It is discovered that Phar Lap is lame. Harry pays only á 4000 for a share in him , whereas initially Davis had demanded á 20000. They both think that possibly Phar Lap cannot win any more , but in fact in the next big race he does win again despite all odds. McKinnon regards him as a freak , but his judgment is clouded by jealousy.

At the next major race McKinnon demands that quite a bit of heavy material be put on Phar Lap as a handicap. He wins anyway , by a very short margin , but Tommy is desperately worried that Phar Lap cannot last long if he is so mistreated by Telford s insistence of putting extreme pressure on him.

At the victory party following the Melbourne Cup , Mrs Davis had suggested to Tommy that he should court Emma , the girl whom he had left behind in Sydney when Phar Lap was moved to Melbourne. Tommy decides to propose to Emma , even though her mother had earlier been very cold towards him. As it happens , she had been waiting anxiously for his proposal for a long time , and her mother strongly approved of the marriage. The next scene shows their marriage.

For the next Melbourne Cup McKinnon puts an extraordinarily

heavy handicap on Phar Lap. Tommy persuades both Telford and Davis to withdraw Phar Lap from the race. However, McKinnon refuses to accept this withdrawal and threatens Davis that if he is "scratched", that is withdrawn, from the race, he will never be allowed to race again. In the end Davis agrees to let Phar Lap race in the Cup with the heavy weight and handicap. Phar Lap does not win, but does not collapse either. The crowd is bitterly disappointed at Phar Lap's defeat, and angry at McKinnon for being totally unfair towards Phar Lap. The American entrepreneurs are still keen for Phar Lap to go and race in the Agua Caliente race in Mexico, one of the great races in the world.

Telford allows Davis to take the horse to Mexico, but refuses to go himself. He suggests instead that Tommy go as Phar Lap's trainer. Emma is very upset at his departure.

Tommy's style turns out to be somewhat different to Harry's. He does not want to work the horse too hard, but prefers to get him up to form more gradually. Davis is on Harry's side, and tells Tommy so, but Tommy persists in following his own judgment over the best way to train the horse.

Phar Lap injures his foot, and for a while there is doubt that he can run. But everybody agrees that he should take part in the race, because of his reputation. He has become a legend in Mexico and the U. S. as well as in Australia, and people are expecting an enormous crowd to come and see him.

Back in Australia Harry has bet an enormous sum on one of the colts he himself has trained, but he has lost. He has become convinced that Phar Lap is a freak and will win no matter who trains him. He sees that all the other colts, whom he has trained in exactly the same way as he did Phar Lap are "duds".

The 20th March , the day of the Agua Caliente race , arrives. Before a huge crowd , Phar Lap at first gets well behind. But then , as so often before , he catches up with the others and eventually wins the race. It is perhaps his greatest victory , but also his last.

This victory is followed quite soon after by Phar Lap's death in the U. S. Among the last shots of the film repeats Harry's reaction to the news of Phar Lap's death , when the reporter says that after all he is only a horse : " He wasn't just a horse , he was the best. "

\* \* \* \* \*

Words and expressions you need to know :

colt—a young male horse

disqualify—to disallow from entering in a race or any other competition

dud—a person or thing that proves to be worthless , defective or a complete failure

freak—abnormally developed specimen , a very unusual example , something or somebody who has highly unusual abilities or deformities

give someone the sack—to dismiss someone

Melbourne Cup—the most famous horse race in Australia , held in Melbourne on the first Tuesday of November every year

overdraw an account at the bank—take out more money from a bank account than it actually holds

the turf—the horse racing business or profession

yearling—a horse which is a year old

## Topics for discussion :

1. What do you know about Phar Lap , the most famous race horse in the history of Australian horse racing ?
2. Describe the opening scene. Why does the film begin this way ?
3. What is Telford's strategy in training his horses ?  
Compare his strategy with Tommy's.
4. How does Phar Lap become a hero of the nation ? What does his success bring about ?
5. Discuss the character of Tommy Woodcock and how his character develops.
6. What are the themes in Phar Lap ?  
What are the qualities in Phar Lap that Australians admire most ?

# Unit 5

## Women's Role in Society

Women's status in society is a recurring theme in Australian films. This is determined by the nature of Australian society from the early days of the penal colonies through to the 20th century.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there have been a number of major changes in the status of women. These include the introduction of a somewhat fairer divorce legislation in the form of the Family Law Act in 1974; the acceptance of equal pay for women doing the same job as men in 1973; the establishment of laws outlawing sexual discrimination in various states in the late 1970s; the acceptance by Parliament of an Affirmative Action Act in 1986; the greater involvement of women in education and other professions; and the acceptance of women by various state and federal governments of the right of women to permanency and careers.

Yet as impressive as the accomplishments of the movement for greater sexual equality have been, there is still a considerable amount of gender inequality in Australia. Australia is still a male-dominated society. The men still give much of what goes on in everyday Australian life its characteristic tone; women are assigned a markedly inferior role. Careers are still mainly a male endeavour, and men hold the majority of key positions in industry, the public service, the professions, and politics. Girls leave school earlier, on the average, than boys and with lower educational qualifications; a smaller proportion go on to

tertiary education. Most working women are in subordinate , poorly paid jobs in industry , the catering and hotel trades , shops , offices , teaching , and nursing.

While the men get on with the work , the women in most Australian households are expected to get on with the child rearing , the domestic chores , and the cooking. This is the case even where , as is happening with more and more families , the wife goes out to work as well. In Australia a women s place is still thought to be , primarily , in the home.

Since the revival of the Australian film industry in the 1970s , Australia has produced quite a few films about the issues of women s roles in society. Gillian Armstrongs *My Brilliant Career* is regarded as the best Australian women s film of the 1970s. The theme of women s independence still has resonance for many Australians in the 1990s. Apart from the theme of women s right to do whatever work they choose , Igor Auzins *We of the Never Never* also deals with the subject of black and white relations in pioneering days. The land rights issue the film briefly touches on is still of contemporary relevance in Australian society today.

# My Brilliant Career

Main characters :

Sybylla Melvyn ( the heroine )

Harry Beecham ( a handsome young man , a wealthy landowner )

Aunt Helen ( Sybylla's aunt )

Frank Hawden ( a titled English landowner visiting Caddagat as a stockman )

Grandmother Bossier

Uncle Julius

Gertie ( Sybylla's sister )

Aunt Gussie

The McSwat family

My Brilliant Career is based on a popular autobiographical novel by Miles Franklin. The heroine , Sybylla Melvyn , is a girl of sixteen. She seeks a career in art , literature and music. Feeling constrained by rural life at Possum Gully and annoyed by her religious mother , she develops a highly independent spirit and likes to do things her own way. She thinks she “ might just as well be dead ” as stay in the bush.

The film begins with Sybylla writing in her journal. She dreams that what she writes may one day reach a big world outside , but she is interrupted by her mother who reminds her to do her chores. Sybylla is raised in a poor , Outback family and lives in a rough and dirty property. Her hopes for a career are treated contemptuously by her stepfather and as naive by her mother.

Next Sybylla is invited by her grandmother to visit her rich property at Caddagat. There she finds a more gracious life that both delights and alarms her. Her Aunt Helen encourages her but also warns against overreaching herself. However , her grandmother dislikes her tomboy ways. She wants her to behave like a lady and make a proper marriage.

At her grandmother s place Sybylla meets handsome Harry Beecham , the owner of a property nearby. At first their relationship is very strained and she refuses Harry s advances. However , later they are attracted to each other. Meanwhile a jackaroo at her grandmother s house called Frank proposes marriage to her , but she rejects him as she finds him stuffy and dull. Her grandmother thinks she should accept him , but she rudely disagrees. Her Aunt Helen tells her love is not the best reason for marriage. She herself married for love , but her husband abandoned her for another woman.

Sybylla is invited to stay at Harry s house. He is very wealthy and his house enormous with numerous servants. However , she gets on very well with Harry s mother. Harry takes her boating and , for amusement , she rocks the boat in such a way that both fall into the river. Their relationship is further developed by a long and friendly pillow fight , initiated by her. Harry clearly wants to marry her , but his mother urges him to wait.

Harry goes to Queensland , while Sybylla returns home. He promises to call on her as soon as he comes back from Queensland , but fails to do so , to her extreme annoyance. She appears to be in love with him , but does not wish to marry and believes he would rather marry someone from a richer family anyway. However , Harry does propose to her at a ball which he organizes , but her response leads to a violent quarrel , during which she slashes his face with a whip when

he attempts to kiss her. Harry's mother sympathizes with Sybylla and tells her Harry loves her. She also says to her "loneliness is a terrible price to pay for independence", believing Sybylla would be unhappy if she never married. Sybylla does not agree.

Harry tells Sybylla he is going north to see to his other properties which he cannot pay for. It is clear that despite all appearances of riches Harry is in fact bankrupt. Sybylla asks him to wait for her for two years so that she can find her identity. Then she will marry him if he still wants her. He agrees. She feels more warmly towards him, now that she knows he is not rich.

Meantime, Sybylla's family has also run into money problems. She is told she must go to be governess to the children of the McSwat family to which her own is in debt, instead of the payment of interest. She refuses to go, but is forced to by her grandmother.

The life-style of the McSwats is a harsh comedown from the comforts of Caddagat. They live in a corrugated-iron house, surrounded by flies, farm animals, and manure. The children are an unruly bunch who are used to terrorizing their governesses. At her first class, one of the children throws something at her, and she gives him a good beating which his mother cannot prevent. After Sybylla wins this confrontation, she gets on much better with the kids.

Later, the McSwats tell Sybylla she must go home and that her family need not pay any more of the debt until they get more money. They believe she is in love with their eldest son and do not want her to marry him because she is from a poor family and he has another girl. In fact, she is not in love with anyone and does not want to marry.

Then Sybylla returns to her parents. There she is up to her knees in mud rescuing a bogged calf when Harry turns up again. He asks her to marry him, as she had promised. However, she prefers inde-

pendence and life as a writer , and rejects him.

The final scene shows her sending the completed novel about her own life to a publisher in Scotland. It was indeed published in 1901. The film does not make clear whether she paid for her independence with loneliness , but implies that she did.

The film really has two themes. The main one is women s rights and the difficulty of an Australian woman of that time who wished for an independent career. The other is the conservatism of rural life. The film treats both themes sympathetically. All characters are positive , but Sybylla dominates the story and all events revolve around her feelings , her dreams and ideals , and her priority that independence is more important than love.

The Victorian English pattern of rigid class relationships is implicit in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* , whereas in *My Brilliant Career* it is more direct. We see the experience of three generations of Australian women at the centre of the story—young Sybylla , her beautiful but lonely Aunt Helen and , lastly her remote grandmother. It is one of the best Australian films about women s emancipation. The film also shows a sense of simple pride of being Australian. Sybylla does not know what her future holds for her and she has been unable to reconcile love and life with a man with her independence. But she can openly and whole-heartedly admit that she loves Australia and that she is “ a child of the mighty bush ”.

*My Brilliant Career* is beautifully photographed. Like *Picnic at Hanging Rock* , it uses the Australian light and landscape very successfully. Beautifully composed shots of rural Australia give the film a dream-like sense of languor.

*My Brilliant Career* won a British Academy Award for Judy Davis as Best Actress , and was the first commercially successful feature film

made by an Australian woman director since the 1930s.

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Words and expressions you need to know :

egotistical—talking too much about oneself and believing that one is better and more important than other people

delusions of grandeur—thinking one is more important than one really is

jackaroo—an apprentice station hand on a sheep or cattle station

catalogue—a list of places , names , objects , goods , etc. put in a special order so that they can be found easily

Five-Bob Downs—this is where Harry Beecham lives

Id rather see her hair shorn off and shut up in a convent—Sybylla s grandmother wants her to behave like a lady ; otherwise , shed rather Sybylla became a nun

bettters—people of higher rank or worth

strangle—to kill by pressing on the throat with the hands or a rope

Im done for if Im not—I m finished if Im not clever

precocious—showing unusually early development of mind and body

Topics for discussion :

1. Describe the character of Sybylla Melvyn. What are her dreams and ideals ? Compare her views with Victorian views about a woman s proper place in society.
2. The film shows Sybylla switching Harry across the face with a whip when he tries to kiss her. Do you think this scene is convincing ? Why or why not ?
3. What are Aunt Helen s views about marriage ? Do you agree with

her ?

4. What does the film show us about the McSwats ?
5. The landscape is used very effectively to show the ups and downs of the heroine. Give some examples to illustrate this point.
6. At the end of the film Sybylla seems to await a new life with optimism. Do you think the repressions of the life leading up to this point can be so easily got rid of ?

## We of the Never Never

Main characters :

Jeannie ( the heroine )

Aeneas Gunn ( Jeannie's husband )

McLennan ( Aeneas's workmate )

Sam Lee ( a Chinese cook )

Goggle Eye ( an older tribal leader )

We of the Never Never is based on a factual account of thirteen months spent by the author , Jeannie Gunn , and her husband Aeneas ( 1862 - 1903 ) , at the Elsey cattle station on the Roper River some 500 kilometres south of Darwin. As the film begins , Jeannie has just got married and is about to go to the Elsey with her husband Aeneas Gunn , who is to be in charge of a cattle station. She is being dressed in the style of those days and given a lecture on the standards she should set as a wife. Her female friends tell her that the main danger is that she may lose her femininity. She must never try to be a “ mate ”—in the Australian sense of the word , one of the boys—to him.

The stockmen , that is , those who work in the Outback with cattle , are not happy with the idea that a woman should live in the region. They take the attitude that the Outback is no place for a woman. But one of them is willing to give her a chance. When the newly-weds arrive at the Elsey , she even overhears them saying how stupid she is to live in such a place.

The climate of that time of the year is very violent , with frequent

heavy storms. The journey to the remote place where they will live is full of great dangers , especially when they cross a flooded river. They have to be winched over by flying fox ( a wire cable on pulleys ). Jeannie impresses the rough , but warmhearted carrier McLennan with her courage.

When they eventually arrive at the “ homestead ” , where they are to live , they find just how uncomfortable and rough the life will be.

Aeneas shows his strength when a horse fails to throw him off. He succeeds in gaining the loyalty of the men , except one who says he will leave in the next dry season , because of the presence of a white woman on the station. Later he changes his mind.

Jeannie meets the Aboriginal women , who are the house servants. She also has a confrontation with the Chinese cook , Sam Lee , who cooks only on his own terms , will not allow her or anyone else to cook and refuses to cook for a half-Aboriginal girl she has met. She wants to dismiss him and find another Chinese cook.

An Aboriginal man is about to beat a woman , but Jeannie orders him to put down the stick , which he reluctantly does. Her action makes a big impression on the people. However , later the man does indeed beat the Aboriginal woman and Aeneas asks Jeannie not to interfere with the behaviour of the Aborigines among themselves.

Jeannie loses control of her horse while Aeneas , she and the stockmen are out mustering the cattle. She climbs a tree to escape a wild bull , which one of the men shoots dead , but her action causes great amusement , including to Aeneas.

Jeannie makes it clear that she wishes to learn the language of the local Aboriginal people and to learn from them as much as she can. Their attitude , very progressive for those days , causes great amusement to the white stockmen , who regard the Aborigines as ignorant

servants and inferior to them.

Against opposition from the stockmen , Jeannie employs one of the Aboriginal men as a gardener , gives him a pair of trousers and promises him tobacco.

Another Chinese cook arrives. Jeannie dismisses Sam Lee , whom she regards as a trouble-maker , and gives the job of cook to the new one. Aeneas agrees. " That's your department , " he says.

When her luggage finally arrives , Jeannie makes the " home-stead " quite comfortable and " homey " , that is , like a real home. Later McLennan comes to see her again. He approves of the house , saying that now she has made her place she can settle down in it. However , this dismays her , for by this time Jeannie has begun to prefer the rigors of the bush to the confines of comfortable domesticity.

A stockman arrives from Queensland , saying that his " mate " is very ill nearby and needs help. She offers help. Aeneas finds the " mate " and brings him back to the homestead. He refuses any help of any kind from Jeannie , because she is a woman. Despite the best efforts of the men , their stockmen s " mate " dies. Jeannie is very upset both by his death and by his refusal to let her help nurse him. She quarrels with Aeneas , because she is so angry that none of the men is prepared to show any feelings , fears or weaknesses in front of a woman. She believes that the stockmen s " mate " would have survived , had he been prepared to accept help from her. She wants nothing more than to be accepted in the society and share her husband s life in the Outback.

Jeannie takes home a small half-Aboriginal little girl. Her husband is not happy with this decision and tells her she should not get too close to the Aborigines. Jeannie , on the other hand , believes all people should live together peacefully. She resents his implication that

the Aborigines are inferior. She also charges him with taking the side of the men against her. This she finds extremely hurting.

The stockmen watch an Aboriginal dance called corroboree , but they find it repulsive. In a racist outburst , they fire three times into the air in praise of the British king Edward. After the dance is broken up , Goggle Eye , an older tribal leader , mysteriously sickens and dies. Prior to that , Goggle Eye and some of the stockmen had been arguing about where the stars came from. In response to Jeannie's explanation that God made all the stars , Goggle Eye says that if the white fellas God made everything , then why didn't he also make the white fellas some bush of their own ?

The half-Aboriginal girl leaves on " walkabout " , a migration on foot common among Aborigines in Australia , and Jeannie fears she will not return. The Aboriginal man has caught the same disease as the stockman's " mate " , but believes himself cursed , so that he can not recover. Both Aeneas and Jeannie try to help him , but he dies.

The time for Aeneas's and Jeannie's departure from the Elsey arrives. Over Christmas dinner , Aeneas tells the men they have decided to stay longer. The men's happy reaction shows that they have accepted both Aeneas and Jeannie , particularly important for the latter. But immediately it becomes obvious that Aeneas has caught the fever which already killed two men earlier. Jeannie tries to nurse him back to health , but he dies.

After the death of her husband Jeannie decides to stay on in the Never Never. The half-Aboriginal girl returns from " walkabout " and the Aboriginal community performs a corroboree for her , meaning that they , too , have accepted her.

We of the Never Never deals with two social themes. One is the status of women , especially white women , in the Outback community

at the turn of the century. The other is race relations. In both cases , it is Jeannie who pushes the progressive point of view. It is she who pushes and yearns for her own acceptance and finally wins it. She also advocates peaceful and harmonious relations between Aborigines , Chinese and white people. She argues strongly against regarding anybody as inferior because of his or her race. Where she perceives an Aboriginal custom to be harmful or superstitious , she tries to have it changed , even though both her husband and the white stockmen urge her not to interfere. Jeannie is the central character all through the film , and it is she who dictates the points of view expressed.

The book on which the film is based is one of Australia's folk epics ; it has sold over half a million copies and has been read by four generations of Australian schoolchildren. The film was screened in 1982. The homestead site at the Elsey is now a national reserve.

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### Words and expressions you need to know :

grace—to decorate or make beautiful

stick one's nose in—to interfere ; to intervene

walkabout—an Aborigine's period of nomadic wandering

she came through like a trooper—she did very well

homestead—the main residence on a sheep or cattle station or large farm

scrub pheasant—a long-tailed bird in the Australian bush

ladies man—a man noted for his attention and attraction to women

as cranky as blazes—very irritable and ill-tempered

humpy—a temporary bush shelter used by Aborigines

jim—any person or thing that is first-rate , excellent

crook—sick ; feeling bad

buggy—a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with or without a hood

swallow—to accept without question

chookie—a domestic foul

### Topics for discussion :

1. What are the two contemporary social themes that the film deals with ?
2. How does Jeannie establish her credibility with Aeneas's work-mates ?  
How effectively does she deal with the tribe of local Aborigines who work on the property ?
3. What does the film show us about pioneering life in the Outback at the turn of the century ?
4. What do you think of Jeannie's attitude towards Aborigines ?
5. What does the dialogue between Goggle Eye and Jeannie about the stars suggest to Australians in the early 1980s ?
6. Is the film successful in integrating the landscape with the human dramas enacted in these spectacular settings ? Why or why not ?

# Unit 6

## The Plight of the Aboriginal Australians

In Australia , it was the native inhabitants who suffered most cruelly from the original white settlement. When Europeans first arrived in Australia in 1788 , the Aboriginal population was at least 314 ,000 and probably higher. However , by 1927 , as a result of disease and ill treatment , including poisonings and sweeps of mass extermination , the Aboriginal population had shrunk to 75 ,000. These numbers since have recovered to 160 ,000 , but the most disreputable side of Australian history still remains its treatment of the Aboriginal people.

Today , as a result of a history of mistreatment and the failure of efforts to redress this , Australian Aborigines are , without doubt , the most depressed and underprivileged minority in Australian society. Many of them are poverty-stricken , poorly educated , degraded by white prejudice , disoriented , and with little hope for the future. The life expectancy of an Aborigine is about twenty years lower than that of a white Australian. The infant mortality for Aborigines is up to three times that of white Australians , while Aborigines have a higher incidence of illness and premature death than the rest of Australia. The unemployment rate for Aborigines in 1986 was over 40 per cent , compared to 8 per cent for the country as a whole. While there has been considerable improvement in the availability of housing for Aborigines , there are still considerable problems in this area. Housing conditions for the Aborigines in many country towns , particularly in Queensland

and the Northern Territory , can be particularly poor.

Apart from the problems mentioned above , what the Australian Aborigines suffer most is not bad living and working conditions but race prejudice of White Australians. In the country , where most Aborigines live , racial prejudice is constant and vicious , as exemplified in films like *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and *The Fringe Dwellers*. However , in the last few years the laws that , under the guise of paternalism , discriminated against the Aborigines have been reformed. In New South Wales and Victoria all discriminatory legislation has disappeared. South Australia made changes in its Aborigines ' laws in 1965 , Western Australia in 1963 , and Queensland in 1965. Even in the Northern Territory Aborigines can now buy liquor , own property , manage their own affairs , go where they like and qualify for workers ' compensation and ordinary social services. It is a measure of the discrimination exercised against them that they could do none of these things till 1964. Eventually , despite resistance from the grazing interests , the diehard paternalists and the out-and-out racists , the Aborigines will gain equal rights in practice as well as in name.

Schepisi 's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* stands out as the strongest 1970s Australian film about Aboriginal-white conflict. It is concerned with the plight of an Aborigine rebuffed by the white society he tries to enter , and is in this sense , a critique of Australian racism. Again and again in the film Jimmie is isolated in the frame , whether at a cricket match at which he is given afternoon tea at a remove from the white players and their women or against a potentially hostile landscape of rocky outcrops. Further , the film is set at the time of Federation , the formal declaration of Australian nationhood , and one of its bitterest ironies is that this nation is so unsure of its identity that it cannot admit a half-caste like Jimmie to its citizenship. Jimmie re-

sponds with appalling bursts of violence to the unfair treatment meted out to him by the whites. It is essentially one man 's declaration of war , but Schepisi , the director of the film , has made painfully clear that Jimmie-jaw half-shot away , caught asleep in a convent bed , ignominiously bundled into the back of a police van-remains to the end the victim of ' historical forces ' that have , for good and bad , helped to shape Australia.

Beresford 's *The Fringe Dwellers* gives an affectionate portrait of a present-day Aboriginal family living on the edge of a Queensland country town. Based on an early 1960s novel by Nene Gere , the story is about the fortunes of the black family in contemporary , rural Australia.

The previous major Australian screen treatment of Aboriginal culture , Auzin 's *We of the Never Never* ( 1982 ) , was also a period film , and though innovative and sympathetic in its approach , *We of the Never Never* 's view of black life retained some conventional stereotypes and even added some new ones. Beresford 's *Fringe Dwellers* avoided this trap. It is closer in its style to the shorter , and often documentary films made about Aborigines by independent filmmakers , like *My Survival as an Aboriginal* ( 1979 ) , *Wrong Side of the Road* ( 1981 ) , and *Lousy Little Sixpence* ( 1983 ).

# The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith

## Main characters :

Jimmie Blacksmith ( a half-caste Aborigine )

Morton Blacksmith ( an Aboriginal man , Jimmie 's half brother )

Policeman Farrell

Gilda ( Jimmie 's wife , a white working-class woman )

Mr Neville ( a clergyman )

Mrs Neville ( the clergyman 's wife )

Mr Healy ( Jimmie 's Irish employer )

Mr Lewis ( one of Jimmie 's employers )

Mr Newby ( one of Jimmie 's employers )

Mrs Newby ( his wife )

Miss Petra Graf ( a white teacher , a friend of the Newbys )

A schoolmaster

The schoolmaster 's wife

Fred Schepisi 's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* ( 1978 ) is based on a novel by Thomas Keneally , one of Australia 's best known contemporary writers. The main part of it is set in 1900 and there are several discussions of coming Federation in it. It is based on an actual event in 1900 when a half-caste Aboriginal man called Jimmie Governor murdered a family of whites , was hunted down and later executed.

The overall theme of the film is racial prejudice , supercilious attitudes and outright exploitation by whites against Aborigines. The film definitely shows both points of view , namely that of the whites and the

Aborigines , but although there is no glossing over the savagery of Jimmie 's crimes , blame for them appears to be laid more at the door of the social system of racial exploitation than at that of a single Aboriginal individual.

Most of the film is set in the New South Wales countryside. The opening scene shows Mr and Mrs Neville , a white clergyman and his wife , taking a very supercilious attitude towards some Aborigines including Jimmie Blacksmith who is undergoing an initiation ritual. The white clergyman explains that Jimmie , being half white , ought to be better than the others.

Jimmie has missed school run by Mr Neville to catch possums , and for this he is savagely caned. This is the first of a series of incidents which leads Jimmie towards a deep resentment of white society.

Years later he gets involved in a drunken brawl for which he and several Aborigines are put in prison. But Mr Neville gets him brought out of prison and promises him a reasonable career. The Nevilles think that Jimmie can marry a white girl , so his descendants can become more and more like ordinary white people. They consider this would benefit both Jimmie and his family.

Jimmie moves into the world of white society and takes on work. The white superiors treat him continually as an inferior , but he is capable of very heavy labour and works hard. Despite his growing resentment of the attitudes white people hold towards him , he remains loyal to his employers.

Jimmie wants to change his job but his Irish superior refuses to give him a reference to help him in his career. This infuriates Jimmie , who accuses him of being unable to write , as a result of which the Irish man knocks him down. Irish people were themselves regarded as social inferiors by people of British background , and Irish people re-

acted by treating those below them with supercilious behaviour. Half-castes and Aborigines were a major target of their contempt.

Jimmie takes a job with another white man , Mr Lewis. Jim-mie 's half-brother Morton , who is a full-blood Aborigine , comes to help him with his work and gets an extremely warm welcome. They not only help each other , but Jimmie enjoys his work much more because of Morton 's presence. However , Mr Lewis dismisses him for not working hard enough. Jimmie comes to believe he can 't do anything right as far as the whites are concerned.

Jimmie gets a job with yet another white man , Policeman Farrell , doing very lowly labour , for which he gets a very low wage and very bad living conditions. Farrell is actually a racist alcoholic who enjoys brutalising the Aborigines under his control. At this point in the film , a mood of horrific seriousness is established. Farrell orders Jimmie to burn the corpse of one of the Aboriginal prisoners arrested after the brawl. He has hanged himself with a belt while in prison. The reason for his order is that Farrell fears the inquest will expose his own complicity in the suicide. Jimmie carries out the order. However , he does so very reluctantly , and is further disgusted with white society and the attitude of the white police towards Aborigines.

The mood of the film softens as Jimmie leaves his job and moves into a happier phase of his life. He gets work as a shearer 's cook on a farm owned by Mr Newby. Jimmie makes love with a white working-class girl called Gilda Marshall and she becomes pregnant. Believing the baby to be his , he marries her shortly after. The wife of the clergyman who marries them tells her how to avoid having babies , which both Gilda and Jimmie regard as rude and supercilious interference in their private affairs. Mr Newby lends them a horse so that Jimmie can bring Gilda back to his property. Gilda is warned by Mrs Newby that

Jimmie might beat her , since he is half-caste and thus not really civilized. However , their relationship is shown throughout as very loving and trusting.

Gilda 's baby is born. When he hears the baby cry , Jimmie does an Aboriginal dance to celebrate. But he is then shown the baby boy , who is very white. This means that the father is clearly a white man , not Jimmie at all. Jimmie finds that his brother and uncle don 't approve of his marrying a white girl. Although Jimmie is upset at the discovery that Gilda 's son is not his , the two remain affectionate towards one another , and Jimmie continues to treat her lovingly.

Miss Graf is a young white teacher , a friend of Mrs Newbys , the wife of Jimmie 's employer. Miss Graf is soon to be married and so she and Mrs Newby suggest to Gilda that she leave Jimmie and take a job with her after her marriage. They think that would be better for Gilda 's own social position , as well as for the future of her baby son. Gilda refuses the job on the grounds that she is married to Jimmie. But Jimmie and Gilda are both furious that she should even have made the offer.

On Jimmie 's behalf , Gilda has asked Mr Newby for an advance to buy groceries to feed his family. Mr Newby refuses , saying there are too many blacks around and Jimmie is too unreliable. Jimmie goes to get his due wages from Mr Newby. Mr Newby then sacks him and even refuses him the money he owes for work already done. When Jimmie says his family are hungry , Mr Newby replies that all Gilda has to do is to take up the offer made by Miss Graf. Jimmie threatens him with a gun , but he is easily dissuaded from shooting.

However , the whole series of insults and exploitation has made a deep and bitter impact on Jimmie. The following day Jimmie goes into the Newby family house and murders nearly everybody he can find in

cold blood with an axe. He is helped in the murders by his uncle. This is an extraordinarily violent and blood-chilling scene. The dead include Miss Graf and three of the Newbys ' daughters. Mrs Newby herself is seriously wounded and dies later. Jimmie spares the Newbys ' baby daughter.

Jimmie then returns to get Gilda and they flee among the Aboriginal community. Jimmie says he has declared war against the whites. Soon after , Jimmie sends his wife and her baby back to the white community , and he goes off to spend his time roaming around on the run from the law. He is joined by his half-brother Morton. They are continually hunted by white police and others. They are taken in by other Aborigines , but their life is very dangerous. Moreover , in terror against being caught and because he has declared war against whites , Jimmie is prepared to shoot anybody he thinks could give him up to the police or against whom he wants revenge. When a white man refuses to give him a lift , he murders his wife and baby out of revenge and later shoots the man himself. Morton is really shocked at the brutality to which Jimmie has descended. But although he threatens to leave him , in fact the two remain together for most of the rest of the film.

Jimmie and Morton then flee to Queensland from New South Wales where the drama has been set so far. Jimmie determines not to commit any further murders against innocent people. In Queensland , Jimmie and Morton come to the Tambourine Public School. Jimmie shoots at the shoolmaster but does not kill him. The schoolmaster tries to respond with kindness and invites them both into his house to show them an article about themselves in the Bulletin magazine. They find it extremely amusing. Jimmie and Morton demand to take the schoolmaster as a hostage , even though he claims to be sick with respiratory complaints. The schoolmaster goes with them , and expresses sympathy

with the Aboriginal people. Since the whites , he claims , have killed 270 000 Aborigines , he can understand their anger at white society. Jimmie says that the whites have taken away a whole culture and way of life , for no crime , which is why he resents them so much. According to the schoolmaster , what white society has given the Aborigines is almost entirely things they do not need or want , such as drunkenness , education , religion and venereal diseases.

The law court condemns Jimmie 's uncle to death for murder and assisting Jimmie with the murders in the Newby household. They realise that Jimmie is the main culprit , but up to that point have not been able to find him.

As Jimmie , Morton and the schoolmaster wander into ever more remote , inaccessible , and fantastically beautiful territory , and as the schoolmaster weakens from respiratory complaints , a reasonable relationship develops among them. The schoolmaster and Jimmie become quite fond of one another. It appears that Jimmie is even regarded as a bit of a hero among some people , enough that the authorities privately express to one another the hope that he will be killed without a murder trial and hanging , which would not be good for morale just at the time when Federation is about to be celebrated.

Morton and the other two become separated. Morton is hunted down and shot dead. The schoolmaster is also shot and dies of the wounds and respiratory disease. Jimmie is left by himself and is reduced to cooking and eating insects. He is cold and hungry.

He comes upon a convent. He goes in to steal some milk and meat , while the nuns are at prayer. He lies down on a nun 's bed and goes to sleep. When the nun finds him , she immediately goes to look for the police , who arrest him , beat him up and imprison him. The clergyman Mr Neville , who had tried to give him an education at the

beginning of the film , comes to give him comfort before he is hanged.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Words and expressions you need to know :

bugger off — a very rude way of saying ‘ go away ’

convent — a religious house for nuns. Convents are common in Australia and frequently function also as schools for girls

in the family way — pregnant

gin — a racist and insulting word for Aboriginal women

half-caste — a person with mixed parentage , for instance an Aboriginal mother and a white father

inquest — an official and thorough inquiry

respiratory complaints — disease involving difficulty in breathing

savage — used as a noun , this is an insulting word for a very uncivilized and violent person

### Topics for discussion :

1. What is your first impression of Jimmie Blacksmith ?

Does it change as the film goes on ?

2. What does the opening scene show about Mr and Mrs Neville 's attitude towards Aborigines ?

3. Describe some of the incidents in the film that lead Jimmie towards a deep resentment of white society.

4. Discuss the contrast between the mean , arrogant Newbys and Jimmie 's traditional black family.

5. Who do you think should be responsible for Jimmie Governor 's tragedy ? Give your reasons.

6. Discuss the use of landscape in the film.

# The Fringe Dwellers

## Main characters :

Trilby Comaway ( an Aboriginal schoolgirl )

Mollie Comaway ( Trilby 's mother )

Joe Comaway ( Trilby 's father )

Nurse Noonah ( Trilby 's sister )

Bartie Comaway ( Trilby 's younger brother )

Bruce Beresford 's *The Fringe Dwellers* ( 1986 ) is a film about outcasts in their own land , meaning Australian Aborigines. Set in an Australian country town , its theme is the resentment of whites by Aborigines , who believe that whites have destroyed their culture and livelihood. The film shows a very bad living standard among the Aborigines , with very high rates of unemployment , alcoholism , gambling , crime and other social ills. The main character is a young Aboriginal schoolgirl , called Trilby Comaway , who furiously resents the way whites treat Aborigines , including those who try , or pretend , to be kind , but are in fact very patronizing. She regards such people as insulting to Aborigines. She is the hero of the film , even though there is no attempt to hide her faults and even a serious crime , and it is mainly her point of view that the film presents.

The film begins with an Australian Aboriginal family , the Comaways , waking up for the day. The mother , Mollie , asks her school-age daughter Trilby to borrow some food from a neighbour , but she is reluctant to be dependent on anybody. It is very quickly obvious how

poor the Aboriginal community is by comparison with white Australia. One of the girls comments that the white girls must throw their dresses away after using them only once , her bitter remark at white wealth.

Mrs Comaway goes to the hospital , where the doctor and all nurses except Noonah Comaway are white. Noonah is the only one of the Comaway family with a job and Mollie relies on her for money. Noonah is embarrassed to see her mother , because she does not like the white superiors to realise how poor they all are and how they depend on her for money.

The young Aborigines , including Trilby , go to a local cafe , but the white girl who sells things to them is rude to them because they are Aboriginal and tells them they should drink the milkshake at the bar , which they refuse to do. Some young white girls , including one called Margaret , laugh at the Aborigines and call them“ boongs ” ,but an older white man defends them , saying they have as much right as anybody to be in the cafe. Trilby runs away angry , saying she doesn 't want to be defended. She apparently regards this as patronizing , although the man 's gesture is obviously meant as sincere.

The family tries to find a house where they can afford to live. They are living on welfare , since only Noonah has a job. Unemployment and living on welfare are very common indeed among Aborigines in Australia. Another source of resentment is that in order to obtain even the money for which they are due under social welfare , they have to submit to questions by authorities.

At home the Comaways are having dinner and Trilby asks why it is that the Aborigines don 't collect their children from the hospital when they have recovered from an illness. The answer is that they can live better in hospital , since they have nowhere decent to go home to.

Noonah gives Mrs Comaway some money , but Mollie hides it so

that her husband won 't find it. He always spends too much of it on drink and gambling.

A scene at the rodeo follows. This is one of the main forms of entertainment in the country towns where so many Aborigines live. The horse riders have a high social status.

Trilby announces to her friends that she intends to go to the city. The reason is that there is no work to be found in the country town. Her wish to move to the city is a recurrent theme in the film.

At school Trilby gets furious with her fellow student Margaret , the white girl who had laughed at her in the cafe. Again she believes that Margaret is insulting her. She hits her and spits at her. For this misdemeanour she is taken in front of the school principal , a white man. The principal tells her that Margaret 's mother has asked for the matter to be dropped , which means that Trilby will get no punishment. Despite this apparently lenient treatment , Trilby is still angry and resents the white people. The principal notes her good , though " erratic " , school record , and comments that she will get her school certificate , meaning that she will definitely graduate from high school. He says " not many of your people have achieved that " , a comment which she finds insulting. She snaps back " my people , we 're all Australians " .

A young Aboriginal man , Phil , is attracted to her and asks her to walk and drive with him. He praises her for showing anger at Margaret 's insult. On her side she takes the fact that she was not punished as an insult. She says that the white authorities are showing her that " she doesn 't know any better " , in other words that she is ignorant and uncivilized. As they walk the two come to a river and they go swimming. Not having swimming costumes , they go into the water naked , and kiss.

The Comaways move house. They put their things into a large

truck , but the motor won 't start , so the whole community gives it a push to get it going. This scene shows great community spirit. Some things fall off the car and two white police see them but there is no incident. The point of the scene is to show the tense relations and lack of trust between the Aborigines and the white police. The house to which they move is in a white neighbourhood and very much better than what they have left : it has running water , a bath and a washing machine. The father refuses the offer of a bath , since he is not used to that.

In a following scene , the family and friends sing a song about how a white man took away the brown-skinned baby of an Aborigine. The song is a theme of the film , and it is sung as the film concludes. The idea of the white man taking away the brown-skinned baby is a reference to former times when it was quite common for white missionaries and others to seize the children of Aborigines , especially half-castes. They did so in the belief that they could give the baby a better upbringing in white society , but the Aborigines were furiously resentful not only at losing their children but at the patronizing attitude displayed by the missionaries or others.

A scene in the school again shows the conflict between the races , and especially the resentment Trilby feels about white treatment of Aborigines in Australian history. She thinks that Australian history is one of whites seizing Aboriginal land and she doesn 't hesitate to say so in the class , which has both white and Aboriginal children.

Another school scene shows Trilby 's little brother , Bartie , doing well and eager to gain an education , in order to get himself more opportunities in the world. His teacher tells him he should become an artist and shows him paintings by Albert Namatjira , who is by far the most famous of Aboriginal painters. She encourages Bartie to go to the

city for training.

Mrs Comaway is invited over for tea by a white neighbour. She is very surprised at the invitation but accepts it anyway. Unfortunately she is not used to the luxury she sees in the neighbour 's house and is frightened by the neighbour 's dog which barks at her , making her upset the table. When Trilby finds out , she thinks that her mother has behaved badly and shown no manners. But then when she discovers that the neighbour has given her mother some old clothes , she sees this as an insult and gets angry , believing that the white woman gave her clothes only to feel good , not out of generosity at all. Trilby goes out and burns the old clothes , as the white neighbour looks on.

Many relations and friends come to visit the Comaways in their new home. The whole family has a big party. But one of the old women frightens the children with tales of how one of the Aboriginal spirits will punish them if they are naughty and noisy. Trilby 's father , Joe , invites them all to stay in their house , but when Trilby is told she is furious. The older people think that this is because she is so angry at being called " dark " by other children at school. Trilby goes out of the house for a walk and comes across a drunken brawl at the local hotel , with the police coming to take the drunks away. Of course the drunks are black , while the police are white. As she wanders around town she sees pictures of Sydney and other big cities , and her wish to go and live in a big city is renewed.

Other Aborigines invite her for a drive to another community , where there is a big and noisy party going on. She joins in the party. One of the Aboriginal men tries to take her away , presumably to seduce her. Phil comes to her defence and a brawl ensues in which Phil and Trilby 's attacker fight each other with burning sticks. Phil wins the fight and beats his opponent to death.

Trilby turns out to be pregnant to Phil. Her family are upset , but explain her strange and even rude behaviour in previous scenes through the pressure and worry she is experiencing.

In the hospital Noonah is doing badly in her examinations , but just as the doctor and senior nurses are offering her a second chance , she is asked to comfort a small Aboriginal girl and is able to exercise a beneficial effect on her when everybody else has failed. The point of this scene is that Aboriginal children are likely to take more notice of Aboriginal nurses than of white.

Phil comes looking for Trilby. He is , rightly , convinced that Trilby 's baby is also his , although she angrily refuses to confirm this. Phil offers to marry her , but she refuses because she doesn 't want to live in squalor all her life , with too many children and no money. Among the crowds of friends and relations who are still living in the Comaway household following Joe 's invitation , a girl about the same age as Trilby defends Phil , arguing that Trilby should take the opportunity offered and marry him. Trilby 's response is to chase her around the house angrily. Eventually Joe is able to restore order by restraining Trilby. The police arrive , and point out that only one family is allowed to live there. However , they do not push the point and eventually the police go away.

Joe and his friends are invited away for another bout of gambling and drinking. Joe bets several hundred dollars , probably all his money , on cards , and loses everything to a white man. He is so distressed at this that he leaves the family. Trilby is of course condemnatory , arguing that it is a husband 's responsibility to look after his wife and family. But Mollie then reveals that in fact they had never got married , because they had " never got round to it ".

Trilby goes to the hospital to have her baby , while her sister and

white nurse attend her. Mollie promises to look after both Trilby and the baby , a girl. She wonders if perhaps the simple life of former times , when she sometimes had to sleep “ under the stars ” , in other words in the open , wasn ' t better than trying to get too much education. She tells Trilby that in fact she is a half-caste , with an Irish father who could sing wonderfully.

Trilby does not want to keep the baby. Against her mother's advice she declares that she will adopt her out , and the adopter can decide on her name. However , Trilby has in fact determined to drown the baby and goes to the ladies ' room to carry out this crime. One of the other nurses , the doctor and Noonah come to try and save the baby , but it is too late. The doctor declares the death of the baby girl to be an accident , although it is quite clear not only that Trilby ' s action was deliberate but that the first nurse to arrive on the scene could see that it was no accident. The doctor ' s motivation for his decision is uncertain , but probably he felt it would cause too much racial strife to have her condemned as a murderess , and he was not sure enough of the facts anyway. At the end of the film Joe comes back to his family after he has earned a bit of money. They move in together again as a family , and the reunion scene is one of great joy. Phil turns up and again declares his wish to marry Trilby. She appears to be responsive but in fact has already decided that life in the big city offers her more prospects than marriage. As almost the whole family and their dog sleep , dawn breaks to show Trilby leaving the house , to a faint nod of approval from her mother. Carrying a suitcase she goes to the town where she boards a bus for the nearest big city. Whether she finds a job or success there is left to the imagination.

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## Words and expressions you need to know :

scorcher — a very hot day

Fourex—xxxx , a favourite brand of Queensland beer

boong — a term of abuse for Aborigines

matron — a woman in charge of nursing in a hospital

tucker — food

old man — husband

erratic— changeable , not regular , sometimes good , sometimes bad

rodeo — a form of entertainment popular in Australia 's country towns  
in which a horse rider does his best to stay on the back of a horse  
which is trying to buck him off

buck jumping — a colloquial word for rodeo

good on you — a very colloquial way of praising someone for what they  
think or have done

scone — a light , plain cake , quickly made , either baked in a very  
hot oven or cooked on a hot plate , usually eaten split open and  
spread with butter

hankie/hanky — a handkerchief

serviette — a table napkin

not the only pebble on the beach — not the only person who has to be  
considered

bubba — baby

sleep under the stars — sleep in the open air

littie — a small child

white or black fella — a name sometimes given by Aborigines to  
whites ( white fella ) or to themselves ( black fella ) ; ' Fella ' is an  
abbreviation for ' fellow '

## Topics for discussion :

1. What is Trilby 's attitude towards white people ?  
What aspects of Aboriginal society does she dislike ?
2. Why do you think she is torn between the two worlds , white and Aboriginal ?
3. The end of the film shows her leaving the fringe dwellers ' camp for the big city. Why does she insist on going to the white city ?  
Do you think she would succeed in the city ?
4. Discuss the character of Trilby 's mother , Mollie.
5. What does the film tell us about the plight of the Aboriginal people in Australia ?  
What are the strategies for change that the film show us in regard to the Aboriginal Australians ?
6. What is the theme song about ? What part does it play in the film ?

# Unit 7

## Post-War Changes in Australian Society

Following the end of the Second World War , great changes took place in Australian political and social life. Among them two of the most important were the radical change in the composition of Australian society caused by the large-scale post-war immigration and the ascendancy to power of a very conservative Liberal government headed by Robert Menzies. Other changes which followed in the wake of political and demographical changes included changes in moral and sexual mores , in relation to extramarital affairs , abortion , conservative Catholicism and attitudes towards “ new Australians ”. However , changes also caused tensions , especially among those who were resistant to change. The films set in this period register some of the tensions arising from those two important factors. Films such as *Newsfront* and *Silver City* , give us quite a vivid picture of how different sections of the Australian community react to these changes.

The major events which are recorded in *Newsfront* and *Silver City* are as follows :

1. The 1949 election and the returning to power of the Liberal-Country Party coalition with Robert Menzies as Prime Minister ;
2. The dockside arrival of post-war European immigrants and

the attitudes of Australians towards newcomers ;

3. The growth of anti-Communist feeling leading to Prime Minister Menzies referendum to ban the Communist Party ;
4. The visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip ( 1954 ) ;
5. Bush fires and the Maitland floods of 1954 ;
6. The round-Australia Redex car rally ;
7. The visit of American Vice-President Nixon ( 1955 ) ;
8. The Melbourne Olympic Games and the beginning of television in Australia ( 1956 ).

In Phil Noyce's *Newsfront* ( 1978 ) , changes in the Australian political and social scene are interwoven with and reflected by the contrasting careers of the Maquire brothers , Len and Frank. The film presents a potted screen history of Australia in the 1950s. It appeals because of the rich documentary content and the patriotic dimensions it offers to Australian audiences.

Sophia Turkiewicz's *Silver City* ( 1984 ) concerns a love triangle in a post-war Polish displaced persons camp outside of Sydney. A young , independent Polish girl Nina becomes involved with Julian , another Pole , who is already married. Like Sybilla in *My Brilliant Career* , Nina outrages conventional opinion , but *Silver City* moves the scenario forward in time and takes the female heroine one step further in establishing her sexual identity. Such a liaison was less outrageous in 1950s Australia than Sybilla's defiance of convention in the 1900s. *Silver City*'s real historical importance lies in its depiction of Australian attitudes towards immigrants , especially non-British immigrants. These attitudes reflect a xenophobia born of an insecure sense of superiority , as we can see from Australia's historical processes and its par-

ticular geographical conditions.

# Newsfront

## Main characters :

Len Maguire ( a news cameraman in Cinetone company )

Amy McKenzie ( a production assistant in Cinetone company )

Chris Hewitt ( Len s assistant in Cinetone company )

Ellie ( Chris Hewitt s wife )

Fay ( Len s wife )

A. G. Marwick ( head of the Cinetone company and Len s boss )

Frank Maguire ( Len s brother and head of a US news company )

Frank s wife

Newsreaders of the Cinetone company

This film is fundamentally about the history of the newsreel business in Australia between 1945 and 1956 , and in particular its decline as a result of competition from television. There is a great deal of real footage of Australian history during that period , which intermingles with the modern film. The real footage is all in black and white , but most of the modern film section is in colour. The newsreel was a kind of very short documentary which was shown in conjunction with longer films. There were places which concentrated all their attention on newsreels. One place in Sydney which was famous for its newsreels was the State Theatre.

The film brings out the history of the newsreel and of Australia through the lives of several people closely involved in a company called Cinetone , which was for a while the leading newsreel company.

The main character is Len Maguire whose life is completely bound up with the newsreel.

The film begins in 1945 with the Second World War just ending. People are shown rejoicing at the coming of peace. They go to the wharf to welcome the men home from the war.

The Minister of Immigration in the then Labor government , Mr Arthur Calwell , holds a ceremony to naturalize immigrant Australians. " Naturalization " is a ceremony which declares people to be Australians. Frank Maguire , Len's brother , intends to become an Australian. The characterization of Len is as a highly professional and " ethical " newscameraman but Frank as " hard but caring ".

Political struggle runs through this film at several points. A leader of the Communist Party is shown as defecting to the conservatives and warning people of the dangers of communism. This was a common theme of Australian newsreels at the time. The struggle between the two main parties is also central to the film. Len Maguire is a strong Labor supporter and regards the two Labor prime ministers John Curtin and Ben Chifley as the two greatest prime ministers Australia has ever had. Curtin was prime minister from 1941 until his death in 1945 , and Chifley was prime minister from 1945 until 1949. Len's assistant , Chris Hewitt , regards Chifley as too left wing.

Len marries in April 1949 , and this introduces another major theme in the film , namely that of religion. Len's wife is a very staunch Catholic , and in those days Catholics were absolutely forbidden to practise family planning. Len is also a Catholic , but somewhat less enthusiastic than his wife.

Frank Maguire says he will leave Australia to live in the United States. Amy and he are definitely interested in each other , but Amy thinks he is too cold and calculating. She calls him " a cold fish ".

Certainly he is shown as a rather sneering person throughout. Frank does not come back into the film until fairly near the end.

ANZAC Day is an important annual event in Australia. It is in honour of those men who have died for Australia in war. Several of the characters are shown watching a film about ANZAC , very much a propaganda film. It shows scenes of war in New Guinea in which the cameraman gets killed actually making the film.

Len's wife is having a baby , but it's sooner than they want. This is because as Catholics they are forbidden to plan their family. Len's wife is very upset because she thinks others are making light of the early arrival of her first baby.

The leader of the Liberal Party wins the elections of December 1949 against the Labor Chifley. The head of Cinetone , A. G. , is delighted at this , but most of his workers , including Len and Amy , are pro-Labor.

Frank leaves for the US by ship and the others go to see him off at the wharf. Amy is clearly distressed at his departure and appears to be secretly in love with him.

In a scene of Winter 1951 , Cinetone is shown as losing to Frank's company because of its lack of foreign content. The bosses decide to make it into an entirely Australian content and emphasize the outback.

One of the main features of Australian history in 1951 was Menzies's attempt to have the Communist Party in Australia declared illegal. His first attempt was defeated in the High Court , so he then had a referendum about it , which means getting the whole people to vote on the issue. " Yes " meant support for Menzies's plan , and " no " opposition to it. Menzies was defeated in the referendum also , but by a rather narrow margin. As a Labor supporter Len Maguire is very much against Menzies's plan and supports the " no " vote in the referendum.

On the other hand , the leaders of Cinetone are in favour of the “ yes ” side. When the Cinetone people are doing a story on the plan to outlaw the Communist Party , the newsreader refuses to say that the passing of the referendum would make Australia a police state and threatens to resign in protest if the producer insists. The producer quickly changes his mind and blots out the offending passage.

By this time Len and his wife are having their third baby. At the baptism of the baby Len argues strongly with the priest who is violently anti-communist and wants to use the church to support the “ yes ” vote in the referendum. However , Len s wife is secretly supporting the priest. She and Len argue about religion and politics. She makes it clear to him that she supported the “ yes ” side in the referendum. Because she does not want another baby and refuses to practise family planning , banned by the Catholic Church , she will not sleep with him any longer.

Segments are shown about the ascent of Mt Everest ( Jomolangma ) and the funeral scene of the newsreader who had refused to read the section about Australia s becoming a police state. There is also a section on the visit of Richard Nixon to Australia as vice-president of the US.

One of the major events of the “ outback ” in the 1950s in Australia was the Redex Trial. This was a kind of car race but also an endurance test for cars. It involved cars driving right around Australia and competing with each other to go over rough roads and complete the trip right around the continent first. The Trial took several weeks and dominated the local news at the time. Because of its emphasis on the outback Cinetone gave it a great deal of emphasis.

The newscameramen Len Maguire and Chris Hewitt are treated like heroes during the Redex Trial. Len deliberately causes an acci-

dent for a car taking part in the race so that he can film the accident. An accident is always exciting news. Naturally the driver is furious , but Len has his film clip anyway.

Chris meets a girl called Ellie at a dance held for the Redex Trial. They make love but he has to leave at 4.00 the next morning to continue covering the Redex Trial. However , she turns up unexpectedly at Chris's workplace because she is pregnant and demands that he marry her. Chris does not want to , but Len persuades him that he should , so they marry. She tells him that she has planned this all along. But it isn't a happy marriage. At the wedding Len begins an affair with Amy , to the obvious distress of his wife. Len moves in to live with Amy and leaves his wife.

In 1954 , floods occur in New South Wales , especially in a country town called Maitland. Len and Chris go to film the event. They get involved in helping people including the Mayor of Maitland , with medical supplies. Chris is killed trying to transport medical supplies. Len finds his corpse at the top of a telegraph pole , which is almost submerged below the floods. The resultant film features the death of Chris.

In Spring 1956 Len goes to film a bush fire. It is here that competition from the newly emerging television medium begins to become obvious. Television was just beginning in Australia at that time. Amy tells Len how good she thought his film was but they are both very conscious that television is potentially disastrous for them , because nobody would go to see newsreels if they could see news film in their own homes. In the event , it was indeed competition which meant the end of the newsreel in Australia. Len is told by a superior to " shape up or ship out " , which means that he must improve his work in the face of competition with television or stop working altogether.

Frank Maguire returns from the US and offers Len a job in his own company. The offer is to handle the Australian end of an Australia series with an American style. Frank has made good in the US. He heads a very large and important company. Amy is very interested in Frank's arrival, and a bit jealous of his American wife. Len is very humiliated by the offer of the job which implies that his brother has done so much better than he, and which also drives home the point that there is no future in the newsreel. Len knows this is true but it hurts him bitterly because he has devoted his whole life to the medium.

Len sees his wife and family and learns that she is hoping to remarry. He sees the State Theatre, which had not long before been so important a centre for newsreels, but it has no newsreels any longer. They are already losing out to television. Len types out a resignation letter. Before handing it in to the boss, he learns that Cinetone is amalgamating with another major company to form a new one called Cinenews. He is offered the job of directing and filming newsreels on the Olympic Games, which were held in Melbourne in 1956. He immediately agrees to accept this job in preference to the one Frank had offered him, even though it is much smaller in scope and shorter in term.

Len does very well in filming the Olympic Games. He shoots two films of an event which saw the Soviet Union in competition with Hungary. This had both sporting and also political implications. Frank asks him for one of the two films. The Americans are very keen to have a film of this event because it appeared to support their cause in the Cold War. Len walks away quite deliberately with his head high in the air, refusing absolutely to have anything to do with such an offer. The final scene shows Frank saying to Amy: "He's walking to a preci-

pice with his eyes wide open ". He means that refusing this offer will destroy him , because he is persisting in following a medium which has no future. Everybody knows that Len s career is over unless he comes to terms with the advent of television. Amy replies : " He s just a bit old-fashioned , that s all ". She means that he would rather keep his dignity and be defeated fighting , rather than give in to humiliation by his American brother who has been so successful. Of course Amy sides with Len and admires and loves him. But she is as aware as the others that Len s career is finished because the future lies not with newsreels but with television.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Words and expressions you need to know :

Waltzing Matilda—the title of Australia s most famous song. The phrase ' to waltz Matilda ' means to carry a bed-roll on one s travels. The song celebrates the fate of a vagrant who has been caught by troopers in illegal possession of a sheep and , in an act of defiance , jumps into a waterhole. For most Australians this is the national song.

naturalisation—a ceremony which declares people to be Australians  
platitude—a flat or dull remark , esp. one uttered as if it were fresh and profound

booze—alcohol drink

digger—a term of address among men

pom or pommy—an Englishman

beauty—excellent

go on the dole—live on social security payments

woolclip—the amount of wool yielded from the annual shearing season

Womens Weekly—it is the most popular magazine in Australia with a circulation of over one million each week. It covers women s issues , but it is not feminist

hack—a person who does the routine work in a creative occupation

dock—take away , esp. money from one s wages

bloke—a man or fellow

army duck—a military vehicle for amphibious use

She'll be right—Don't worry ; everything will turn out to be all right

bastard—used in Australia to mean any person without pejorative sense

aggravation—something that irritates

shape up or ship out—perform as required or leave

amalgamate—join together to form something large

commission—an amount of money usually related to the value of goods sold , paid to the person who sold them

go and get stuffed—used to express unwillingness to do something

I invite you to bite your bum—an impolite dismissal indicating the speaker's wish to end the conversation

### Topics for discussion :

1. How would you comment on the characters of the Maguire brothers ? Do you see any qualities in each of them that you admire ? What are they ?
2. Discuss that relationship between Len and his orthodox Catholic wife Fay. What do you think of the breaking off of their marriage ?
3. Some scenes show internal fights at Cinetone between the head of the company and his staff. What are the issues involved ?
4. What does the film show us about the influence of the Church on politics in Australia in the 1950s ?

5. Why does the film-maker incorporate some old black and white newsreel footage in the film ? How successful is it ?
6. How , through the rivalry of the two newsreel companies and the coming of television , has the construction of 20th century history of Australia been affected by the growth of visual media ?

## Silver City

### Main characters :

Nina ( a young , independent Polish girl )

Julian ( another Pole , Nina's lover )

Anna ( Julian's wife )

Victor ( Julian's friend )

Helena ( Nina's friend )

Mr Roy

The migrant arrivals glimpsed at the start of Newsfront are moved centre stage in Sophia Turkiewicz's *Silver City* ( 1984 ). The film is an historical film concerned with an important aspect of Australian post-war life : the European migrant influx. It is set in the 1950s in Silver City , which is the migrants' ironic name for the spartan , rough , and ready camp in which the " New Australians " lived on arrival in Australia.

The film begins on a train with a meeting between old lovers , Nina and Julian in 1962. They are both Polish migrants who came to Australia in 1950. Nina is now a teacher. She is on her way to a teachers conference in Sydney. Julian and Nina are very happy to see each other , some six years after their original experiences in Silver City. Chatting over a cup of coffee , they recall their life in the migrant camp. Then the film jumps backwards in time to the migrant situation in 1950. The story of the camp is told as an extended flashback.

The film first presents the dockside arrival of European migrants

in Sydney. Some real-life figures are represented , for example , Arthur Calwell , Labor Minister for Immigration. Among the new arrivals quite a few are so-called “ displaced persons ” , that is , people who have been forced to leave their country. The first problem faced by migrants is unsympathetic officialdom. This is dramatized in a customs officers seizure of a quilt from a migrant woman , in the bullying approach of the migrant camp director and in the use of a loud hailer for barking out orders in largely uncomprehended English to the new arrivals. In the migrant camp the migrants are treated like children , and families are sexually split up into separate dormitories for administrative convenience. However , Nina is excited by Australia , with its ghostly gum trees and clear blue skies. She also has a tragic sense of Poland's horrific wartime past.

The romance between Nina and Julian begins to develop immediately after they meet each other. Yet , in relation with some local people Nina encounters some very nasty experiences. When she asks for a vodka or cognac in a country pub , she is surlily treated by the barman. Another incident happens in a small town when some local yob-bos shout at her “ bloody reffos ” , and they even try to rape her.

After the confrontation in the small town Nina decides to go to the migrant camp outside Sydney , where Julian and his family are staying. Nina starts work as a laundrywoman in the same factory that Anna does. The relations between Nina and Julian become more and more intimate. One day , instead of going to his English class , Julian takes Nina to a small house Victor built out of a Rolls-Royce packing case. From then on they often have their secret meeting at Victor's place.

Nina goes to confession for the first time. The priest advises her to leave Julian and go as far away as she can. He regards their love

affair as a sin that she should avoid. But Nina rejects the priest's condemnation as she is determined to lead her own life. The priest criticizes her angrily. " You would never have argued with a priest like this back in Poland , " he says.

In the meantime , Julian helps persuade the authorities that the camp should no longer be sexually segregated. They have the whole camp reorganized so that husband and wife could live together and children could live with their parents.

Anna is dismayed to learn that Julian has been unfaithful to her , but at first she does not know who the woman is. She has to put up with it when Julian tells her that it is Nina who he has been living with. Actually Julian has never broken away from his wife.

Nina and Julian try to set up house together , but their efforts prove to be unsuccessful. After a series of conflicts , Julian decides to return to his wife.

The final sequence shows the two of them on the train again. Nina happily explains the achievement of her lifelong ambition to be a teacher. Julian feels awkward and regretful as he is still an articled clerk ( a lawyer's clerk ).

Silver City highlights some of the problems faced in Australia by migrants when they first arrive in their adopted country. The settlement policies implicit in pre-1970s immigration embraced assimilation and integration. Non-English speaking immigrants were expected to learn the language and conform to the cultural norms and values of Australia. But the process of assimilation turned out to be slower than anticipated. Not all migrants wished to become Australian , and some preferred to retain their own culture. Deep-rooted prejudice ingrained in Australians aggravated the migrant problems. Another theme the film deals with is the confrontation between Julian's extramarital affairs

and the conventional opinion , especially in Polish-Catholic circles.

The film , which is based on Sophia Turkiewicz's own experience and that of others , is sympathetic with the migrant problems. The last sequence clearly shows that despite the difficulties of being a migrant in the face of the indifference and even hostility Australia frequently offered to " displaced persons " , migrants like Nina and Victor did succeed in their efforts to adapt to the Australian way of life. However , Julian remained unchanged. As he puts it , " I am too old to change. "

Like *Newsfront* , *Silver City* is a historical film concerning the migrant situation in the 1950s , but it does not successfully integrate its individual drama with the historical processes.

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Words and expressions you need to know :

crockery—cups , plates , etc. , made from baked clay

get stuck into—start work or an activity eagerly and forcefully

" Do the two years of work you owe this country and return your passage "— In the 1950s as Britain could no longer supply skilled labour in sufficient numbers because of her own post-war reconstruction , Australia was forced to seek refugees and other immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. These refugees were assisted to Australia on the condition they were prepared to work for up to two years wherever the government sent them.

" You are not the only pebble on the beach "—you are not the only one to have this problem

scorcher—a very hot day

shandy—a mixed drink of beer with lemonade

refugee—refugee

one of the nuts and bolts—one of the simple facts of a subject

Holden car—a car manufactured by Australia's own motor company  
called Holden Motor Company

Rolls-Royce—a car made by British Rolls Royce Motor Company.

Rolls-Royce cars are famous for their excellence

let the dog see the rabbit—do not get in the way of another who wishes  
to see or do something

Pavlova—a dessert made of a large soft-centred meringue, having an  
indented top filled with whipped cream and often topped with fruit.

It was invented by an Australian chef in 1935 and named after Russian Ballerina Anna Pavlova

### Topics for discussion :

1. What is Silver City? What sort of problems do migrants have while staying in the migrant camp?
2. Discuss the character of Nina. Do you think she is a feminist?
3. What do you think of the romance between Nina and Julian?
4. How do you like Julian? Compare his character with that of Nina.
5. A sense of intense camaraderie between the migrants pervades the film. Give some examples to illustrate this point.
6. What have you learnt from the film about Australian society in the 1950s?

# Unit 8

## Post-Apocalypse Prophecies

The Australian film industry has not produced many science fiction films. Science fiction films are costly to make because they usually require expensive and complex special effects. However, the Mad Max trilogy can no doubt be regarded as Australian examples of this most modern of all movie genres.

What the Mad Max films depict is a savage, futuristic world which emerges after a nuclear war. This is what we call a post-nuclear age or post-Apocalypse society. Mad Max I tells us that in such a world terror will reign if the road gangs take over the highways and that life will become a nightmare as shown in the killing of Max's wife and baby by the Toecutter's gang. In Mad Max III, violence and corruption is the order of the day in Bartertown. This is what is left of the civilized world after a nuclear war. A band of marooned children are the survivors of the dimly-remembered nuclear holocaust. Clearly, the message the Mad Max trilogy presents to us is that we should do everything we can to prevent any nuclear war because nuclear war means death, destruction and the end of the world. The emergence of the Mad Max films is by no means accidental. The films express the public concern about the possible effects nuclear war would have on our world. The anti-nuclear movement in Australia is developing very fast. The issue of nuclear disarmament is the single biggest issue which can bring thousands of people to demonstrations in Australia to-

day.

How to keep order in face of horror and violence is of course a great problem. This is solved in the trilogy by presenting Mad Max as a super hero who stands alone against the barbarians of a post-nuclear age. But Max was not born a killer. The desperate situations force him to use violence against violence. In Mad Max I , at the start of the film Max wants to resign after the death of his friend Jim Goose. McAfee , his superior , appeals to him to stay. People don't believe in heroes anymore , he tells Max , but he wants him to be one of those heroes. Max refuses. " What scares me most is that I'm starting to enjoy my work , " he says to his boss. In Mad Max III , Max steadfastly refuses the prophet's mantle , and Tina Turner's title song track repeats that we don't need another hero. However , Max finally ends up doing what McAfee urged him to in Mad Max I , and he is sanctified despite himself.

# Mad Max

## Main characters :

Max ( the heroine , a policeman )

Jessie ( Maxs wife )

Sprog ( their small son )

Jim Goose ( Maxs colleague )

The Nightrider ( a bikie )

The Toecutter ( the head bikie )

Johnny the Boy

Baba

Fifi McAfee ( Maxs superior )

The film is Australian and set in an Australian country town a few years from now. Its language is very colloquial and extremely difficult to understand. However , there is a great deal of action.

As the film begins , we see an empty highway with a death's head painted on it , some wild graffiti on an abandoned building , and a title saying " a few years in the future. " Suddenly , through the telescopic sights of a rifle we see a naked couple making love in an open field. The voyeur is a police officer and friend of Max. He is told by an urgent radio call that the Nightrider , a terminal psychotic , is loose on the roads. Two police cars take off after him at high speed. As we see the Nightrider wiping the police cars off the road , we glimpse cutaways of Max preparing for the chase. In a little town the chase passes through , we see a woman pushing her baby in a pushchair and two

tourists hauling a caravan. As the cars speed by , the baby wanders on the road , but miraculously escapes when one of the cars hits through the caravan. Max s colleague Jim Goose , who has joined the chase , crashes his bike , and this leaves Max to take on the Nightrider. During the chase the Nightrider is killed in an accident , his coffin being sent back to his home town in the country.

The next scene shifts to Maxs home , an idyllic beach house. We see his wife , Jessie playing a mood piece on a saxophone , while their son Sprog ( an Aussie nickname for babies ) is happily playing on the kitchen table. As Jessie soothes Max , the radio reports the Nightrider s death as the third of its kind in the last month. Max then returns to work. He and Goose are at the Hall of Justice , a rundown place , which is the headquarters of the pursuit unit. Max s boss , Fifi McAfee is a bare-chested , shaven-headed giant who affectionately treats Max as a surrogate son. He badly wants to keep Max on the payroll as the chief road warrior. As the scene shifts to yet another road accident , Fifi warns Max that the Nightriders gang will come after him.

The Nightrider s friends swear to take revenge. They are led by the fearsome Toecutter. Johnny the Boy and Baba are his two rival lieutenants , who are vying for his favours. The gang heads off to the railway station to collect what s left of the Nightrider. Then the Toecutter s gang chases a young couple , who try vainly to escape in their red roadster ( an open car ). The bikies hunt them down and smash their car off the highway with crowbars and giant meataxes. They kill the boy , rape the girl , and destroy their car. As this scene peaks , there is a close-up of an Australian crow croaking ominously , like an antipodean raven.

In the next scene , Max and Goose arrive on the scene. They rescue the girl , who has been chained by her neck to the car , and arrest

Johnny the Boy. He has been left behind because he is drunk.

The police , including Max and Goose , try to mount a legal case against the bikies. However , to their intense disappointment , nobody from the town dares to press charges against the bikies. Fifi has to set Johnny the Boy free. The bkie curses Goose and Max as he leaves , threatening their lives , and ridiculing them as a cripple ( Goose has a limp from the Nightrider chase ) and a mute ( Max is a man of few words ). In a rage Goose starts fighting other policemen.

Next we see Goose in a nightclub watching a blonde sing a torch song about leather men on motorbikes who take her to the edge of her dreams. On his way back Goose has a bad accident on his bike , but he is not seriously hurt. He phones the police to send him a car to take the wrecked bike back. When he is driving back in the car , the bikies find him. Johnny the Boy traps Goose inside his car , with petrol dripping down through the twisted metal. The Toecutter puts a joint in his mouth and asks Johnny to light him up. Even Johnny hesitates , but he does it. The Toecutter's plan is to burn Goose alive in revenge for the death of the Nightrider. Goose is badly burned. When Max visits him in hospital , he is absolutely horrified at the sight of the dying burned Goose. He can't believe that this thing was his friend.

Pushed to the edge by Goose's death , Max decides to resign. Fifi appeals to Max to stay. People don't believe in heroes anymore , he tells Max , but he wants Max to be one of those heroes. Max refuses , saying that what scares him most is that he's starting to enjoy his work. Fifi responds charitably by ordering Max to take a holiday.

Max , Jessie , and Sprog drive off on a country trip. Max talks to Jessie about his father , and how he made the mistake of never showing his feelings to him , and they play with their dog. Then the holiday goes wrong when they stop to repair a tire. Max waits there while Jes-

sie drives to a nearby store but she is surrounded by the Toecutter s gang. The Toecutter wants to rape her , but she fights against him and wins by kicking him in the crotch. Jessie speeds away , ripping off the hand of one of the bikies who had thrown a chain around the car.

The family flees to Jessie s parents house nearby and seems to be safe there. While Max works on the car , Jessie goes to the beach. Here there is a feeling of something dreadful about to happen—but it doesn t. Then , going back to the house through the bush , she is terrified by a man following her. He turns out only to be a harmless idiot , but Max is alarmed enough to go in search of the Toecutter. Meanwhile , Jessie recovers from her fright to realize that Sprog has been left outside. She runs after him , but finds the bikies have arrived and are playing with Sprog. The Toecutter taunts her , refusing to give her the child. Jessie s mother appears with a gun and traps them in a shed while she and Jessie escape by car. The bikies break out of the shed and chase them. The car breaks down , the bikies run down Jessie and Sprog and escape. Max comes to their rescue and takes them to hospital. The doctors are heard declaring that they have already died.

Meanwhile , Max renews his determination to take revenge on the bikies. From a car repair man he finds out where they are and gives chase. During the chase , the bikies suffer several accidents , some of their bikes are damaged and they are injured. However , the Toecutter and Johnny the Boy escape. Max continues the chase but is caught behind a lorry. Max enters a prohibited area looking for them. The two bikies shoot him down. The Toecutter escapes but Max is badly hurt. He nevertheless manages to get to the car and chases him. This time the Toecutter is killed in an accident with the lorry , which runs over him and his bike.

The only one finally left is Johnny the Boy. When Max catches

him , he handcuffs Johnny to a wrecked , petrol-soaked car , then leaves him a hacksaw and advice about either cutting off the cuffs ( ten minutes ) or his foot ( five minutes ) before the car explodes. As Max drives off , we see Johnny die in a cloud of black smoke. The film ends with Maxs point-of-view of the white highway lines flipping hypnotically under his speeding car.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Words and expressions you need to know :

cop-killer—one who kills policemen

terminal psychotic—a person suffering from an incurable mental disease

bikie—a member of a gang of motorcycle

MFP—Mobile Force Patrol

game—any object of pursuit or attack

meat-truck—a big truck used to transport meat

scrubber—a girl of loose morals

Nobody showed—nobody was willing to give evidence against the bikies

Im through—I quit

Youre on the top shelf—youre the best road warrior Ive had

crap—nonsense

blow—a walk in the fresh air

Tarzan—a jungle-raised hero of stories by E. R. Burroughs

tattoo—pictures on the skin

### Topics for discussion :

1. It is clear that Max is presented in the film as a hero for a post-A-

- pocalypse society. What kind of hero do you think he is ?
2. Compare the image of Max with those of Archy and Frank in Gallipoli. What do they have in common ? What does the figure of Mad Max represent ? What kind of values do the images of Archy and Frank embody ?
  3. Towards the end of the film , in a night driving scene , Max's head momentarily becomes a source of light. What does this suggest ?
  4. In the scene in which the bikies are destroying the boy's red car , there is a close-up of an Australian crow croaking across the sky. What does it symbolize ?
  5. The film does well in contrasting a peaceful-looking natural setting with human events of appalling violence. Give some examples to illustrate this point.
  6. What are some examples of slang in the film ? Why does the film use the sort of language it does ?

## Mad Max : Beyond Thunderdome

Main characters :

Mad Max ( the hero )

Aunty Entity ( a power-crazy domineering woman , the second most powerful person in Bartertown )

Master ( a brilliant but physically small man , the Lord of Bartertown )

Blaster ( a strong but stupid man , but in combination with Master , they rule Bartertown )

Iron Bar ( one of Aunty Entity's men )

Savannah Nix ( the head of a quasi-religious sect )

Various servants of Aunty Entity and followers of Savannah Nix

Mad Max : Beyond Thunderdome is the third part of the Mad Max trilogy , so it is also known as Mad Max III .

In the opening scenes , we see the Gyro Captain in an airplane , buzzing Max below and hijacking his camel train. Left alone in the desert , Max trudges through the sand dunes with his monkey by his side. He looks like a Biblical prophet.

Then the film shifts quickly to a fortress scene. The fortress is not a refuge for the good , but a seething , sleazy pit called Bartertown. From here the criminal dregs of what is left of society run a foul empire. The town's energy comes from methane , which is extracted from pig shit. The Lord of Bartertown is the Master , a dwarf , who rides on the shoulders of a huge , iron-hooded giant called Blaster. Together , " Master-Blaster " rules Bartertown. The town is a quasi-medieval ,

post-futuristic world where we see a cross-section of Neanderthal types in exotic costumes. As Max enters Bartertown , a man is hawking radioactive water. This sets the tone of ruthless corruption Max is about to encounter. And Max himself has changed. He has longer than shoulder-length hair and is wrapped in an Arab burnous.

We are then introduced to the neo-colonial politics of Bartertown via the sinister Collector. He and his lieutenant , Iron Bar notice Max s fighting skills and take him to meet Bartertown s second most powerful person. This is Aunt Entity , a youngish domineering woman. As Max is ushered into her presence , her Japanese manservant is playing a moody saxophone solo , just the way Max s wife did in Mad Max. Aunt Entity asks who he is. Max replies that in the old world he was a cop who drove. On “ the day after ” , he says , “ I was still alive. ” Aunt Entity is impressed enough with Max to offer him a deal. She wants him to kill Blaster to undermine the power of Master-Blaster. Max agrees. The fight takes place in a large semicircular cage called Thunderdome. This is Bartertown s own arena of justice. The only rule of any fights there , made up by Aunt Entity , is “ two men enter , one man leaves ”. This means that in any fight , one man must be killed , and only one survives. The people in the town love the violence of the fight and say repeatedly the only slogan : “ two men enter , one man leaves ”. For them it is a kind of blood sport , because they love to watch people die.

The film s first major action sequence takes place with the fight in Thunderdome. Max and Blaster are suspended by elastic ropes and go bouncing round the cage after each other s blood. At first Blaster gets the upper hand , but then Max wins by blowing a high-pitched whistle , which renders Blaster powerless.

Max is about to kill Blaster with a giant club when the latter s hel-

met comes off , revealing him to be a simpleton ( a weak-minded person ). Master runs into the cage to plead for Blaster s life , but Iron Bar shoots Blaster with a crossbow arrow.

Because Max has refused to kill Blaster , he has broken Barter-town s rules. He now has to spin the wheel of chance to determine his punishment. The principle is “ bust a deal , face the wheel ”. The wheel stops against the word “ Gulag ” , which means the victim is to be put on a horse , have his head covered with a large , clown mask , and banished to die in the desert. So Max is sent off , while the dwarf , Master , is thrown in with the pigs. Aunt Entity , it seems , has won the day. What she doesn t count on is Max s surviving in the desert , which he does , thanks to a tribe of lost savage children.

Here , about halfway through , *Mad Max III* becomes another movie. Max is saved by Savannah Nix and taken to a remote tribal community , which believes in a glorious future called the “ Tomorrow morrow land ”. Savannah Nix s followers believe that a saviour or messiah called Captain Walker , who can fly and talk through a kind of magic means called “ sonic ” , will come to save them and present them with the wonderful “ Tomorrow morrow land ”. They call themselves “ the waiting ones ”. Max lies near death for days in the children s camp , while they cut his hair and talk about their ideas of the outside world. When Max finally recovers , they explain the myth of their origins to him , speaking a broken , odd , Austral-English , and show him an old 747 jet shrouded in the sand. They also have a plastic slide projector with which they show him pictures of Captain Walker and photos of Sydney , Australia before the “ pocky-lyps ”. They think Max is their long-awaited Captain Walker. The kingdom is there for Max to claim if he wants it , but in his usual blunt manner Max tells them he s not Captain Walker , that he knows about the “ pocky-lyps ” , but that he s

not there to save them. The “ pocky-lyps ” is “ the apocalypse ”. When Max denies he is their expected god , some of the bolder ones leave the camp , despite Max s warning about Bartertown. Max goes after them against his better judgement , and together they return to Bartertown. On the way there he saves them from being swallowed up by the sand.

After they arrive in Bartertown , they rescue the Master from Iron Bar and the pigs and destroy Bartertown s energy grid. Max is supported by some of “ the waiting ones ” , including Savannah Nix , who turns up at the right time to give him strong help. The fight is long and intense but ends with the destruction of Bartertown.

Aunty Entity demands that the town be rebuilt. Max escapes with Master Blaster , who thus falls under Maxs domination and becomes a threat to Aunty Entity. A chase and fight fail to change the situation. Aunty Entity fails to regain control over Master Blaster.

A small girl halts the progress of Maxs escape and takes him and his retinue , now including Master Blaster , to a small plane , but it cannot take off because it is overweight. Max insists again on trying to take off , while Aunty Entity and her slaves follow in hot pursuit in armoured ground vehicles. At the critical moment Max leaps off the plane and causes a major accident among Aunty Entitys group. Maxs leap lightens the plane s burden enabling it to take off , but without Max.

The film ends with Savannah Nix , Master Blaster and the other “ waiting ones ” escaping in the Gyro Captain s old plane. During the conflict Max finally wipes out Iron Bar , who gives a final defiant gesture from his wrecked vehicle. Most uncharacteristically , Aunty Entity becomes Max s fairy godmother and lets him go free. The last sequence shows the rickety light plane flying through a burnt-out Syd-

ney , and the tribe listening to the story of their origins , being told by one of their own older girls how they must keep the city alight for those who are still waiting out there.

Mad Max : Beyond Thunderdome is the most explicit of the Mad Max movies in its social message. It takes its point of departure from the moment of nuclear Armageddon and its story and moral themes are worked out in this context. The main theme of the film is the power struggle between Aunty Entity and Master Blaster. The film also shows us various forms of corruption in Bartertown. The secondary theme deals with the ideals of a strange quasi-religious community , led by Savannah Nix , who looks back into history ( represented by Australia in the 1980s ) and forward to a beautiful future called the “ Tomorrow morrow land ”.

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### Words and expressions you need to know :

apocalypse—a writing about the future , esp. about what will happen when the world ends

barter—to exchange goods for other goods rather than for money

radioactive water—water which possesses radioactivity harmful to living beings

brothel—a house of prostitutes , where sex can be had for money

a cock of the walk one day and a feather duster the next—a person who has ( or thinks he has ) the most control , but he becomes insignificant shortly afterwards

the day after—here it refers to the day after the nuclear war

bunny—a rabbit

piggyback—a ride on someone else's back or shoulders

bust a deal—to break a deal

sleazy pit—a hole in the ground which is dirty, poor-looking and immoral

### Topics for discussion :

1. What kind of place is Bartertown? Give examples of the way Bartertown is run in the film.
2. What is the conflict between Aunty Entity and Master Blaster? Which of them do you support or sympathize with?
3. How would you comment on the image of Mad Max in this film? Is it any different from the image in *Mad Max I*?
4. People talk about the end of mankind. Do you believe it is inevitable? Does a nuclear war mean the end of the world?
5. What do you think of the ideals of the quasi-religious community led by Savannah Nix?
6. What does the last sequence show us about the future of our world?

# Unit 9

## Relationship between Man and Nature

Australia is a dry and sparsely populated continent , with some 90% of the population living in less than 20% of the land area and the remaining population scattered in isolated mining settlements and outback properties. In many areas , one can drive for hours without seeing another vehicle , let alone a dwelling. With a population density of two people per square kilometre , it would seem that Australians would have to worry less about how they use their land than overcrowded countries in Europe , Japan , and elsewhere in the world. However , this is not the case. Despite the size and open spaces , Australia is the world's driest continent. Much of its inland is desert or semi-desert. In the 19th century death by thirst was a common experience in inland Australia. Explorers travelling in well-equipped parties entered dry country and found themselves desperate for food and water. As in the film *Burke and Wills* , the two explorers died from starvation and exhaustion. Three deserts occupy large parts of central Australia , and one of them , the Simpson Desert , was not even named until 1929 , and not traversed until 1939.

When Europeans first settled in Australia 200 years ago , they came to a land whose animal and plant life had been affected by the impact of the Aboriginal communities. While the Aborigines had introduced the dingo and cleared quite large areas of forest and shrub through the systematic use of burning-off to provide grass for kangaroos

and other marsupials , they also assisted the environment through this process of land management. Australia's unique animal and plant life generally thrived and a balance appears to have been achieved between human and other life on the continent.

The two centuries of European settlement have seen major changes in the Australian landscape. Wherever Australians have farmed , mined or established urban communities there have been dramatic shifts in the natural environment. While human activities have brought economic benefits , they have also created problems for the natural fauna and flora and in some cases pose serious ecological problems for Australia's population.

In *Storm Boy* and *Burke and Wills* , two different attitudes towards the environment are aptly presented through the contrast between the city hunters and *Storm Boy* and his Aboriginal friend , between *Burke and Wills*. *Storm Boy* and *Fingerbone Bill* know how to live in balance with the land , but those hunters want to destroy it. *Burke* views the land as an enemy to be conquered , whereas *Wills* wishes to see the country and understand it. In *Burke and Wills* , only *John King* survives because he is saved by Aborigines. Unlike *Burke* who drives away Aborigines when they come with food , *King* goes to live with them. The message such films contain is that in order to live in balance with the environment , man must learn to live with and understand it.

Today the opinion polls in Australia show environmental matters soaring to the top of people's concern. The greenhouse effect , depletion of the ozone layer , world population growth , the nuclear weapons stockpile and so on are problems most Australians are worried about. The theme of the environment has become a recurring topic in recent Australian films.

In *Storm Boy* and *Burke and Wills*, apart from the different attitudes towards the environment, the contrast of the outback and the city is also discernible. The bush is depicted as savage but noble, whereas the city is viewed as civilized but corrupt. There is a general feeling among Australians that cities are much the same all the world over in modern civilization, whereas the bush and its bushmen are not only unique but also typify the 'real Australia' and the 'real Australian'. However, in Australian society today, the contradiction between the 'bush myth' of the typical Australian—digger, stockman, *Crocodile Dundee*—and the urban reality—one of the most urbanised countries in the world and the declining role of the rural sector in the Australian economy—is more apparent than ever before. But the idealisation of the outback still emerges in Australian films like *Crocodile Dundee* (to be introduced in Unit 10).

# Storm Boy

## Main characters :

Storm Boy ( the hero )

Tom Kingsley ( Storm Boys father , a hermit )

Fingerbone Bill ( an Aborigine )

Miss Walker ( the school teacher )

Ranger

Hunters

Henri Safran's Storm Boy ( 1976 ) is adapted from a classic children's novel by Colin Thiele. The film is set on the Coorong , a sanctuary with a salt-water lagoon and adjacent sandhills along the South Australian coastline. Storm Boy has been brought there by his father after the death of his mother , and he is as wild and free as the sandhills and the sea. His father Tom is known as Hide-Away , and is regarded as a hermit and a beachcomber. Storm Boy has difficulty in relating to his father but he finds friends in animals and plants around him , and he is perfectly in tune with his environment.

Fingerbone Bill is an Aborigine who lives on a reserve about two kilometres away. He is a friend of Storm Boys. Fingerbone has been to mission school and knows how to read and write. He teaches Storm Boy all about the fish and birds , the signs of the weather and the sea. Storm Boys education is not in books , but it is less profound for not being conducted in school.

Tom's humpy is just on the edge of the Coorong sanctuary. Every

year the duck shooters from the nearby town often sneak into the sanctuary chasing wounded birds. Even worse are the men with rifles who shoot birds at random. Storm Boy loves birds very much , especially those pelicans which often sit in a row , like a lot of important old men with their heavy paunches sagging. Whenever Storm Boy walks away , they will rattle their beaks drily in greeting.

In one of the broken nests Storm Boy finds three baby pelicans still alive. One of them is very weak and sick , and the boy brings him and the other two to the humpy. Storm Boy spends three days and nights nursing the sick one back to health. He calls this baby pelican Mr Percival , and the other two Mr Proud and Mr Ponder.

One day the school teacher , Miss Walker , comes to visit Tom and his son. She wants Tom to send the boy to school at the town of Goolwa , but he refuses , saying that the boy is learning what he needs.

Before long the three pelicans grow big and strong. Tom says to the boy that he cannot afford to feed three huge birds. Storm Boy agrees to let them go , although it is agony for him to part with Mr Percival. When Tom and his son return to the humpy in the evening , they find a big shape sitting on the Look-Out Post on the sandhill. Mr Percival has come home !

From that day the boy and the bird become inseparable. They even play ball together. Mr Percival loves to retrieve things such as a ball , a stone or an old fishing reel that the boy has thrown out across the water.

One night some hunters from the town of Goolva drive their cars into the sanctuary and damage Tom s humpy. Fingerbone comes to their rescue. In this way Tom meets Fingerbone for the first time. The next day the local ranger calls on them and blames Tom for using the

gun and shooting at the hunters because “ there is a law against guns in the Coorong ”. But actually it is Fingerbone who shot at the hunters.

A terrible storm comes up. At the height of the storm a tugboat is blown aground , far out in the surf. There is no apparent way a line can be run out the two or three hundred metres to where they are.

Storm Boy has the solution. Mr Percival can fly out to the sailors with a line. Tom gets out a fine line , attaches a sinker to one end and gives it to Mr Percival , who flies out to the tugboat. Grabbing the line the sailors swim ashore one by one and the whole crew is rescued.

Mr Percival is a hero. In thanks , the captain and the crew offer to pay to send Storm Boy to Adelaide to boarding-school. But Storm Boy refuses to go unless Mr Percival goes with him. That is impossible , so Storm Boy stays on the Coorong.

The year goes by , and then the next duck season opens and the air is hideous with shots and the stench of gunpowder. To Storm Boys horror , one of the duck shooters shoots Mr Percival. Later Fingerbone finds Mr Percival dead and buries it at the top of the sandhill. The film ends with Fingerbone showing Storm Boy a baby pelican which has just hatched out of the egg. “ Perhaps Mr Percival is starting all over again , ” Fingerbone says philosophically , “ birds like him never die. ”

Storm Boy is a touching and highly believable story in which the audience live as much with Mr Percival as with Storm Boy. With great delicacy and tact , the film conveys the message that to live in balance with nature , man must learn to live with and understand her creatures. Fingerbone Bill and Storm Boy are portrayed as a black man and white boy who know how to live in this balance with nature.

Just as Colin Thiele , the author of the book Storm Boy , points

out ,“ In the world there will always be men who are cruel , just as there will always be men who are lazy or stupid or wise or kind. Today you've seen what cruel and stupid men can do. ”

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## Words and expressions you need to know :

Coorong—a national park comprising a salt-water lagoon and adjacent sandhills along the SA coastline near Lake Alexandrina

reserve—a piece of land set aside for wild animals and plants or for the use of the aboriginal people of a country allowing them to retain their traditional lifestyle

pinch—to steal , to take without permission

mullet—a fairly small sea fish

bark canoe—a long light narrow boat made of the strong outer covering of a tree

add and subtract—to join numbers together and to take numbers from something larger

wash up—to bring to the shore by the waves

mission school—a school set up by a religious organization to provide teaching for the local people

ranger—a person employed to patrol a public reserve , wild-life park , etc. to see that the law is kept

There's trouble brewing—some difficult situation is ready to happen

move in with someone—to come and live with someone

black fella's tucker—food for Aborigines

point the bone at someone—to accuse or curse someone , to wish someone wrong

Holy Grail—the cup believed to have been used by Christ before his

death , and in which , it is said , some of his blood was collected. It was searched for by King Arthur's knights

car prang—a crash or accident in a car

catch the tide—to be in time for the tide

put someone out—to cause inconvenience to someone

have a way with something or someone—to have an attractive quality which pleases something or someone

stick together—to remain loyal , faithful

### Topics for discussion :

1. What sort of person is Storm Boy's father ?
2. Describe the relationship between Storm Boy and his father. Why does he have difficulty in relating to his father ?
3. What is the central conflict in the film ?  
What are the incidents that help to reveal and develop this conflict ?
4. How are Storm Boy and Fingerbone Bill portrayed in the film ?  
What part does Fingerbone Bill play in developing Storm Boy's character ?
5. What message does the film contain about the relationship between nature and civilisation ?
6. What does Fingerbone Bill say at the very end of the film ? What do you think that implies ?

## Burke and Wills

### Main characters :

Robert OHara Burke ( the hero , an Irish-born police superintendent )

William John Wills ( Burke s best mate , a surveyor and meteorologist )

Julia Mathews ( Burke s girlfriend , and actress )

George Landells ( an Englishman , deputy-leader of the expedition )

William Brahe

John King ( members of the expedition )

Charles Gray

Graeme Clifford s *Burke and Wills* is based on the true story of the Burke and Wills expedition ( Aug. 1860-June 1861 ). Burke and Wills are brave explorers , who take on the task of crossing Australia from south to north—from Melbourne in Victoria to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north. They have to travel this immense distance on foot and horseback with a train of camels especially imported from India. What they expect to find is the Inland Sea , which earlier explorers had hoped to find in the middle of the Australian continent. They do succeed in crossing Australia from south to north , beating a rival expedition led by Charles McDouall Stuart , but both die in the attempt.

The film begins with Wills at home in Dorset , England. He is at a garden party , where he is running a race against the clock through a labyrinth of well-groomed shrubs. Wills briefly gets lost in the laby-

rinth , which foreshows his dreadful final fate in the Australian desert. From there the film cuts quickly to the departure of the expedition , where local dignitaries are speechifying and Burke is promising his supporters a grand race with the rival expedition.

Burke is a middle-aged , black-bearded , gregarious Irishman , abrasively confident. In contrast , Wills is a slightly built , quieter , and younger Englishman. Burke is as ignorant of exploration as he is of the sciences. At nearly forty , he is head over heels in love with an attractive young lady called Julia Mathews , who is prominent in theatrical circles. Perhaps the reason why he takes up his appointment as leader of the expedition is that he hopes to impress the lady as he knows that the expedition will bring him fame. Wills s aim is to observe the new Australian continent as a natural scientist , like his countryman , Charles Darwin.

The expedition consists of 28 horses , 27 camels , 19 men , 6 wagons and 21 tons of equipment and supplies , and they have 3 000 miles to go. Their progress is very slow. Burke is greatly troubled by the fact that McDouall Stuart s second attempt to reach the Gulf has the advantage of starting further north from Adelaide and his party are much smaller , faster and more experienced than Burke s. Because of the slow progress Burke is not keen to stop at any of the gold-mining towns they pass on the way. Attention to the progress of the party prevents Wills from attending to his scientific studies until the party stop to camp at the end of each day.

Flashbacks and cross-cut scenes are used quite effectively in the film. The cross-cut scenes show Burke s sweetheart Julia Mathews waiting for him in Adelaide. Here we see the striking contrast of the Outback and the city—the savage and the civilized , the innocent and the corrupt.

After the party have travelled for eleven days , 30 miles out of Melbourne , they encounter their first major obstacle—the Murray River. It takes them two months slow going to march 500 miles and still they have no word of their great rival McDouall Stuart. At Menindie , the edge of the known world , Burke takes on a local man called Wright. Illiterate , and said to be an experienced bushman , he is engaged as guide for the next stage to Cooper's Creek. Burke often quarrels with George Landells , the Deputy Leader of the expedition , who had brought the camels from India. After disputes with Burke , Landells finally resigns and Wills is appointed deputy and William Brahe foreman.

At Menindie , Burke splits the expedition into two groups. An advance party of 9 men , 15 horses and 16 camels will push on while the rest of the expedition set up a depot and rest some of the animals that had fallen ill.

Half way to Cooper's Creek , Burke asks Wright to return to Menindie. He is to bring the rest of the party to Cooper's Creek to join the advance group. After Burke's party arrive at Cooper's Creek , they establish a base camp beside a magnificent stretch of water.

While his party make various reconnaissances , Burke stays at the base camp for over a month , waiting for Wright to arrive. Expecting him in a few days , Burke again splits the expedition and decides to make a fast , light run to the Gulf , taking Wills , Charles Gray , John King , six camels and his white horse Billy. He expects to be back within three months at the latest.

From Cooper's Creek on , Burke's party have no maps to fall back on and have to write their own. They carry supplies sufficient for three months march calculated at half rations. They have to supplement their diet with what they can find along the way.

After they have passed the Tropic of Capricorn , the party finally reach a tidal creek flowing into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Of course , they are overjoyed to be the first group to cross the Australian continent from south to north. But for their return journey they have only one third of their provisions left. Gray gets sick when they are halfway back and Burke thrashes him for stealing stores. Eleven days later they eat the horse Billy , having already eaten four of the camels. Twelve days later Gray dies. When they bury him they abandon the rest of their equipment , keeping only the firearms and Wills s field-books. It is now bitterly cold at night. Burke , Wills and King are very weak.

What happens next is indeed one of the strangest episodes in world exploration. The party stagger back into the depot at Cooper s Creek only to find that Brahe had left a mere nine or ten hours earlier. He leaves a message in a bottle under a fresh blaze on a coolibah tree : “ DIG 3 FT N. W. APR. 21 1861 ”.

Having learnt that Brahe had left for Menindie , Burke decides to try for Mount Hopeless , about 150 miles away. Burke thinks that they can take the route Gregory had taken three years before and he had managed it in about a week. From Mount Hopeless it would be relatively easy to continue on through the settled districts to Adelaide. But Wills argues with him , saying that it is beyond them and that they will never make it. But Burke insists that they should go to Mount Hopeless instead of Menindie. “ What we do is what I decide , ” he shouts. Wills has to obey his orders. Before they go , they leave a message of their plans at the depot in case Brahe returns. Brahe does so but does not find the message and departs again for Menindie. Burke , Wills and King are too weak to get beyond the reaches of Cooper s Creek , and by the time Howitt s search party arrive , only King has survived.

At the end ,after Burke and Wills have perished from exposure in the desert ,their story is told haltingly and movingly by King. For his pains , he is presented with a watch by the Royal Geographical Society in a public meeting back in Adelaide. If the people of Adelaide had supported the explorers adequately , King says , Burke and Wills may have survived. The party's principal backer , on the other hand , tells a waiting crowd outside that there have been no villains or plots in what has happened. Burke and Wills , he says , simply had a dream of building a young land.

Despite its epic nature , Burke and Wills is primarily a tale about ambition , idealism , and friendship. It concentrates on the friendship between Burke and Wills and their relationship with the rest of the party. At one point , Burke speaks to Wills of his father , who died a glorious military death against the Russians in the Crimean war. Later , as Burke himself is dying , the film flashes back to his father's death scene at the moment of the fatal charge : he becomes his father. Wills , on the other hand , seems less driven by egotism and ambition. His motives are more those of youthful purity and idealism. Burke complains to Wills that he does not eat or drink enough , but stays up half the night with his books. Wills good-naturedly replies that he is there mainly to see the country and measure it with his instruments , while Burke wishes to conquer it. In the final days , however , Wills's quiet strength matches that of Burke , who cracks first under the strain.

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Words and expressions you need to know :

pull together—to work together so as to help a shared effort

field-book—a surveyor's book for recording measurements

dead to the world—drunk

Peshawar—a city in North West Pakistan, near the Khyber Pass. At

Peshawar John King saw forty mutineers shot away from guns

Menindie—a native word meaning 'many waters'; in the 1860s it

was the edge of the known world

know somewhere like the back of one's hand—to know somewhere very

well

rum—a strong alcoholic drink made from the juice of the sugarcane

plant

That's capital! —that's excellent

larrikin—a rough, rowdy, boisterous young man

depot—a place where stores are kept

cut it fine—to leave a very narrow margin for error

honeycombed—filled with holes

Tropic of Capricorn—the imaginary line drawn round the world at a-

bout  $23\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  south of the Equator

best man—a bridegroom's attendant

blaze a trail—to pioneer new ground or areas; to lead the way

stunt—an action which gains attention

feather one's own nest—to provide for one's own wealth and comfort

without thought to anyone else

Good on ya (you)! —an expression of approval or encouragement

nardoo—a plant ground into a flour and eaten by Australian Aborigi-

nes

Topics for discussion :

1. Describe the opening scene of the film.

What implication does this scene have for Wills?

2. Discuss the characters of Burke and Wills.

What are their differing character traits ?

3. What does the film tell us about Australia's hinterland ?

4. Why does only John King survive in the end ?

What does this show ?

5. What camera techniques are used in the film ?

Are they effective ?

6. How are Aborigines portrayed in the film ?

What is the relationship between whites and blacks as exemplified in the film ?

## Unit 10

### The Modern Legend of the Sun-Bronzed Aussie

All films present images of their countries of origin , whether setting out deliberately to do so or not. Australian films have been remarkably successful in shaping and rendering the images which encapsulate the national life. The recent examples of such success are *Crocodile Dundee* and *Crocodile Dundee II* which received enormous popularity immediately after their release. These two films vividly present the modern legend of the sun-bronzed Aussie and the idyllic life of the Australian outback to the world. The image of the bushman , as exemplified by Mick Dundee and the man who plays the role and directs the films , Paul Hogan , is so impressive that many people outside Australia tend to take Mick Dundee as representing the typical Australian. Like other images projected by Australian films of the last dozen or so years , this image also has some basis in reality , but it only reflects some points of continuity with some earlier films. In some ways , the *Crocodile Dundee* films look a bit old-fashioned , a bit nostalgic in the images they evoke. However , the films do help to promote Australia as one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Mick Dundee s business partner Walter Reilly makes this purpose quite clear when he says , “ Sue Charlton ( an American journalist ) is a very experienced writer and her articles are going to put us on the map. . . . We can have thousands of American tourists here. They haven t got anything like this over there , have they ? ”

The Crocodile Dundee films are comedies based on American-Australian cultural contrasts , from which most of the humour comes. Hogan s humour is an updated 1980 s version of the Australian larrikin tradition , which is anti-political , anti-authority , and pro the ordinary guy and his missus. His character Mick Dundee has mates everywhere. In New York , his attitude is the same : everyone is alike under the skin and you just need to be honest and open. Although his innocent naivety sometimes gets him into trouble , he always emerges as a victor. No matter how uncouth , boorish or uncultivated he appears , he proves himself to be a man with a heart of gold.

Crocodile Dundee is a movie full of national symbols , some very beautiful landscapes shot by Russell Boyd and Paul Hogan himself. Because the film relies so heavily on the fast editing and one-liner jokes of Hogan s TV comic and commercial style , the final story-line of the picture is instantly forgettable , except for its basic rags-to-riches story. Crocodile Dundee *II* is nothing but an adventure movie which has the theme of the triumph of good over evil. There are no lessons in this film , it is just for entertainment and to push the splendour of the true “ Ocker ” image.

Since there are many Aborigines in the Northern Territory out-back , some appear in the films. But it is very striking that the films do not take them very seriously and there are several places openly scornful of their culture. This is in sharp contrast to *The Fringe Dwellers* or *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*.

# Crocodile Dundee

## Main characters :

Mick Dundee ( the hero )

Walter Reilly ( Dundee s business partner )

Sue Charlton ( a reporter from New York )

Sam Charlton ( Sue s father , a media tycoon )

Richard Mason ( Sue s fiance )

Gus ( a chauffeur )

Various city cowboys ( roo shooters )

Peter Faiman s *Crocodile Dundee* ( 1986 ) is a comedy , with the King of Aussie comedy Paul Hogan playing the lead role. Hogan s comic style is typically Australian , where everything is a joke and nothing is sacred. Quickly after its release in 1986 , it became the No. 1 box-office movie in Australia , breaking the record set by *The Man from Snowy River*.

*Crocodile Dundee* is not only a comedy , but also a love story. However , most of the film describes the conflict between two different cultures , with Mick Dundee as the innocent Aussie in America s biggest and most dangerous city. The film begins with a stunning panoramic night shot of New York City , then cuts to daytime Sydney. The time difference is 17 hours with Sydney ahead. There we see American reporter Sue Charlton speaking to her fiance in New York over the telephone. She says that she plans to extend her stay in Australia to write one more story. She tells him that last month a man in the

Northern Territory was attacked by a giant crocodile , who bit his leg right off and left him there to die , a hundred miles from nowhere. A week later he crawled out of the bush , got patched up and disappeared. But she says she has tracked him down and is prepared to fly to the remote Northern Territory to interview him , now known as “ Crocodile Dundee ”.

Mick Dundee runs a safari business at Walkabout Creek in the Northern Territory. He has a business partner called Walter Reilly. When Sue gets there from Darwin by helicopter , she is met by Mick's partner. He tells her that she couldn't have come at a better time because it is the end of the traditional cattle muster and there is going to be a “ top time ” in the pub that night.

The Australia that Sue finds in the Territory is a society that seems to be beyond the frontiers of civilization. Her initial contacts with the town locals in the pub show them to be a bunch of permanently drunk , half crazed hillbillies. However , they are quite smart enough to take the piss out of any big-city upstarts , as Mick shows to Sue when he casually punches out an arrogant city kangaroo hunter.

The next day Mick takes Sue to see where he was attacked by a crocodile. On the way there they come across a buffalo blocking the way. Sue is surprised to see how Mick uses magic to make the buffalo do what he wants it to do. Walter says jokingly that this is an old bushman's trick. After they cross the billabong , Walter leaves them there and promises to meet them at the billabong on Wednesday , that is , two days later.

Mick and Sue finally get to the river where he was attacked by a croc. He shows her the boat that the croc had bitten and tells her how he survived the attack.

On the first night they camp out in the bush , Sue tells Mick that

her ex-husband is an original rebel and that in her opinion he is an eccentric person. Then Sue asks Mick what he thinks of the nuclear debate and the arms race , he says it is none of his business. When Sue presses him for his opinions about the Aboriginal land rights issue , Mick is almost speechless for once. He talks about how silly it is when two fleas fight over the dog they both live on. However , he soon shows where he stands on these issues. The first night he breaks up a night kangaroo shoot the city cowboys organise. The second night Mick dresses up as an Aborigine and goes off to dance with his black fellow friends.

Sue wants to try travelling in the bush on her own , but she soon finds it almost impossible for her to do so. When she is left alone and about to go into the water for a swim , a crocodile suddenly attacks her. If Mick had not come to her rescue , she would have been killed by the giant croc. Actually Mick has been following her all the way in case something might happen to her. Sue is then convinced that the bush is definitely not a place for a city girl. But Mick says he has never been to a city and that he has heard the city is just as dangerous.

Sue is getting more and more interested in Mick. She invites him to go to New York City with her. Mick is afraid that people there might make a fuss of him , but nevertheless he agrees to go with her.

The second part of the film shows “ Crocodile ” Dundee in New York City where he has some very interesting experiences. While in New York he feels like a fish out of water , which is caused by differences between both city and country and American culture and Australian culture.

Mick is friendly to anyone. In New York his attitude is the same. He always says “ good day ” to whoever he meets in the street. He enjoys talking with New Yorkers but some people think he is a bit eccentric.

tric.

On his first solo night out , Mick lands in a bar where the locals are just as rough and ready as those back in Australia. He finds it very funny to see men dressed up like women. When he discovers that they are homosexuals , he laughs like a drain.

Mick's easy friendliness helps him to win over the usually cynical New Yorkers. He makes friends with the hotel staff , taxi-drivers , policemen , and some street girls. In fighting off the street hoodlums he encounters , he is finally saved by Gus , the black chauffeur of Sue's father who is a media tycoon. Mick mistakes Gus for a Pitjantjara tribesman , and actually he is an ex-Warlord.

Crocodile Dundee also deals with a love triangle which involves Sue Charlton , Richard Mason and Mick Dundee. Sue and Richard are engaged to be married. However , the romance between Sue and Mick finally leads to the breakoff of her engagement to Richard. The film ends with Mick walking on the heads of an obliging crowd in the subway station to reach Sue , who has made up her mind to marry Mick instead of Richard. The humour this scene suggests is that the huge crowd in the New York subway station is being compared to droves of sheep in Australia when we hear one of the men saying , " it's just too crowded. We're jammed in like sheep. "

Crocodile Dundee has some resemblance to other Australian Outback films like *The Man from Snowy River*. It raises a number of topical social issues such as conservation , Aboriginal land rights , women's lib and nuclear disarmament.

There are a few other things about Australian society we can learn from the film. For example , when Sue first meets Walter Reilly , she calls him Mr Reilly. He immediately stops her , saying " Call me Walter. We are pretty informal in the bush. " In Australia people pre-

fer to be called by their given names , especially among close friends.  
In New York , Mick finds the steering wheel is on the wrong side of the car , because in Australia people keep to the left when they walk or drive in the street.

\* \* \* \* \*

Words and expressions you need to know :

walkabout—to wonder around to discover new places. It is actually a term coined by white Australians which refers to Aborigines going to places to perform their ceremonies

Never-never—the vast , remote , inland area of northern Australia , in particular north-west Queensland and the Northern Territory

top-time—really good time

Darkie Johnson—‘ Darkie ’ is a common nickname for Aboriginal men , though not often used in recent times

a flagon of red—almost 2 litres of red wine contained in a bottle

city cowboy—a term of abuse by bushmen to people who occasionally come out to the bush from the city

big white hunter—similar to ‘ city cowboy ’ ; it refers to the notion of British in Africa and India pretending to be big game hunters but relying on African and Indian people for expertise

roo shooter—kangaroo hunter

love bite—a playful bite by a man or a woman during sexual play

Fred Astaire—a famous Hollywood film dancer of the 1930s and 1940s

“ Just the two of us out alone. I’ve got the reputation to think about ”—ironical as it is really the woman’s reputation which will be endangered

shit for brains—to be foolish , stupid

everyman and his dog—the general public ; many people  
buck—dollar  
mind over matter—the force or power of clear thinking overcoming  
something unpleasant  
billabong—a pool left after flood waters recede  
sheila—woman  
meatsafe—before refrigeration a box with wire netting in which meat  
was kept  
barramundi—north Queensland reef fish , perhaps the best tasting  
Australian fish  
anti-nuc—anti-nuclear war and weapons  
women s lib—women s liberation  
save the whales—another popular political movement of the 1970s and  
1980s in Western countries  
prize ratbag—an extremely useless person  
king brown—a large brown snake  
Skippy—the name of a kangaroo who starred in an Australian TV se-  
ries  
escarpment—a long cliff on a mountainside  
Davey Crockett—a frontiersman in the United States  
“ You frightened shit out of me ”—you scared me a great deal  
corroboree—Aboriginal ritual dance accompanied by song  
“ You believe it will take your spirit away ”—some traditional peoples  
will not allow their photograph to be taken because they believe it  
will steal their spirits. This is not true of Aborigines  
turnouts—gatherings , parties  
telepathic—able to send thoughts or messages from one person s mind  
to another s without the ordinary use of the senses  
stickybeak—a person who pries , meddles or interferes

“eat me alive”—used by the crocodile literally, but by Mick Dundee  
 as a euphemism for sexual relations  
 fix someone up—to pay back or settle any money matters  
 more tucker than you can poke a stick at—more food than you know  
 what to do with  
 make a great wrap to the story—to give an excellent ending to the sto-  
 ry  
 make a pass at someone—to make an amorous advance or gesture to  
 someone  
 coo-ee—a bushman's call to another in the bush; it travels great dis-  
 tances  
 no worries—no problem  
 backwoods—an American term for the bush  
 Jungle Jim—a famous Rudyard Kipling character who lived in the jun-  
 gle with animals  
 “regular Tarzan”—Tarzan was reputedly lost in the jungle and raised  
 by apes. The story was made into films, TV series and comic  
 strips. His consort was Jane, hence the heroine says Dundee makes  
 her feel like ‘Jane in a Tarzan comic’  
 nitwit—fool  
 dunny—toilet  
 bidet—French contraption in which a woman washes her backsides  
 strewth—from ‘God's truth’, an expression of surprise  
 vodka martini—a drink made with two spirits, in this case, one of  
 them vodka  
 Chevvy—a Chevrolet car  
 pain—a boring, tedious or annoying person or thing; a nuisance  
 lemon—a sour, humourless person  
 boozier—a pub

drink someone under the table—to drink much more alcohol than  
someone without becoming drunk  
funnel-web spider—a dangerous Australian spider which builds a web  
in the shape of a funnel  
what's going down ? —what's happening ?  
just blowing the froth off a couple ( of beers )—talking and drinking  
flat out like a lizard drinking—extremely busy ; having a full schedule  
buy another round—in Australia it is customary to buy a drink for everyone in the ‘ school ’ , a group of drinkers. People take turns to  
buy a round  
fag—a homosexual  
pilligan—a fool  
stone the crows—an expression of amazement , wonder  
good shit—good quality drugs  
clear as a bell—able to be heard perfectly ; or , the meaning is quite  
clear  
buzz—an exhilarating feeling induced by drugs  
blowfly—an Australian fly which makes loud buzzing sound  
get stuffed—an expression of angry dismissal ; literally it means ‘ go  
and have sex ’  
bonza—great  
full of beans—full of energy  
ta-ta—bye-bye  
buddy—mate  
joint—a house regarded as one's own  
shrink—psychiatrist  
get on top of someone—to begin to get the upper hand of someone  
I wouldn't be dead for dollars—life is so good , I wouldn't be dead if  
you paid me a large amount of money

## Topics for discussion :

1. What is the central conflict in the film ?
2. Discuss the character of Mick Dundee.  
What are the qualities in him that enable him to win Sue's heart ?
3. What can you learn from the film about the life in the Australian outback ?
4. Describe the contrasts between New York City and Australia's outback. If you were to choose between New York and the Australian interior, where would you prefer to live ?
5. How would you comment on the film as a whole ? What doesn't Crocodile Dundee say about Australia ?
6. What are some examples of humour in the film ?

## Crocodile Dundee II

### Main characters :

Mick Dundee ( the hero )

Sue Charlton ( Dundee's lover )

Bob Tanner ( Sue's former husband )

Doris ( Sue's colleague )

Leroy Brown ( a black )

Luiz Rico ( a Colombian drug dealer )

Miguel ( Ricos offsider )

Rad ( a young man )

Charlie and Diamond ( two Aboriginal men )

Walter Reilly ( Dundee's business partner )

Crocodile Dundee *II* is a sequel to Crocodile Dundee. It is an adventure story , basically a fight between good , represented by Mick Dundee and his friends , and evil , represented by two drug dealers and their followers , with some comic sections. As before , the main character is Mick ( " Crocodile " ) Dundee , who is still capable of deeds of great daring and bravery , and is still a heroic type of image. The action takes place both in New York and in the Northern Territory , in the Australian outback.

The film opens in New York with Dundee in a dinghy trying to catch fish through throwing a bomb into the river. The police immediately turns up in a helicopter , but when they find out who it is they just laugh and go away. The point of the opening is that Mick Dundee already has a reputation for harmless eccentricity.

Mick and Sue Charlton , the journalist he met in Australia in the previous film , are living together in a New York flat , but Mick still misses the Australian outback , which is the place he really regards as home. Mick is thinking of getting a job , because he is sick of being on holiday. He goes to a public bar , drinks a beer and announces to everybody that he wants a job. A black man ( Leroy Brown ) wearing dark spectacles immediately offers him a job , but the barman warns him that it would not be wise to accept. The job involves delivering stationery.

Sue works as a journalist in the city and her colleague Doris expresses great interest in her ex-husband , Bob Tanner , who is currently working as a journalist in Colombia , South America. He succeeds in photographing a drug dealer called Luiz Rico killing somebody. He immediately escapes and rings Sue in New York to tell her that he has sent her the film , but he cannot get through. Mick answers the phone

through an answering machine , so he knows that Sue is living with somebody else.

Mick accidentally meets Leroy Brown in the road , and they arrange to meet again for a drink. Mick goes to Sue's city office to take the letter containing the pictures of Rico killing a man to Sue. He sees a " jumper " walking past. He talks to the jumper , who then refuses to commit suicide while he is watching. The jumper tells Mick that he wants to commit suicide over an unhappy love affair , but in the process Mick almost falls over the tall building himself , and clammers back only with difficulty. The scene shows a rather odd side of New York society as well as demonstrating Mick's courage and strength.

One of the drug dealers succeeds in abducting Sue in the street and takes her away in a car to the mansion of his boss , Luiz Rico. Rico wants back the pictures which he thinks Bob Tanner has sent to her. Rico orders her to ring Mick whom he wants to get to the mansion. Mick answers the phone and tells her that the letter from Colombia has arrived. The door bell rings and it turns out to be a drug policeman. Rico then rings again and orders Mick to take the letter to a prearranged place , Hoyt Subway station , threatening him that if he tries to trick them , Sue will be killed. The drug dealers are afraid that they will be caught by the police and severely punished unless they can get hold of the pictures which Tanner has taken.

Several scenes showing Mick's bravery and ability to escape from extraordinarily dangerous situations follow. Mick succeeds in defeating all the men whom Rico has sent against him. He is very keen to find Sue , who has told him by phone that she is a prisoner. Eventually Mick finds out where the mansion is and goes there to look for Sue.

Sue is still with Luiz Rico , whom she describes as a " grubby little parasite ". He again threatens to kill her if Mick " screws this up " ,

in other words makes a mess of things in a way which might be embarrassing to him.

Leroy Brown and Mick go to the mansion to explore the situation but make no attempt to go in at this stage. They want to get her out without giving the drug dealers the pictures. Mick approaches a young man called Rad to form a distraction while he himself goes in to try and save Sue from the drug dealers. Mick tells Rad he has heard from Leroy Brown that Rad's gang is the coolest, in other words the most effective and best, in New York. Rad agrees to help them and the gang goes off to the mansion to help rescue Sue.

Rad and his gang begin howling like dogs. The drug dealers try to get rid of them. Mick seizes his opportunity and begins to fight his way into the mansion. The gang and other onlookers cheer him for his courage. He knocks Rico's main offside, Miguel, unconscious with his knife and then bursts open the door to the main room, defeating Rico at the same time. Mick then takes Sue out of the mansion and to her home.

The drug police have breakfast with Mick and Sue and tell Mick they are convinced that the drug dealers will try to kill them both in the future. Just as they talk, gun shots ring out, proving him quite right. Rico declares that Sue must die, but that he alone may kill Dundee.

Mick and Sue find their solution, their escape from the drug dealers, in going back to the Northern Territory in Australia, where all their old friends greet them heartily. In particular, Mick's best friend, Walter Reilly, hugs him like a long-lost brother. The next scene shows Mick and Sue in the outback in territory which Mick says belongs to him. However, Rico and Miguel follow them to Australia in order to punish them for the defeat Mick and Sue had inflicted on them

in New York and to avoid being caught by the police themselves.

It isn't long before the drug dealers find Mick and Sue and start shooting at them. They have got hold of Walter and threaten to kill him if they don't reveal themselves. An indecisive shooting battle follows, in which Mick shoots at Walter in an unsuccessful attempt to save him from the drug dealers, but it is already clear that Sue and Mick will never be safe from the drug dealers until they are imprisoned or killed.

At Mick's suggestion Sue takes off her bra and hangs it on a tree to lure the drug dealers, who fall into the trap. They take it down and, as they are off their guard, Mick and Sue both start shooting again. Mick bites off a small bit of his hat and throws it into the water to make it look as if he has been taken by a crocodile. The drug dealers and their followers leave quickly. As Walter tells the drug dealers of Mick's extraordinary talents and prowess, birds come to attack them, but they succeed in shooting the birds away. Then a big snake appears, frightening them seriously. They are convinced it is Dundee's doing as if he is a kind of magician, but Rico still determines to defeat him. The main feature of this scene is the magnificence of the Australian outback scenery in it.

Two Aborigines, Charlie and Diamond, come to keep watch over Sue to protect her, as Mick again goes off to fight the drug dealers. Walter leads them across a river but suddenly sinks. The drug dealers think he has been taken by a crocodile. They shoot at him and then leave, believing him dead. "We don't need him now anyway", says Rico. Just after they leave, Mick and Walter both appear, and it is clear that Mick has pretended to be a crocodile in order to release and save Walter.

Rico lights a fire in order to prepare for a final fight. Sue and

Walter come across two men , one of them dressed in Mick s clothes. The other is definitely Miguel. They believe the drug dealers have captured Mick and fire , shooting one of the men dead. After a brief gun battle , Miguel is killed as well. As they pause to look at Mick s clothes , believing him dead , Charlie turns up to explain that it was a plot , and that in fact the dead man is not Mick at all. Apparently both Rico and Miguel have been killed. Mick then turns up to show that he is alive and has gained the final victory over the drug dealers. Sue runs into his arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Words and expressions you need to know :

cool—composed , self-possessed , level-headed

bra—an abbreviation of brassiere , an article which women use to cover their breasts

dinghy—a very small boat

grubby—dirty , slovenly , untidy

jumper—a person who jumps from a tall building in order to kill himself

parasite—something or somebody which lives on other bodies

protective custody—imprisonment designed to protect somebody , for instance , against drug dealers or other dangerous people

screw up—to make a mess of things

### Topics for discussion :

1. What is Mick Dundee doing when the film begins ?

What do the opening scenes show us about Mick Dundee ?

2. What is the central conflict in the film ?

How does Mick's character develop in the course of the conflict ?

3. What is the theme of *Crocodile Dundee II* ?

Does it have any value other than as pure entertainment ?

4. Describe the final scene of the gun battle between Mick and the drug dealers.

How does Mick finally get rid of Rico and Miguel ?

5. Compare *Crocodile Dundee II* with *Crocodile Dundee* in plot and character. Which one do you prefer ? Why ?

6. What part is played by the landscape in the film ?

# Unit 11

## Crime and Corruption

It is a commonplace observation that most Australians live in a small number of large cities. During the last 100 years , Australian cities have gained an increasing percentage of the national population , and the proportion of rural dwellers has fallen in recent years to about 1 in every 7 Australians. In the 1980s , more than 70 per cent of the Australian population lived in the 11 cities which had a population exceeding 100 ,000 people. Since the cities are where most Australians live , a film industry which wishes to be in touch with the ' national life ' can hardly afford to ignore what goes on in them. Although the best-known films of the recent revival have been set in rural Australia , there has been , throughout the past 20 years , a steady stream of ' city films '. Picnic at Hanging Rock , The Man from Snowy River and We of the Never-Never are all set in wide rural landscapes. Yet , it is important to note that there have been some important urban films since the 1970s. Caddie , Newsfront and Silver City all use the city as a background for period pieces. They offer the authentic feel of the cities in which they are set. They also open up important historical and sociological issues that remove them from the limiting category of ' period pieces '.

Australian cities have much in common with other cities in the world. Therefore , city films also convey common elements of urban experience such as pressures , opportunities , crimes and corruption.

What is distinctive about life in Australian cities is less clear. However, in city films, the city is not just a setting but a narrative and thematic determinant.

As a detective thriller, *The Empty Beach* offers a close look at the corruption of urban society in general and the seediness of Sydney life in particular. The attitude towards the police chief as exemplified in the film is typical of the anti-authoritarianism of many Australians. There is a strong disillusionment with the police among the ordinary people and the view is commonly expressed that the police wouldn't be bothered about doing anything.

As suggested in *The Empty Beach*, one of the problems that Australian cities face today is the rising crime rate. As a social problem crime in Australia is one of the oldest. It is usually difficult to construct an accurate picture of the trend of major crimes (robbery, homicide, rape, burglary, etc.) in Australia during the last two decades. However, the statistics on the number and volume of incidents reported to the police since 1964 - 1965 show that all the major crimes have increased during the last 21 years. Crime rate per 100,000 population for reported major offences has gone up by 319 per cent. ( *The Australian Encyclopedia*, Australian Geographic Society, 1988 )

Recent studies have tended to show that juvenile delinquency has become a serious problem. A large majority of serious crimes are committed by persons 12 - 24 years old. In 1984 - 1985 a total of 271,710 burglaries were reported to the police in Australia. Of these only 11.80 per cent or 32,101 were solved, for which only 27,782 arrests were made. Of these, 14,300 arrests involved persons under the age 17 years.

Crime statistics in Australia also indicate that organized crime is getting worse. As exemplified in *The Empty Beach*, organized crime in-

volves provision of illegal goods and services by a group of people commonly known as ' gangsters ' or ' racketeers '. It consists of large-scale activities in gambling , SP bookmaking , prostitution , illegal dealings in drugs and other serious crimes. Organized criminal activity uses the illegally obtained capital to expand into other activities , legal and illegal , and corrupts government officials with the aim of gaining protection.

Corruption is not a new phenomenon in Australia. Abuse of power and bribery were found among the first group of officers who arrived in Australia in 1788. Today corruption is still a big problem. Take Queensland for example. The Queensland National Party Government appointed a commission of inquiry into possible illegal activities and associated misconduct of the police in Queensland. The Commission is popularly known as the FitzGerald Inquiry. The corruption which the FitzGerald Inquiry revealed at the heart of Queensland's political institutions finally brought about the downfall of the long-lived National Party Government and indicated that much was indeed rotten in the State of Queensland.

As revealed in *The Empty Beach* , organized crime in Australia is very difficult to deal with. The reason is that the crime bosses often have politicians in their pockets. Prostitution , SP bookmaking , gambling and the sale of illegal drugs can generate great opportunities for corruption and abuse. Where there are such activities , there are corrupt and degenerate government officials.

## The Empty Beach

Main characters :

John Singer ( a property developer )

Mrs Marion Singer ( John s wife )  
Cliff Hardy ( a private detective )  
Sandy Modesto ( a model and drug addict , having an affair with John  
Singer at the time of his death )  
Frank Ward ( a big crime boss )  
Mr McCleary ( a corrupt businessman and crime boss )  
Bruce Henneberry ( a journalist )  
Bill Winter ( a boss behind the scenes )  
Ann Winter ( girlfriend of Bruce Hennebury and daughter of Bill Win-  
ter )  
Cliff's girl friend  
The police chief  
Various thugs , old people and others.

The Empty Beach is set in Sydney in the 1980s. It is about the corruption of society , the police and the government. The main thread of the plot is an attempt by Cliff Hardy to find out whether John Singer , a rich property developer , is still alive or not two years after he has supposedly committed suicide by drowning while yachting after discovering that he has cancer.

The film begins with John Singer leaving his house for Bondi Beach and sailing out to sea in a yacht. He never returns and is believed to have drowned himself. But his wife Mrs Marion Singer thinks otherwise. Two years after her husband's death she hires Cliff Hardy , a private detective , to find out what has happened to her husband , telling him that she believes he is still alive.

Hardy begins to look for information and traces a journalist called Bruce Henneberry , who has written articles about the case in the newspapers , and is said to know a great deal about it. Bruce is at first

reluctant to get involved because he knows that it is very dangerous to do so.

Hardy finds out from Marion Singer that in fact John Singer never had cancer at all. She tells him that Singer in fact had a girlfriend called Sandy Modesto , so Hardy goes to see her. He finds out that Sandy is a model and also a junkie , that is , a drug addict. Among her current boy friends is one who is also in the service of a corrupt crime boss called McCleary. He immediately finds out that Hardy is discovering information dangerous for the crime bosses , and kills Bruce Henneberry to prevent Hardy from finding out too much. Hardy arrives on the scene just too late to save him.

Bruce Henneberry is said to have had some tapes which contained a great deal of information about the Singer case. Hardy suspects that Bruce s girlfriend Ann Winter has the tapes , but does not succeed in getting hold of them. However , she does put him onto searching for a man called Leon who has a great deal of information. The police chief , who is more interested in his own promotion than in discovering crime , is suspicious of Hardy and tries to prevent him from finding Leon.

One of McClearys men tries to kill Hardy but fails. He is afraid that Hardy will find out too much about the crimes being committed. The crime bosses also have Ann Winter s room broken into. They are attempting to find the tapes which Bruce Henneberry had owned. They believe that having been Bruce Henneberry s girlfriend , she is still keeping the tapes.

Ann Winter invites Cliff Hardy to her house , which is magnificent and in a very luxurious part of Sydney. She is falling in love with Hardy and tells him she is aware he is divorced. She also takes him to meet Bill Winter , her father , as well as Fred Ward and other crime

bosses. Of course Hardy is not aware at this stage that Fred Ward is the senior crime boss. Bill Winter is also involved with those criminal activities , but he is a wonderful survivor , because he has “ politicians in his pocket ”.

The case takes Hardy through Sydney s high life and low life , through the seediness and splendour of Bondi. During his investigation Hardy helps the police to uncover ghastly crimes committed by those “ respectable ” people. One of the shocking crimes is the running of a so-called nursing home where the old pensioners live under horrifying conditions.

Through some old people in a cemetery , Hardy finds out the details of a crime racket. A nursing home for old pensioners has been taken over by the crime bosses. They seize the money sent to the old people by the government as social welfare. They make the old people into drug addicts and keep them in miserable conditions , at the same time making huge amounts of money out of them. When the old people die , they put the bodies into a large vat and destroy them with lime so that they disappear totally and become “ missing persons ” , but at the same time continue to receive the social security money.

While Cliff Hardy and Ann Winter are investigating this “ nursing home ” , two men in the service of the crime bosses come in and , after taking Hardys gun , fight with him. They say they have killed Leon , who has “ talked ” , in other words , revealed information to the police. After the fight , Hardy gets the gun back. The police arrive and arrest the two men. The police chief asks Hardy to continue helping with the case. He realises how corrupt McCleary is and how high his connections are. The implication is that he has connections even in the government.

As he leaves the police station , Hardy is kidnapped and taken to

Fred Ward's residence. Ward is trying to get hold of the tapes to prevent their falling into the hands of the police. He has Hardy imprisoned in his own residence. He then gets his men to move Hardy somewhere else but Hardy has put a billiard ball into his sock and with that hits the two men unconscious, as a result of which he succeeds in escaping.

Hardy immediately calls on Ann Winter to ask what she knows about her own father and Fred Ward. She is shocked to hear that Fred Ward tried to kill him but is still reluctant to believe her own father is corrupt and refuses to tell him about Bruce Henneberry's tapes.

The police chief agrees to help Cliff Hardy catch Ward and McCleary, now revealed as the biggest crime bosses. Hardy will be the bait which will bring them into the open, after which the police will swoop down on them. Hardy pays Sandy Modesto to tell McCleary that the police are onto him. McCleary tells Hardy that Ward is in fact a rival and enemy of his and he will help to get rid of him. In gross deception he then hands Hardy over to Ward, but the police arrive at the crucial time. A fight ensues in which Ward is killed and McCleary wounded. The police chief tells Hardy the case will be announced as a fight between Ward and McCleary, with no involvement from the police.

In the final scene Marion Singer meets with Hardy in a restaurant on an island near Sydney. As they are talking Ann and Bill Winter come in and Ann displays a newspaper headline announcing that Bruce Henneberry's tapes have been found. This means that the police could probably solve the case if they wanted to, but the likelihood is that they would prefer to leave it unsolved because they are corrupt and afraid.

Marion Singer tells Hardy that she now has proof that her hus-

band is in Bangkok having an affair with a Thai girl and asks him to go there to find him. Hardy refuses. He has come to realise that Marion is herself the real villain. It was she who arranged to have her husband murdered in order to get control of the enormous financial dealings in which he was involved. She planned that Hardy would be able to trap McCleary and Ward so that she would herself get their money and power. The invitation to find her husband in Bangkok is a scheme to get him out of the way now that Ward is dead and McCleary powerless. She knows that it is a fraud.

The ending of the film implies that Hardy will do nothing against Marion Singer and will stay out of the affair from then on. This means that Marion Singer is not punished and no action is taken against her. It also implies that the corruption in the government and the police will continue. It is not clear whether any concrete action is taken to stop the crime racket which involves the robbery of the old pensioners of their social security, the drug dealing which is destroying them, or the destruction of their bodies so that they become "missing persons". Hardy has got his money from Marion Singer, and that is all that really matters as far as he is concerned.

\* \* \* \* \*

Words and expressions you need to know :

Bondi—it is a beachside suburb of Sydney on the Pacific Ocean, east of the city centre, whose name derives from an Aboriginal word meaning "place of breaking waters"

private eye—a private investigator

confide—to tell information, personal matters, etc. secretly to a person one trusts

yacht—a large often motor-driven boat used for pleasure  
real estate—property in the form of land and houses  
pinball—a game played on a machine with a sloping board down  
which a rolling ball is guided by various means  
crook—sick or ill  
asshole—a stupid , annoying person  
piss—to pass urine from the body  
intrude—to enter unasked  
toilet training—the teaching of a young child when and how to use the  
toilet  
one of those days—an event that cannot be avoided  
cut corners—to do something in the easiest or quickest way , by using  
a simpler method , disregarding rules  
junkie—a drug addict  
wetsuit—a set of tight-fitting upper and lower garments made of rubber  
worn by underwater swimmers or surfers to retain body heat  
hot stuff—something of very good quality  
pissed—drunk  
like a stunned mullet—dazed , so unaware as to be almost unconscious  
You bet—You can be sure ; certainly  
phoney—false , unreal  
slum it—to accept or choose a lower standard of living than one is  
used to  
I couldn't care less—I don't care  
grow on someone—to become gradually more pleasing  
rip off—to charge too much  
talk—to reveal information  
throw in the towel—to admit defeat  
as respectable as a dead virgin—very respectable

warn off—to try to cause someone to stay away from something by warning

I can't make the mortgage either—I can't pay the amount of money lent on a mortgage either

stir the possum—to raise issues others want to leave dormant

nicky little questions—very small questions

call of nature—a need to pass liquid or solid waste matter from the body

stir the shit—to incite trouble or to cause trouble

### Topics for discussion :

1. What are your first impressions of Cliff Hardy ?
2. What does Marion Singer want Hardy to do ? What is her real purpose ?
3. Why is Bruce Henneberry suddenly murdered while surfing off Bondi ?  
Who is the killer ? Who is the man behind the scenes ?
4. What sort of crimes are those “ respectable ” people involved with ?  
What happens to them towards the end of the film ?
5. How does the police chief impress you ? What is he most concerned about ? Why ?
6. What does the film show us about the crime problem in Australia today ?

# Unit 12

## Constitutional Crisis of 1975

For most Australians the date 11 November 1975 still evokes an emotional response and the feeling that a great injustice was done or , on the contrary , the country was saved from chaos. Whatever view one takes , there is no doubt that the Constitutional Crisis of 1975 is the most significant event in Australia's modern history , with the full implications still not completely realised. What happened on 11 November was that the Governor-General , Sir John Kerr , used his reserve powers under section 64 of the Australian Constitution to dismiss the Labor Government led by Gough Whitlam , although it had a majority of seats in the House of Representatives and had the same number of seats as the Opposition in the Senate. It was a decision that virtually nobody felt would—or even could—be taken.

In December 1972 the Australian people elected the first Labor Government since 1951. For the next three years Australia went through a series of political upheavals and tensions. The Liberal-National ( then called the Country Party ) Coalition tried to regain office and the Labor Government was faced with the most difficult world economic recession and inflationary spiral since the Depression of the 1930s. In 1974 , after less than 18 months in office , the Government called a double dissolution of both houses of parliament as they had a number of bills blocked by the Opposition majority in the Senate. Labor won the 1974 election , but was unable to get a majority in the

Senate.

From the day of the 1974 election until November 1975 the atmosphere of political crisis continued almost unabated. When the Liberal Opposition voted for Malcolm Fraser to replace Bill Snedden as its leader, its campaign for a return to power intensified. The Opposition was helped by the poor economic performance of the Government and the surfacing of a number of 'scandals' and ministerial inadequacies. Matters came to a head when the death of two Labor senators and their replacement by Liberal state premiers in New South Wales and Queensland with a political neutral and an avid opponent of Labor, respectively, gave the Opposition the same number as the Government in the Senate and hence the opportunity to block government bills. In late September 1975 they used this Senate equality to deny the passage of the two major government Appropriation Bills (Budget) and to hold them in suspense in the Senate.

The blocking of the Budget was followed by a period of political manoeuvring, which continued into November as the Government approached a situation where its funds would run out unless the bills were passed. On 11 November 1975, the Governor-General summoned Prime Minister Whitlam and handed him a letter that effectively dismissed the Labor ministers and placed Fraser in charge of a caretaker government until elections could be held. Entering those elections as a recently dismissed government, at a time not of its choosing, the Labor Party was badly defeated. Labor did not regain office for eight years.

The dismissal of the Whitlam Government in 1975 raised many still largely unresolved issues. One concerns the power of the Governor-General Sir John Kerr; the other revolves around the actions of the Senate. The key issue here is whether the written constitution should

prevail over conventions or vice versa. That's why what happened in 1975 was a constitutional crisis.

Under sections 2 and 64 of the Australian Constitution a Governor-General can dismiss his Prime Minister, but the convention is that the Governor-General should take the advice of the Prime Minister. In the events of 1975 Sir John Kerr did not accept the advice of the Prime Minister but instead sought advice from the Chief Judge of the High Court and members of the Opposition. At no time did he inform Gough Whitlam of the resolution he had formed to dismiss his government.

For most of the century the Governor-General has been and more importantly has appeared to be, above party disputes, staying politically neutral. However, during 1975, Sir John Kerr intervened and took sides. From a conventional viewpoint, he probably should not have intervened and could have waited for the political leaders to settle the dispute themselves. As Donald Horne, a well-known historian and social critic, wrote, 'Australia's position is now like this: one man, an appointed, not elected, official, can take a decision that changes Australian political life, yet he is entirely unaccountable to us.' (Donald Horne, *Death of the Lucky Country*, Penguin, 1976, p. 44)

There are two other conventions concerning the actions of the Senate which were broken during 1975. The first concerns the appointment to casual vacancies in the Senate. The second relates to the ability of the Senate to bring down a government with majority support in the House of Representatives.

Constitutionally, it would appear that the Senate is not obliged to pass money bills, but the general understanding has always been that it would. By not upholding this convention, the Senate has taken powers to itself which it was not intended to have, and it could make government unworkable unless the government of the day has a majority in

the Senate.

Concerning the filling of casual Senate vacancies , although the written constitution originally gave the power of filling casual vacancies to state legislatures , the convention later emerged that the state legislatures should replace deceased or retired Senators with men or women of the same party as the person being replaced. In this way the balance between the major parties decided at the most recent election would be preserved.

In Australia , so much of the Constitution is unclear and so much is out-dated that , if the system is to function at all , then acceptable conventions must be made to work.

While the events of 1975 are receding , the issues of what exactly is the power and role of the Governor-General and the Senate remain unresolved. The conditions still exist for another constitutional crisis.

George Miller's *The Dismissal* ( 1983 ) is a television mini-series. It is intended as entirely historical. All events and characters are factual and much effort has gone into finding actors and actresses who look like and can imitate the mannerisms of the original people. In places there are clippings of the actual events , taken at the time they were happening. The makers of the mini-series are clearly on the side of Gough Whitlam and his government and portray him sympathetically. On the other hand the actor playing Fraser shows him as haughty and unpleasant. The mini-series ends with an inscription exhorting all to remember the past , in order to prevent such breaches of democratic practice from happening again. Another inscription regrets that the article in the Constitution which allowed Sir John Kerr to behave as he did has still not been changed or eliminated.

# The Dismissal ( TV Mini-Series )

Main characters :

## Part I

Gough Whitlam ( Prime Minister )

Dr Jim Cairns ( Deputy Prime Minister )

Rex Connor ( Minister for Minerals and Energy )

Billy Snedden ( Leader of the Liberal Party , Leader of the Opposition )

Malcolm Fraser ( Snedden's successor )

Sir John Kerr ( Governor-General )

Bill Hayden ( Treasurer after the dismissal of Jim Cairns from the government )

Junie Morosi ( an Asian Australian , Cairns secretary for a brief period of time )

Tirath Khemlani ( a Pakistani Financial Broker )

Cairns secretary

Connors secretary

Lady Kerr

Tony Staley

Reg Withers

Sir Frederick Wheeler

Doug Anthony ( Leader of the Country Party )

The TV anchorman

The reporter

## Part II

Gough Whitlam

Rex Connor

Malcolm Fraser

Jim Cairns

Bill Hayden

Sir John Kerr

Tirath Khemlani

Lady Kerr

Albert Patrick Field ( an anti-Labor Senator appointed by the Premier of Queensland to replace a Queensland Labor Senator after his death )

Melbourne reporter

Reg Withers

Senator Jim McClelland

Phil Lynch

The TV anchorman

Margaret Whitlam

Prime Ministerial Aide

Doug Anthony

### Part III

Gough Whitlam

Malcolm Fraser

Sir John Kerr

Bill Hayden

Lady Kerr

Senator Withers

Robert Ellicott ( Shadow Attorney-General )

Sir Garfield Barwick ( Chief Justice )

The mini-series focuses on the dismissal of the Whitlam Government on 11 November 1975 , and the events leading up to it. It begins with a brief account of the world in 1972 , especially the revolution in thought. But the focus is on Australia. The Whitlam government was elected in December 1972. The film gives an introduction of various main Labor leaders , such as left-winger Jim Cairns , Rex Connor and Bill Hayden.

A discussion of the ALP government shows the second election in May 1974 , because of a double dissolution. This means that when a government bill is defeated twice in the Senate , the government may dissolve both houses of parliament , the House of Representatives , and the Senate , and hold simultaneous elections for both. It may then hold a joint sitting of both houses to discuss and vote on the bills which were defeated in the Senate before the elections.

The decline of the Australian economy led the government to try and raise a large loan from Arab sources through a Pakistani called Khemlani. At the same time , rising and worsening inflation and unemployment were casting doubt on the competence of the government in economic matters.

The film introduces the background of the Whitlam government , the nature of the Australian parliament , and the various personalities , both in the Labor and the Liberal-Country Parties.

The detailed story opens in November 1974 with Rex Connor asking for a very large loan from Khemlani to build an oil pipeline and other development projects. Connor was Minister for Minerals and Energy , and he wanted Australian resources in Australian hands. Connor believed passionately that too much of Australia s resources were owned by foreigners and he wanted to change that situation.

Junie Morosi comes to interview the Deputy Prime Minister and later Treasurer Jim Cairns and quickly the two become very good friends : the Morosi affair. Cairns asks her to work for him , and she agrees.

Among the Liberals a split emerges between the leader Billy Snedden and others , especially Tony Staley and Malcolm Fraser. The parliament becomes more and more tumultuous. Detailed discussions follow on leadership in the Liberal Party with pro-Fraser and pro-Snedden factions emerging sharply. The opinion of the former Liberal Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies is asked , and he supports Fraser strongly. A challenge among the Liberal parliamentarians in November 1974 results in a victory for Snedden over Fraser by ten votes.

Cairns staff opposes the appointment of Junie Morosi as his personal secretary on political grounds , but he rejects their advice. The result is very good propaganda for the Opposition and scandal for the government. Under the pressure she resigns , but only after great damage has been done to the government. She gives a press conference explaining her position and reasons.

The government and the new Governor-General , Sir John Kerr , gives Connor the authority to raise the enormous loan from the Arabs.

On Christmas Day 1974 , a cyclone strikes Darwin , a serious natural disaster. Jim Cairns goes to the city and does what he can to help. Shortly afterwards he makes the mistake of reappointing Morosi. He also starts trying to raise his own loans through a Melbourne businessman , George Harris , despite strong opposition from the head of the Treasury , the public servant Sir Frederick Wheeler. Cairns insists on his own point of view , claiming that it is in Australia s interests , and that the Treasury s view merely retains American control over the Australian economy.

The press begins speculating that the relationship between Cairns and Morosi is improper. The press secretary is forced to resign after advising him strongly to dismiss Morosi who , he believes , is causing enormous damage to the government.

When the Attorney-general Lionel Murphy is appointed to the High Court , the N. S. W. Premier Tom Lewis refuses to replace him with a Labor senator. The convention in Australia is that when a Senator leaves the Senate for any reason , the premier of the state he/she represents , appoints a replacement of the same party. On this occasion Lewis broke the convention to the fury of Whitlam and Labor people generally , who believed he was sabotaging democracy.

It is the convention in Australia that the leader of the Party which wins the most seats in the House of Representatives at a general election forms the government. However , under the constitution it is the Governor-General , as the Queen s ( or King s ) representative , who formally appoints the Prime Minister and his ministers. All bills must be agreed to by both the House of Representatives and the Senate , and signed by the Governor-General , before they become law.

Khemlani delays over raising the loan and Connor becomes very angry. Why has the money not come through ? Delay follows delay and the Opposition begins to find out what has happened. They pass on the information to the press , and the Opposition make much propaganda from the proposed loans.

Meanwhile the Liberals are still arguing over leadership. Fraser still wants to be leader of the Opposition and prime minister. Fraser makes a statement to the press that he is not seeking Snedden s job , but it is clear he is lying. In March 1975 another vote on Liberal leadership is taken resulting in a Fraser victory by ten votes.

Fraser is asked if he wants to force an election by rejecting the

supply of money through the Senate. He refuses to deny that such is his intention , but does say such an election would require ' reprehensible ' behaviour by the government. Under the Australian system , all moneys given to the government must be passed by the Senate , including those moneys needed to pay the salaries of the public service.

The Opposition under its new leader makes more and more propaganda over the loans affair. In May 1975 Connor is forced to discontinue trying to raise the loan by Whitlam himself. Despite this , he continues negotiation with Khemlani. Further leaks to the Opposition from the public service cause even greater scandal.

Meanwhile , the other loans affair , that of Cairns and Harris , explodes in Whitlam s face while Cairns is overseas. Whitlam orders Cairns to return home and dismisses him as Treasurer. The Opposition asks Cairns a question in the House on the matter , over which Cairns lies directly , so Whitlam dismisses him from the government altogether. To lie to parliament is a serious breach of propriety and a lie by any minister is extremely damaging to the government as a whole.

A by-election for the Tasmanian seat of Bass proves totally disastrous for the government. Fraser's confidence mounts as he determines to force an election.

Whitlam decides to devote a whole day in Parliament to discussing the loans affair , hoping to kill the matter once and for all as a propaganda point for the Liberals. Whitlam discovers that Rex Connor is still negotiating over the loans and that Connor has not provided him with all documents. He writes to Connor demanding to know everything that's happening. Bill Hayden , who as Treasurer is very suspicious of Connor's activities , tells Whitlam he will not speak in the debate in the House in defence of the government.

The debate takes place in July 1975 , and proves extremely heat-

ed. Close listeners include the Governor-General , more and more suspicious of the Whitlam government. Both Whitlam and Fraser perform well in the debate. Fraser raises numerous questions but on behalf of the government Rex Connor refuses to answer them , and even makes a false poetical quotation.

Frank Crean is elected Deputy Prime Minister and Kerr tells him that he believes his own power should not be limited simply to signing laws.

At the 1975 budget , Hayden reduces government expenditure severely. However , in doing so he clashes openly and severely with Rex Connor. This heightens the atmosphere of a looming crisis within the government , even though Hayden s budget was well received in the community at large and by the Treasury in particular.

After a debate with other senior opposition leaders , Fraser announces that , at this stage , it is his intention to allow the budget to pass the Senate , but refuses to commit himself absolutely not to change his mind.

In September 1975 a Queensland Senator dies and the Premier appoints an anti-Labor Senator. For the second time an old convention of Australian democracy has been broken. The government thus totally loses control of the Senate , opening the road for it to block the 1975 budget.

A journalist from the Melbourne Herald tries to get in touch with Khemlani in an attempt to write more about the loans affair. Khemlani tells the journalist that , as far as he knows , he still has authority to raise loans. Fraser raises the matter in Parliament when Connor is sick in hospital. The inference is that Connor is indeed still negotiating with Khemlani for a loan. Connor has all the files removed while he is sick in hospital in an attempt to prevent anybody finding out what he

has done. Whitlam is furious by the question raised in Parliament and demands an explanation from Connor , expecting him to deny that he has deliberately misled both the government and the Parliament. Connor claims he has indeed ceased negotiations , that Khemlani has lied , and that Khemlani is in league with the Liberals. He even sues the Melbourne Herald for giving false information.

Khemlani is summoned to Australia to produce evidence in support of the article in the Herald. This proves that Connor has indeed had contacts with him many times , and shows that Connor has lied , deceiving Whitlam , the government and the Parliament. Whitlam has no choice but to force Connor to resign.

The Opposition prepares to force an election by blocking Hayden s budget in the Senate. It decides that the loans affairs are indeed ‘ reprehensible ’ , even though there is sharp disagreement in the higher echelons of the Parties on the issue.

The Opposition continues to win propaganda points over Connor s resignation. Opinion polls suggest the Liberals would win an election. Because he is unsure his own liberal senators will all support him , Fraser decides to defer rather than block the budget. He informs the main newspapers , which unanimously support his proposed action.

The Party , after some discussion , supports the idea that it should defer the budget until Whitlam decides to call a general election which all know Labor will lose. Whitlam determines to “ tough it out ” , that is , continue to govern without money , and refuse to hold an election. The Labor argument is that they were elected for three years and should be allowed to run their term.

After a stormy debate in the Senate its members vote to defer the budget until the Prime Minister calls a general election. The vote is very close , that of the anti-labor Queensland representative appointed

by the state's conservative premier being crucial.

Demonstrations , uproar in the community follow. Suggestions arise of CIA involvement.

Part III of *The Dismissal* brings events to their climax.

The film introduces Sir John Kerr , the Governor-General , originally a Labor man and appointed by Whitlam. As the part begins , Whitlam is discussing the issue with the Prime Minister of Malaysia and Kerr. The possibility of Kerr's dismissing Whitlam is raised but laughed at by Whitlam , who continues to trust Kerr. Fraser also thinks he can persuade Kerr to break the deadlock over the supply bills in the interests of the Liberals.

Enormous demonstrations erupt , mainly in support of Whitlam , who refuses to hold an election , still arguing that he was elected for three years. He considers a governor-general can act only on the advice of his prime minister. Kerr's wife does not agree , and believes that the Governor-General can act independently.

Kerr asks Whitlam whether he should consult the Chief Justice Garfield Barwick and Whitlam in effect forbids him to do so. In fact , though Kerr says he agrees with him , he privately determines never to respect Whitlam's view again.

The Liberal chief legal member , Robert Ellicott draws up a battle strategy , the chief point of which is that the Governor-General has the duty to break a deadlock by dismissing the Prime Minister and appointing somebody else.

Kerr asks Whitlam for a government assessment of Ellicott's opinion , adding that he regards that view as ' bullshit ' , a vulgar word meaning ' nonsense. But at least one of Whitlam's supporters can see that Kerr would not ask the government opinion if he really thought Ellicott's view as nonsense.

Whitlam tells Kerr he intends to force the Senate either to pass or reject , not defer , the budget , i. e. the supply bills. He is still confident that in such a direct vote , at least two Liberals would vote to pass the budget. Kerr tells Whitlam he wants to show his concern about the deadlock by talking directly to Fraser about it. Whitlam agrees.

Kerr summons Fraser and asks his opinion. Fraser argues that a constitutional crisis has arisen , but is quite sure all Liberals would support rejection of the budget. It becomes clear that Fraser wants Kerr to dismiss Whitlam and appoint him( Fraser ) as prime minister , after which he would immediately call an election. Clearly Fraser thinks he would win such an election. Kerr does not make his own view clear , but Fraser leaves the interview confident that he can win the crisis provided he persists. Popular opinion still seems to favour Whitlam and the Labor Party regains support it earlier appears to have lost. An opinion poll shows public opinion on Labor's side.

Whitlam thinks of the possibility of an election for half the Senate if the Senate refuses to pass the budget. Fraser's followers become doubtful his strategy can win , but Fraser remains totally determined to press on.

On 30 October 1975 , Kerr suggests to Whitlam that he might propose a compromise to Fraser : if the Liberals agreed to pass the budget , the government would not hold a half-Senate election , thus foregoing the possibility of temporary majority in the Senate. Fraser discusses the proposal with his senior colleagues and then tells Kerr he rejects the suggestion. He insists on an election for the House of Representatives.

The government makes legal plans for extending money arrangements. Kerr privately tells Hayden , the Treasurer , his view that Labor would win an election. Hayden immediately tells Whitlam he suspects

Kerr's loyalty, and believes Kerr intends to dismiss the Prime Minister. Whitlam strongly disagrees with Hayden's view. Neither side is willing to give in.

Both Fraser and Whitlam agree to meet privately to sort out the problem on 11 November. Kerr tells his wife he is on Fraser's side, and she encourages him to play a 'historic' role.

On 10 November, against Whitlam's express veto, Kerr asks the advice of Chief Justice Sir Garfield Barwick, who tells him he should dismiss the Prime Minister, and that he is constitutionally enabled to do so. Barwick happened to be related to Ellicott. Kerr drafts a letter of dismissal.

On 11 November Fraser and Whitlam meet. Whitlam puts Kerr's compromise to Fraser, who rejects it. No compromise is possible. Whitlam calls Kerr saying he wants to see him to advise a half-Senate election. Kerr still does not sign the letter of dismissal which is, unknown to Whitlam, lying on Kerr's desk. Fraser receives a call from the Governor-General and tells him he will not change his stands. The Liberals show more and more doubt on Fraser's obstinacy. Kerr signs the letter of dismissal and asks his secretary to summon Fraser for just after the time Whitlam has said he will come to advise the half-Senate election. Fraser receives the message that he is summoned just as he is making a speech in the House.

Fraser arrives first at the Governor-General's residence and hides so that Whitlam will not see him and suspect something is wrong. Whitlam arrives and goes in to see Kerr, who tells him he is dismissed. Fraser comes into his room and accepts the commission as care-taker Prime Minister pending a general election for both Houses of Parliament. Fraser takes the oath of appointment.

Whitlam summons his main colleagues, while Fraser immediately

calls an election for 13 December and orders the Senate to pass the budget , which it does immediately. The Labor Senators learn of the dismissal one minute before the vote.

The House of Representatives meets but only to hear Fraser will immediately advise a double dissolution and an immediate election.

Whitlam makes a short defiant speech to a large crowd outside Parliament in which he calls Fraser ' Kerr s cur ' , a now famous phrase. Protests immediately erupt against Kerr and the Liberals. Labor campaigns on the constitutional issue , the Liberals on the economy , and the Liberals win a decisive victory.

Kerr resigned as Governor-General in 1977. Whitlam lost another election in the same year and then resigned as leader of the Opposition. Connor died in 1978. Cairns retired from politics. Khemlani was arrested for fraudulent financial dealings in New York in 1980 and disappeared in history.

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## Words and expressions you need to know :

a letter of mandate—a letter authorizing someone to act in a certain way

commission—1. an amount of money , usually related to the value of goods sold , paid to the person who sold them ; 2. an official paper appointing someone to a high position in the government or a high rank in the armed forces

Royal Commission—a group of people specially appointed at a high level to do certain work , especially , to find out facts and write a report

buy back the farm—a political jargon , meaning to redeem Australia

from overseas investors  
run one's own show—to be in complete control  
on the run—trying to escape or hide , especially from the police  
on the ropes—in danger of failing  
talk through one's hat—to talk meaninglessly or insincerely  
as clumsy as an elephant—extremely clumsy  
dredge—to bring to notice something unpleasant from the past that has  
been forgotten about  
audit—to take an official examination of the accounts of a business  
innuendo—a remark that suggests something unpleasant or disappro-  
ving without saying it directly  
insinuation—an indirect suggestion  
nepotism—the practice of giving one's relatives unfair advantages when  
one has power , especially by giving them good jobs  
pinnacle—the highest point or degree  
lurks and perks—pertaining to schemes and resulting benefits , profits  
etc. e. g. He knows all the lurks and perks of the gambling industry  
wog—an Italian , Greek , Arab or person of similar Mediterranean or  
Middle East extraction  
bugger him ! —an exclamation of annoyance , frustration or contempt  
spike someone's guns—to prevent someone from attacking  
outstanding—not yet done , settled or paid  
revoke—to put an end to a law , decision , permission , etc.  
neither here nor there—doesn't matter ; makes no difference  
discrepancy—difference  
swing—a noticeable change from one opinion to another  
bloody oath—expression of complete agreement  
leak—too disclose secret or confidential information  
put up or shut up—to be prepared to support one's views or be quiet

transpire—to become known

stonewall—to intentionally delay or block development in a discussion or argument by refusing to answer questions

locker room—a place where lots of lockers are kept for leaving clothes in ; it is also a place where coaches give instructions to players as to how the game should be played

trespass—used in the Bible , meaning a wicked or wrong action

orgy of trivia—too much activity concerning useless matters

take issue with—to disagree with a person

platitude—a statement that is true but not new , interesting or clever

Bible-bashing—excessively and zealously promoting one's religious beliefs

polisher—a person who rubs with a tool silver , glass or furniture to produce a smooth and glossy surface

monkey nut—peanut

decoy—a person or thing that is used for tricking someone or getting them into a dangerous position

spill the beans—to tell a secret too soon or to the wrong person

buckle—to give in to pressure

hold someone to ransom—keep someone prisoner so as to demand payment

defer—to put off an action to a future time

ASIO—Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

tough it out—to get through and defeat a difficult situation by having a strong will

blow the whistle—to cause something undesirable to stop by bringing it to the attention of the public

to the echo—very loudly

stall—to delay by putting off

Kerr's cur—an expression used by Whitlam to describe Malcolm Fraser ; the word ' cur ' means a dog of mixed breed and also refers to a person who is mean , contemptible and cowardly

### Topics for discussion :

1. What do you know about the Australian parliamentary system ?  
What is a double dissolution ?  
Why did Gough Whitlam call a double dissolution in 1974 ?  
What was the result ?
2. What is the Morosi affair ?  
What does it show about Australian society ?
3. What is the so-called ' loan affair ' ?  
Why did Gough Whitlam dismiss Jim Cairns and Rex Connor ?
4. What are the reasons the Governor-General gave for dismissing the Whitlam government on 11 November 1975 ?  
Are these reasons justified ?
5. What are the issues raised in the Constitutional Crisis of 1975 ?  
In the case of the Australian system of government , should the written constitution prevail over the conventions or vice versa ?
6. Could the events of 1975 occur again in Australia ? Justify your answer.

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