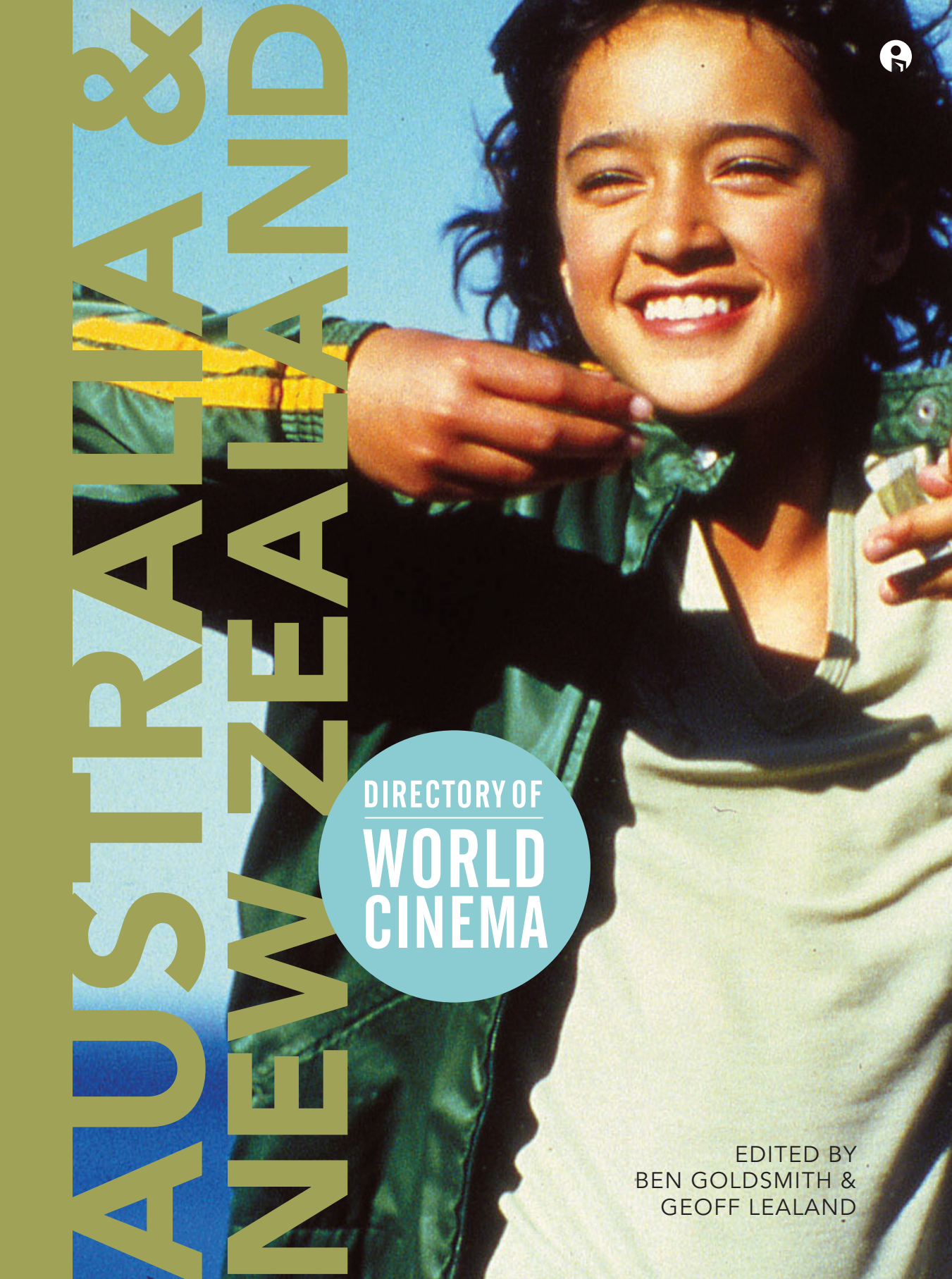
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND



DIRECTORY OF WORLD CINEMA

EDITED BY
BEN GOLDSMITH &
GEOFF LEALAND

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DIRECTORY OF WORLD CINEMA
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Edited by Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand

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Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand

Next page: *Caterpillar Wish*, Beat Fx.

AUSTRALIA


POMMY
ASTARD

INTRODUCTION: AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

BEN GOLDSMITH

Film-making in Australia has a long and distinguished history, dating back to October 1896 when a French chemist, agent of Lumière et Compagnie, and trained operator of the Lumière cinematographe, Marius Sestier, filmed passengers alighting from a ferry at Manly, Sydney. The following month, Sestier shot thirteen films at Flemington racecourse, including the first footage of the 'race that stops the nation', the Melbourne Cup horse race. The interest in this event and the fabled Australian love of sport prompted four different teams of film-makers to film the Cup the following year. Despite this early interest in documenting Australian sporting life – other early films included footage of the touring English cricket team – with only a few notable exceptions, sports films have not achieved a prominent place in the Australian film pantheon. Short films, by contrast, have remained an important component of film-making in Australia, even during the long fallow period in feature film production from the end of the Second World War to the early 1970s when short films produced by avant-garde and experimental film-makers like the Cantrills and the Ubu Films group were virtually the only forms of local film production. The short form has grown in importance since the introduction of state support for film-making in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and especially since the creation of the Australian Film and Television School (now the Australian Film, Television and Radio School) in 1973. Short films have been the principal mode of production at the national film school since its foundation, as they were at the Swinburne Film School, at Swinburne's successor the Victorian College of the Arts and most of the other training institutions that have been set up over the last four decades, with many of the most prominent Australian film-makers learning and honing their craft in

Left: *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, Longford.

the short form. Today, several hundred short documentaries and fiction films, both live-action and animated, are made in Australia each year, most of which are screened at one or more of the 60 film festivals devoted to shorts that run here annually. As Lisa French observes in her essay on short films in this volume, short film-making is a fertile and diverse form of Australian production, with practitioners winning awards and acclaim at all major festivals and ceremonies around the world in recent years. Like the other genres and groups of films highlighted in this volume, Australian short films are often hybrids and do not always fit neatly into a single genre category.

For the next decade and more after Marius Sestier's first films were screened, 'going to the pictures' in Australia meant, as it did in the United States and in Europe, going to see a programme of short films, typically a mixture of actualities and 'trick' films. Within a few years, various cycles or groups of films sharing themes, settings, and eventually narrative and dramatic arcs, began to appear. The Salvation Army, the most important institution in film production in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century, produced a series of short religious-themed films for their touring illustrated lecture shows. For these multimedia extravaganzas – *Social Salvation* (1899), and *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900) – the Army's film-making branch, the Limelight Department under the direction of Joseph Perry, restaged events such as the burning of Christian martyrs and the drowning of Bishop Calepodius in a glass-walled studio in the centre of Melbourne and in a local swimming pool (Long & Sowry 1994: 65). In 1902 the Department made *Under Southern Skies*, a dramatization of Australian history from Captain Cook's voyages of discovery in the 1770s to Federation which contained filmed segments amounting to an astonishing 100 minutes (Long,1995a: 54). The Limelight Department also produced the first Australian long-form documentary films, including the official record of the ceremonies of national foundation, *The Inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia* (1901). Australian film-makers have been both burdened and empowered by the national frame through which their work has been viewed ever since. More than any other art form or media, film in Australia has been the site of vigorous contest over the representation of national and colonial history, over Australia's international cultural and industrial relations, and over the constitution of national identity. The idea of the 'national type' was explored and created by film-makers from an early date, and films featuring local settings, subjects and stories found a ready audience, whose enthusiasm inflated Australian cinema's first boom in the years before the World War I.

Perhaps the first Australian film (sub)genre, meaning a type and group of films which originated in Australia rather than drawing on international precedents and examples, was the group of historical films made between 1906 and 1914 about the fictional and documented exploits of Australian bushrangers or outlaws. These films are, as Ramon Lobato notes in his essay in this volume on Australian crime films, a subset of the broader crime genre. They merit a distinct entry because of their numerical significance in the early years of the twentieth century, and because of the importance of one film in particular: the Tait brothers' *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906). Although this was not the first Australian film with a bushranger theme (that honour probably goes to the Limelight Department's Joseph Perry who made *Bushranging in North Queensland* in 1904), *The Story of the Kelly Gang* is universally acknowledged as the most significant bushranger film, and the most important Australian film of this early period. It '[set] the pattern for the bushranger films to follow', and was by no means simply an imitation of the early American western (Bertrand and Routt 2007: 61). The *Story of the Kelly Gang* is an

extraordinary enigma, a landmark film and a remarkable piece of the international jigsaw that is the early history of cinema. In 2007, 101 years after it was made, the film was put on UNESCO's Memory of the World register of internationally-significant documents alongside the Bayeux Tapestry, the Rigveda, and the archive of Ingmar Bergman. The film was not quite 'the world's first feature length film,' as inscribed in the register, since longer, multi-reel films of boxing matches running up to 100 minutes, passion plays, and films of important national events like the 1901 royal visit were not uncommon at this time. Rather, its importance lies principally in the fact that, at 67 minutes, it was the longest narrative film made anywhere in the world to that date. Although popular, narrative cinema was still very much in its infancy in 1906, and virtually all story films produced anywhere in the world at this time were less than ten minutes long (Bertrand & Routt 2007: 15). It would be another ten years before narrative films the length of *The Story of the Kelly Gang* became standard cinematic fare in the larger American and European film industries. In addition to its length, the film is significant for its use of the pan – the sideways turn of the camera now commonplace, but previously difficult to perform steadily with cameras of the time. And it is hugely significant because fragments of the film still exist. As with 90 per cent of Australia's silent film heritage, much of the film is now lost, although the discovery of footage in the British Film Institute archive in 2006 means that 17 minutes of the film have now survived the ravages of time. The film clearly influenced contemporary film-makers, and not only in subject matter as multi-reel films became more common in the years after 1906.

While the bushranger films featured themes and iconography similar to the American 'western', which was also emerging at this time, the bushranger film and the western developed separately and should be considered as distinct tendencies. William D Routt (2001) makes this argument powerfully, observing that despite parallels in historical setting and the shared frontier location, and notwithstanding the 'rough coincidence between the heyday of the bushranger film (1906–1911) and what Ed Buscombe (1988: 25) has called 'the crucial formative years' of the American Western (1903–1913)', it is difficult to sustain the proposition that one form had a direct influence on the other. Approximately a quarter of films made in Australia between 1906 and 1912 featured the exploits of infamous bushrangers like Ned Kelly, Ben Hall, John Vane and 'Captain Thunderbolt', and several films were based on Rolf Boldrewood's 1888 bushranger novel *Robbery Under Arms* (Routt 2001). *The Story of the Kelly Gang* was remade in 1910, while police in Victoria prevented another version from going into production two years later. Throughout this period, politicians, police and moral crusaders worried over the effects of such films, which not only often depicted successful criminal activity but also usually portrayed the police negatively: the *Bulletin* magazine reported in May 1907 that the Victorian government had moved to ban screenings of the 1906 film in 'Kelly country' (the area of Victoria where the gang had been active), and eventually all screenings of films about bushranging were banned in New South Wales and Victoria in 1912.

As Stephen Gaunson describes in his essay in this volume on the bushranger film, while some film-makers tried to circumvent the intervention of state censors, producers' enthusiasm for the bushranger film waned after 1912. While the bans remained in place until the 1940s, some films with bushranging themes were passed by the censors if they portrayed the bushrangers as criminals and the police and judicial system in a positive light. Over the years, various film-makers have revisited the genre with varying degrees of success. British director Tony Richardson's 1970 version of the Ned Kelly story, which starred Mick

Jagger, was critically derided and largely ignored by audiences, while Philippe Mora's 1974 film *Mad Dog Morgan* is notorious for the extraordinary behaviour of lead actor Dennis Hopper during production. More recently, comedian Yahoo Serious's first film *Reckless Kelly* (1993) achieved some success by updating the Kelly gang mythology to the present day.

The censorship of the bushranger cycle of films was an expression of rising concerns from a diverse range of community groups and organizations about the social and cultural impact of film. Censorship also presented an opportunity to shape the popular image of Australia on screen – a task which was undertaken with gusto following the outbreak of the First World War. Film scenarios had to be passed by state censorship boards, while new federal agencies were established during the War to censor imported films. The War provided the inspiration for a new cycle of Australian films; thirteen war-themed films met the censors' expectations and were released between November 1914 and May 1916. The films, known as 'patriotics', have been credited with boosting enlistment in the armed forces. They were modelled, at least initially, on war films produced in Britain, with storylines featuring 'spies, rapacious Huns and upper-class Britons', as Daniel Reynaud describes in his essay in this volume on Australian war films. Other films depicted key campaigns or engagements involving Australians, including *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (Alfred Rolfe, 1915) and *Within Our Gates, or Deeds that Won Gallipoli* (Frank Harvey, 1915) about the Australian 'baptism of fire' at Gallipoli, and *How We Beat the Emden* (Alfred Rolfe, 1915) about the sea battle between HMAS *Sydney* and the German warship SMS *Emden* near the Cocos Islands in November 1914. Other films sought to exploit popular fears about German spy rings operating in Australia (*For Australia,* Monte Luke, 1915) and paranoia about a potential German invasion of Australia (*If the Huns Came to Melbourne,* George Coates, 1916). In part because of a public campaign during the war which characterized cinema-going as frivolous and unnecessarily extravagant, and in part because attitudes to the war effort and to the style of film which borrowed heavily from British war narratives and which 'typically also copied the intense patriotism of the British Empire and the current Social Darwinist beliefs about the superiority of the British race' were changing, their popularity declined for the remainder of the war (Reynaud 2005: 4). After the war, the figure of the Anzac became a contested symbol, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s:

> officialdom and Empire loyalists wished to celebrate the war in conservative terms as a great national-imperial success championing the loyal Anzac; many returned soldiers were disillusioned with Empire and politicians and turned to radical politics, mobilising the image of the larrikin digger; while others who had not gone to war were tired of the whole thing. (Reynaud 2005: 6)

Between the two world wars, Australian films featuring Anzacs, or with storylines about the conduct or aftermath of the First World War, often played for comedy. And, as Daniel Reynaud observes, the tendency in these films to portray the war positively was in marked contrast to war-themed films produced in Europe in this period. This approach was manifest in one of the most successful Australian films of the first half of the twentieth century, Charles Chauvel's *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, which was released in 1940 and intended as a self-described 'message of inspiration for a new generation of soldiers'. The film portrayed the heroic exploits of the Australian Light Horse cavalry regiment, commanded by Chauvel's uncle General Sir Harry Chauvel, in the Sinai Desert campaign during

the First World War. Events in the Great War, specifically the Gallipoli landings, were the subject of the most prominent war film made after the revival in feature production in the 1970s. Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* was released to great public and critical acclaim in 1981. This homage to the spirit and sacrifice of the Anzacs followed the line of Australian war historians from C E W Bean (who had witnessed the Gallipoli landings first-hand) onwards in placing the blame for this bloody and ultimately ill-fated campaign squarely at the feet of aloof and incompetent British generals. By contrast, the film venerated the qualities of the Australian troops – mateship, camaraderie, loyalty and simple bravery – and chimed with a contemporary, assertive nationalist mood and with the cinematic treatments of Australians at war in two earlier films, Tom Jeffery's *The Odd Angry Shot* (1979, about Australians in the Vietnam War), and Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* (1980, set in the Boer War). While several other films have subsequently covered aspects of Australia's Second World War history (*Blood Oath*, Stephen Wallace, 1990, about the post-war trial of Japanese troops over a massacre of Australian troops at a prisoner of war camp; *Paradise Road*, Bruce Beresford's 1997 film about women prisoners of war in Sumatra; *Kokoda*, Alister Grierson's 2006 film about the battles between Australian and Japanese troops along the Kokoda Track in New Guinea; *Australia*, Baz Luhrmann's musical epic from 2008 featuring the bombing of Darwin), stories featuring other Australian wars and engagements, like those in Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan and East Timor, have yet to be made.

Historical films have been a staple component since the earliest days of film production in Australia. Stories of Australian bushrangers jostled for public attention with tales of hardship and fortune-hunting on the goldfields, and historical dramas adapted from Australian and international plays and novels. Among the latter were several versions of Marcus Clarke's convict-era novel *For the Term of His Natural Life*, originally published in 1870. The most notorious adaptation was directed by the American special-effects master Norman Dawn. Upon release in 1927, the film was the most expensive Australian production to that date, and one of the most controversial. Celebrated Australian director Raymond Longford had spent a year working on the script and preparing the production before he was dismissed in 1926 and replaced by Dawn. This action became something of a *cause célèbre* at the 1927 Royal Commission into the Moving Picture Industry, and it was seized upon by those arguing for government intervention to reinvigorate feature film production in the 1960s as an example of the scandalous treatment of Australian film-makers and a contributing factor both to Longford's decline into obscurity and to the slow demise of feature production. The film is now particularly notorious for a spectacular and enormously costly scene depicting a fire on a ship; two tonnes of old nitrate film stock, including many early Australian films, were used as fuel for the fire, which was described by historian Eric Reade as 'the final flicker of what has been called 'the bright flame' of early film productivity in Australia' (in Verhoeven 1995: 135).

Australian crime cinema, into which category *For the Term of His Natural Life* could be placed (although like many Australian films it straddles a number of categories from literary adaptation, and special effects spectacular, to epic blockbuster), is a broad-ranging category. The genre includes such different Australian films as the McDonagh sisters' *The Cheaters* (1930), a melodrama about a family-run criminal empire, Bruce Beresford's 'inside-job' heist film *The Money Movers* (1978), Jon Hewitt's police drama *Redball* (1998) and Dee McLachlan's *The Jammed* (2007), about one woman's efforts to save a group of women who have been forcibly brought to Australia to work as prostitutes. Ramon Lobato

observes that while crime films have not been especially numerous in Australian cinema, they have been a consistent feature of Australian film production over the last hundred years. Several subgenres or subsets of the crime film can be identified. The bushranger film is clearly the earliest, but there are others, most obviously prison films, which Ben Goldsmith argues includes films about convict life along with contemporary films about life inside prisons. In retrospect, it may be a little surprising that so few films about the convict era have been made in Australia, especially since in the very early period, and again in the years after the revival, film-makers sought distinctively and uniquely Australian subjects and stories. In the early years, there was considerable ambivalence about Australia's convict history and some shame attached to those whose ancestors had been forcibly transported. More recently, this heritage has been more proudly remembered, especially since the publication in 1986 of Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore*. And yet there have been relatively few convict films made over the last hundred years. Italian producer Dino DeLaurentiis did announce an intention to adapt *The Fatal Shore* to the screen as one of the first of the slate of films he proposed to produce at the new film studio on the Gold Coast in the late 1980s, but this project fell through when DeLaurentiis's American company was forced into bankruptcy and he had to withdraw from Australia. And, in recent years, three films have been based on the story of escaped convict and alleged cannibal Alexander Pearce but, in part because of ambivalence about the past and in part because of the expense of making historical films, convict-era films have been relatively few and far between. In the recent golden age of historical film production from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, film-makers, and more importantly the government agencies that controlled film financing at the time, preferred films set in rural Australia in the late nineteenth century. As Bonnie Elliott notes in her essay on the period films (or 'AFC genre', as they became known), the key historical references for these films were late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels and, in particular, the paintings of the Heidelberg School of artists from the 1890s that played on a sense of nostalgia, which gives perhaps another reason for the lack of films set in the convict era.

The emergence of the AFC genre in the mid-1970s has been linked to a desire within the funding agencies to shift the popular image of Australian cinema away from the knockabout larrikin characters and scatological humour of the 'ocker' cycle of comedies that had proven so commercially successful in the early 1970s. These films – *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (Bruce Beresford, 1972), *Stork* (Tim Burstall, 1971), *Alvin Purple* (Tim Burstall, 1973), and the various sequels, spinoffs and other titles they inspired – unashamedly celebrated the Australian vernacular, and spoke directly to the Australian audience with little concession made to the possibility of international circulation. They were enormously popular, not least because they tapped into a strain of Australian nationalism that prided itself on its distinctiveness and, in particular, on its difference from Britain. The commercial success of the ocker films in the first years of the revival proved the viability and value of Australian cinema to private investors and to potential film-makers and, as Tom O'Regan has noted, these films 'paved the way for the more respected 'revival' films that followed' (O'Regan 1989: 78). The films demonstrated once again the popularity of comedies with distinctively Australian subject matter. As Lesley Speed notes in her essay in this volume, the popularity of Australian-themed comedies dates back at least to the seven Hayseeds films of Beaumont Smith (beginning with *Our Friends, the Hayseeds*, 1917) and to Raymond Longford's *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) and *On Our Selection* (1920), the latter two adapted from popular literary works. In the 1930s, vaudeville comedian George

Muriel's Wedding, Ciby 2000.

Wallace starred in a series of hit films, while remakes of *The Sentimental Bloke* (FW Thring, 1932) and *On Our Selection* (Ken G Hall, 1932) also proved popular with local audiences. In recent years, several cycles or groups of comedies have continued to prove the resilience of the genre and residual affection local audiences have for films which display an Australian sense of humour, from the 'quirky comedies' of the 1990s (*Strictly Ballroom*, Baz Luhrmann, 1992; *Muriel's Wedding*, P J Hogan, 1994; *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, Stephan Elliott, 1994, *Love Serenade,* Shirley Barrett, 1996), and the group of films made by the diverse collection of comedians who first worked together on the television sketch comedy series *The D-Generation* in the late 1980s (*The Castle*, Rob Sitch, 1997; *The Dish*, Rob Sitch, 2000; *Crackerjack*, Paul Moloney, 2002; *Bad Eggs*, Tony Martin, 2003; *BoyTown*, Kevin Carlin, 2006), to the 'wogsploitation' (Speed 2005) or 'wogboy' (Collins 2009) comedies like Aleksi Vellis's *The Wog Boy* (2000) and Paul Fenech's *Fat Pizza* (2003), and the 'bogsploitation' mockumentary *Kenny* (Clayton Jacobson, 2006). The success of all of these films pales before the real monster of Australian comedy, *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986), which is still by some distance the highest-grossing Australian film in Australia, and the most successful Australian film internationally.

In numerical terms, the coming-of-age film has been possibly the most prominent genre of Australian cinema. It is also, perhaps, the most written about, with many critics seeing in the numerous Australian films about rites-of-passage metaphors for both the film industry and the Australian nation. In her essay in this volume, Kristina Gottschall identifies a variety of films which deal with the transition between childhood and adulthood, or feature characters growing up and

discovering the world around them and finding their own identity. One important subset is films set in schools. In the first decade of the revival, the trials and tribulations of young women in Victorian boarding schools provided the drama in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Getting of Wisdom* (Bruce Beresford, 1977), while an oppressive Catholic boys' school in the 1950s was the setting for Fred Schepisi's directorial debut *The Devil's Playground* (1976). Another group of films depicts the growing pains of Indigenous Australians, with tragic outcomes in Beresford's *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986) and Stephen Johnson's *Yolngu Boy* (2000). Gottschall also highlights a number of films about adolescent girls leaving home to search for their absent fathers; this figure, the failed or departed father is a vital 'presence' in a whole string of recent Australian films.

Two recent coming-of-age films – Elissa Down's *The Black Balloon* and Cherie Nowlan's *Clubland* (both 2007) – feature lead characters negotiating their path to adulthood in a domestic environment that is shaped by the needs of their mentally-disabled brothers. In her essay on Disability in Australian Cinema, Katie Ellis charts the changing representation of disability in Australian cinema, and describes a shift – represented by these two films – from the use of disabled characters to illuminate or highlight aspects of the national character (as in Ken G Hall's *On Our Selection,* 1932, and *The Squatter's Daughter,* 1933), and the 'triumph over disability' (as depicted most prominently in Scott Hicks' Oscar-winning story about the pianist David Helfgott, *Shine,* 1996) to stories in which 'disability is … recognized in terms of social restriction rather than physical ailment'.

By contrast with the popularity and acclaim accorded to Australian comedies, Australian horror films have historically been marginalized in discourse and scholarship around Australian cinema. Today, though, as Mark David Ryan makes clear in his essay in this volume, horror movies are perhaps the most popular genre of films for Australian film-makers, especially those working with low budgets. While there are several examples of what Ryan calls 'horror-infused thrillers' in the early Australian cinema, the recent popularity of Australian horror films and film-makers both here and in international markets is due principally to the commercial success of James Wan and Leigh Whannell's *Saw* franchise (which only became possible when the film-makers relocated from Australia to the United States due to the lack of support they received for their concept from Australian funding agencies and investors), and in particular Greg Mclean's *Wolf Creek* (2005).

A significant number of Australian horror films play with the themes of the 'monstrous landscape' and the idea that Australia, and in particular the Australian outback, is a dangerous place. To differing and often less horrifying extents, these themes animate two other genres of Australian cinema: the road movie, and science fiction/fantasy films. As Fiona Trigg notes in her essay on Australian road movies, a group of films she terms the 'road movie/*amour fou* hybrid' involve extended chases across an inhospitable landscape, often ending with the death of the protagonists. In his essay on science fiction/fantasy films, Sean McMullen discusses the violence and lawlessness of *Mad Max*'s Australia. Both of these essays make the point, as do others in this volume, that the films we might label as 'road movies' or 'science fiction/fantasy' are extraordinarily diverse in their styles and subject matter, and often better understood as hybrids rather than clear-cut examples of any single genre. To this end, Fiona Trigg includes the documentary travelogues of Keith Adams, the Leyland brothers, and Alby Mangels in her essay on road movies, while Sean McMullen draws together such different films as *The Matrix* (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999), the Oscar-nominated short animation *The Mysterious*

Geographical Adventures of Jasper Morello (Anthony Lucas, 2005) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975).

Picnic at Hanging Rock, as Martyna Olszowska notes in her essay on Peter Weir, is for many Europeans and other non-Australians the first film that comes to mind when thinking of Australian cinema. Weir is undoubtedly one of the best known and most highly-acclaimed Australian directors. Although he has not made a film in Australia since *The Year of Living Dangerously* in 1982, and while his subsequent films that have been produced around the world (parts of *The Year of Living Dangerously* were shot in the Philippines, parts of *The Mosquito Coast,* 1986, in Belize; *Master and Commander,* 2003, in Mexico and the Galapagos Islands; and his current film, *The Way Back* in India, in Morocco and at the former Bulgarian national film studio now known as Nu Boyana), he has returned to Australia on several occasions for post-production. Weir began his career in television and in documentary film-making at the Commonwealth Film Unit (which became Film Australia in 1973, and which was absorbed into the mega-agency Screen Australia in 2008). His first feature film, the gothic horror *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974), was a bold and imaginative black comedy and one of the first Australian films to screen at the Cannes film festival, where its memorable prop, a Volkswagen Beetle festooned with spikes, created enormous media attention. Two years later, the acclaim that greeted his next film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* when it screened at Cannes announced the arrival of the revived Australian cinema on the international scene. *Picnic* also validated and compounded the Australian Film Commission's preference for European-style art films as the acceptable face of Australian cinema. In subsequent years, Weir has time and again proved his versatility and consummate ability to work within the Hollywood system while retaining his individualism and personal style with the production of films like *Witness* (1985), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Master and Commander* (2003). While far from being a prolific director – he has made only ten films over the last thirty years, and just five since 1990 – Peter Weir remains an enormously important and influential figure in Australian cinema.

The two other directors profiled in the Australian section of the Intellect Directory of Australian and New Zealand Cinema began their careers outside Australia and produced their most significant Australian films during the long fallow period in feature production between the end of the World War ll and the early 1970s known as 'the interval'. Cecil Holmes, a communist and celebrated documentary film-maker who started his career in the National Film Unit of New Zealand, only directed two feature films in a long career, but is rightly described by Adrian Danks in his essay in this volume as 'one of the most significant and ambitious film-makers to work in Australia during the 1950s, 60s and 70s'. Holmes' feature films, *Captain Thunderbolt* (1953) and *Three in One* (1957), were among only 25 made in Australia during the 1950s. Stylistically innovative and highly idiosyncratic, both films clearly display Holmes's cineliteracy and knowledge of international aesthetics and techniques. Danks identifies the influence of Soviet montage and Italian neo-realism which complemented Holmes's documentary sensibility. As Danks notes, Holmes's career is most notable for his work on documentaries which revealed to mainstream Australian audiences the lives and cultures of Indigenous Australians. Michael Powell, the British director and subject of Danks' second profile, like Holmes, only made two feature films in Australia, *They're a Weird Mob* (1966) and *Age of Consent* (1969). Danks observes that Powell's career in Australia 'is a tale of extreme tenacity, pragmatism and, ultimately, missed opportunities'. The work that he did manage to produce here is quite remarkable, and quite distinct from the films he made in Britain and Europe in the 1940s and 1950s, often

in partnership with his long-term collaborator Emeric Pressburger. In Australia, *They're a Weird Mob* is now considered an insightful and influential comedy about migrant life and the difficulties of assimilating into Australian society in the 1960s. *Age of Consent* paired the young Helen Mirren with James Mason in the story of an ageing artist who travels to a tropical island in an effort to rediscover his creativity and finds inspiration in the form of a beautiful young woman. Both films were adaptations: *They're a Weird Mob* from a novel by John O'Grady writing under the pen-name Nino Culotta, and *Age of Consent* from a 1938 novel by Australian artist and writer Norman Lindsay, and, while neither has received the acknowledgement they deserve outside Australia, they are both important and visionary films that deserve wider acclaim.

Forty years ago, around the time that Powell was active in Australia, film critic Sylvia Lawson lamented that '[i]n other countries, locally-oriented film comment is about actual films; here it is always about the industry, or rather the non-industry, because until the industry properly exists, there will be virtually no Australian films for discussion' (Lawson [1969]1985: 175). Twenty years later, and almost twenty years after the revival in local production, academics and film historians Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka echoed this sentiment in a criticism of film agencies' neglect of film culture when they noted that 'there is a professional discourse to talk about the economics of films and a popular one to *promote* them; but ways of discussing our cinema in its aesthetic and political aspects are severely underdeveloped' (Dermody & Jacka 1987: 106). Today, the aesthetic (if not political) aspects of Australian films are widely discussed, although the travails of the production industry and local audience indifference about Australian films still tend to be the dominant topics of conversation. And yet, despite the widespread discussion of Australian cinema in print, online and on the airwaves, and despite the regular division by critics and scholars of Australian films by kind, type or common theme, genre film-making and genre analysis have, until recently, tended to be seen as beyond the boundaries of Australian cinema. This perception was tackled head-on in a set of articles in the first issue of a new journal, *Limina*, published by the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. The School's Head of Screen Studies, Karen Pearlman, introduced the section, entitled 'Genre is not a Dirty Word', by asserting that collectively the four articles represent 'a provocation to move beyond the notion that genre is somehow beneath us' (Pearlman 2009: 83). While the authors, and the School, are to be applauded for continuing an emphasis on genre film-making that has been developed over a number of years, and that was kicked along significantly by a short course on Horror cinema convened by Teresa Rizzo in 2006 and 2007, the section unfortunately reinforces the misguided idea that genre film-making is something that exists outside Australian cinema, or as something 'other'. All four articles – on horror films, musicals, westerns and a new category, the 'self-help' genre – take as their principal points of reference films from the American cinema. In so doing, the authors both deny the contributions Australian film-makers have made to all of these genres, and ignore the history and new vibrancy of genre film-making in Australia

There are a number of reasons for this continuing tendency in critical writing on Australian cinema to marginalize genre films. Dermody and Jacka both describe and promote a tendency within the critical establishment, among some film-makers, and within funding agencies from the 1970s until the present day, to consider 'traditional' genre films, by which Dermody and Jacka meant genres typically associated with Hollywood cinema: 'thrillers, exploitation, splatter movies and action pictures (Dermody & Jacka 1987: 147), as antithetical to

the core mission of the film industry, which, for many, is to represent national identity and to tell distinctively Australian stories. Genre films have been seen as part of an international or transnational rather than locally-oriented cinema, commercially rather than culturally minded, less 'aesthetically interesting' than those films which expressly set out to represent and explore Australia onscreen, and, worst of all, prone to 'erasing all signs of their local production' (Dermody & Jacka 1988a: 24). This has been their ultimate failing: to be an authentic contribution to Australian cinema and screen culture, a film made in Australia, by Australians, must foreground its local specificity and its geographic and cultural origins and maintain an ethereal originality. Those that did not and, instead, took their cues from films made here or elsewhere, or had the temerity to consider audiences beyond Australia, were damned by Dermody and Jacka as 'culturally stupid … emblematic of a 'carpetbagger mentality' (1988a: 49), and 'chilled by commercial or exploitationist motives' (1988a: 43). These attitudes have prevailed for many years. Those Australian films that used generic templates with a local inflection were branded 'eccentrics' and 'limbo-like' by Dermody and Jacka (1988a: 47). Succeeding generations of critics and scholars, and successive funding agencies, have accepted this line, and have tended to view films that display the codes and conventions of recognizable film genres as somehow beyond the acceptable boundaries of the national cinema. Genre films, or even consideration of Australian films in terms of genre, have not sat easily with the 'underlying notion that film served the identification and refinement of essential Australianness [that] was the confident starting point for everybody' involved in arguing the film industry into existence from the 1960s onwards (Dermody & Jacka 1987: 27). So, even though the study of film genres was becoming an established practice in Britain and the United States from the late 1960s, the dominant critical paradigm in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, and even to some extent to the present day, has been the nation and the national cinema. In this framework, Hollywood is routinely cast as the 'other', with 'cultural exactitude' measured, in part, by difference and distance from Hollywood forms, themes, concerns and commercialism. The emphasis on 'cultural exactitude' has valorized and lauded difference and distinction, and relegated genre films for their unthinking similarity and derivativeness.

As Dermody and Jacka document, the introduction of tax concessions under Division 10BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act in 1981 led to an influx of private investment in film production and boosted the number of genre films made in Australia. And yet they argue that, on the evidence of films produced between 1970 and 1988, Australian cinema was 'not genre-based nor nearly prolific enough to be so' (Dermody & Jacka 1988a: 47). That is, genre film-making was constructed as the preserve of a film industry of a certain size and output, though what this size and output might be was not specified. But, curiously, Dermody and Jacka, like so many writers and critics before and after them, could not resist describing and discussing the films by grouping them into particular types or kinds. 'Type' or 'kind', as Steve Neale helpfully reminds, is the literal translation of the French term 'genre' (Neale 2000: 9), so, at some level, it seems odd that Australian cinema is both considered to be *not* genre-based, and yet still divisible into types of films.

Several recent events and developments have encouraged a re-evaluation of Australian genre film-making, and of the place of genre in Australian cinema. The first was the runaway success of Greg Mclean's horror film *Wolf Creek*, released in 2005. This low-budget film was by no means the first horror film produced in Australia, as Mark David Ryan outlines in his contribution to this

volume. *Wolf Creek* did however open the eyes of funding agencies and other investors to the potential of horror films, and shone a spotlight on the thriving but critically-marginalized genre. In 2008, the release of Mark Hartley's feature length documentary *Not Quite Hollywood* presented an opportunity to re-evaluate the diversity of genre films made in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s that were often popular either in Australia or overseas, influential in their genres, but critically derided in Australia and marginalized from the project of constructing an Australian cinema the nation could be proud of. Hartley coins the term 'Ozploitation' as a label for the variety of films covered in his documentary, although, as Deborah Thomas points out in her essay on Ozploitation in this volume, the term covers a diverse variety of genre films including soft-core pornography, ocker comedy, horror and 'creature features', and action films. In the 1970s, Ozploitation film-makers like John Lamond (*Australia After Dark,* 1974; *The ABC of Love and Sex: Australian Style*, 1978; and *Felicity,* 1979), Tim Burstall (*Alvin Purple,* 1973), and Anthony Ginnane (*Fantasm,* 1976; *Fantasm Comes Again,* 1977; *Patrick,* 1978) explored the new freedom in production afforded not only by government subsidy but also by the relaxation of censorship laws and the introduction of the 'R' or 18+ rating in 1971.

Many of the Ozploitation films and the core group of directors and producers involved in their production – Brian Trenchard-Smith, Richard Franklin, Anthony Ginnane, and Colin Eggleston – also benefited from the introduction of the 10BA tax concessions in the early 1980s, with most of the horror and action films produced in this decade. As Hartley notes in his film, and as Deborah Thomas outlines in more detail in her essay, the marginalization of these genre films was a consequence of the official preference for 'quality' films. The subsequent neglect of these films by scholars (although not, it should be noted, by audiences,both in Australia and overseas) is due, in part at least, to the critical orthodoxy established by Dermody and Jacka that denied the cultural value and even the very existence of genre film-making in Australian cinema. As Hartley's film reveals, the sheer number of films produced in the 1970s and 1980s that fall broadly into the Ozploitation category, and the influence they have had not only on Australian audiences and film-makers but also, as Quentin Tarantino and other contributors to *Not Quite Hollywood* make clear, to film-makers and audiences around the world, makes their marginal status much harder to maintain. And, as Deborah Thomas notes, the 'positive cultural values now assigned to exploitation cinema', due in no small part to the evangelism of Tarantino and his fans, have aided the revisionary approach to the variety of genre film-making in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s.

A further boost to the reconsideration of genre film-making in Australia came with the publication in 2006 of Albert Moran and Errol Vieth's book *Film in Australia: An Introduction*. The book opens with a statement of its aim to 'promote the study of Australian feature films in terms of genre' (Moran & Vieth 2006: 1), which, as the authors note, is a departure from usual approaches to Australian cinema. The authors group Australian films into thirteen broad genre categories: adventure, art film, biopic, comedy, crime, detective, horror, musical, science fiction, social realism, suspense thriller, teenpic and women's film. This Directory builds on Moran and Vieth's approach. While the groupings of films in this volume differ somewhat from those in *Film in Australia*, the motivation and sentiment behind this volume is the same as Moran and Vieth's: that is, to encourage new considerations of Australian films and to provide new perspectives on Australian cinema. The contributions to this volume come from a variety of writers, many of whom are at early stages in their careers as academics, critics, and

contributors to Australian screen culture. It is hoped that future editions of the Directory will feature the work of other writers, perhaps drawn from contributors to the worldcinemadirectory.org website, which is open to public submissions.

Identifying and grouping genres of Australian films are, of course, principally critical and scholarly exercises, and it is to be expected that some film-makers, scholars and commentators will disagree with the classifications outlined here. The important point is that this process of revision, of looking at Australian cinema in terms of genres or types of films rather than seeing the entire output of Australia's film-makers as a single genre, as some bizarrely continue to do, provides a means to think about the things that films share in common; to consider their relations with other films both Australian and international; to explore what these films share and what makes them distinct; and, crucially, to connect with audiences. Genre films resonate with other films, with audiences, and with film-makers. Genre, as Rick Altman (1999) reminds us, is useful as a blueprint and guide for film-makers, as a label for distributors and exhibitors to sell a film and for audiences to make decisions about what to see. And the description of a film in terms of a particular genre, with distinct stylistic and narrative features, represents a contract between audiences and film-makers that sets up certain expectations on which audiences will judge the value of the film and of the experience of viewing.

In marked contrast with the situation even five years ago, genre films are now much more prominent in Australian cinema and scholarship, although the state of the industry and the Australian audience's apparent dislike of Australian films remain the core topics of conversation. If the recent crop of Australian productions and the range of writing about Australian film is any guide, the institutions of Australian cinema – industrial, critical, bureaucratic – appear to be sloughing off their previous hostility or ambivalence towards genre films. The synopses of films at various stages of production in Australia in September 2009 give some flavour of Australian film-makers embrace of genre, and of the diversity of films currently being made here: An environmental disaster creates a killer fog that destroys everything in its path; Australian soldiers tunnel beneath the trenches of the Western Front during the First World War; a rape victim embarks on a revenge mission against her attackers; a young man fights his way from the suburbs of Melbourne to a boxing world title; a group of friends are marooned on a remote reef surrounded by sharks after their pleasure cruiser sinks; eight teenagers work together to fight an invading army. These film-makers understand that, while 'Australian film' may not on its own be a selling point for local audiences, tagging films with genre labels and embracing the codes and conventions of established genres may just be the best way to make their film stand out and, most importantly, to enable them to find an audience. In the process it may just be that the historical ambivalence that Australian audiences display towards Australian films, and which the industry and commentariat endlessly worry over, might just be surmounted.

Ben Goldsmith

Gentle Strangers, 1972. Writer and director, Cecil Holmes. Copyright Screen Australia.

DIRECTORS
CECIL HOMLES (1921–1994)

Although born in New Zealand, Cecil Holmes is nevertheless one of the most significant and ambitious film-makers to work in Australia during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. A dedicated leftist, in fact a communist, his work consistently demonstrated a humanist commitment to the socially disenfranchised, ranging from the underlying capitalist conditions that force decent citizens into bushranging and stealing, to the social and economic conditions confronting indigenous communities in contemporary Australia. In the 1950s, Holmes briefly moved from his background in documentary to feature film production, but all of his work demonstrates a keen eye and ear for the 'actuality' of the moment being captured. Although he is often regarded as a maverick director who struggled hard to make films – and he did produce only two features in a relatively long career – he nevertheless consistently produced work in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s for a variety of governmental, corporate and philanthropic organizations, as well as at the behest of such individuals as Australian leftist author, Frank Hardy.

Holmes is most well known to contemporary commentators on Australian cinema for his two highly-idiosyncratic features, *Captain Thunderbolt* (1953) and *Three in One* (1957), two of only a very small number of truly local features made in Australia during the 1950s. *Three in One*, in particular, represents one of the highpoints of post-war Australian cinema, reframing the common or characteristic theme of 'mateship' within more explicitly leftist contexts. But what is most remarkable about the film – which is uneven, possibly inevitably so considering its tripartite form – is its visual style, both reaffirming and transforming the common preoccupations of Australian landscape cinema. Also significant are the international models of film-making aesthetics that it openly draws upon, ranging from Soviet montage (seen clearly in the opening story's use of low-angle framing and expressive caricature or typage) to Italian neo-realism. These visible influences also betray Holmes' cinephilia; he was a key figure in the New Zealand film society movement of the 1940s, and ran a company, New Dawn Films, that distributed European cinema later in the 1950s. It is nevertheless the middle section of *Three in One*, based on Frank Hardy's short story 'A Load of Wood', that remains a classic expression of Australian colloquial understatement, a minimally-worded, visually high contrast and largely location-shot paean to worker unity set during the 1930s' Depression.

These two features tend to somewhat skew understandings of Holmes' broader career, especially considering the fact that he mainly worked within the realm of documentary. Although several of his works in this field do deal with worker and union issues – such as *Words for Freedom* (1956) about the union press, made between the two features – his career is most remarkable for its commitment to indigenous causes and issues (many of his documentaries in this mode were shot in the Northern Territory). But this genuine and empathetic concern has also made much of his work difficult to see, often being restricted in its subsequent distribution and visibility. Made for a range of organizations, including the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Film Australia, and the Institute for Aboriginal Studies, these documentaries move from the more conventionally ethnographic to committed and troubling works concerned with Aboriginal rights and the conflict between modern and traditional ways of life. Two of his most remarkable documentaries remain *I, the Aboriginal* (1961), made for the ABC and based on Douglas Lockwood's bestselling book, and the more troubling *Faces in the Sun* (1965), focusing on a range of Aboriginal characters living varied but conflicted lives in Arnhem Land and Darwin. Each of these films is a fascinating artefact of its period, attempting to 'accurately' depict Aboriginal life while caught between

an understanding of tradition and the 'needs' of assimilation. Containing numerous images, sounds and ideas that are discomforting for contemporary audiences from any background – let alone specifically indigenous ones – both films (and later more positivist films like *The Islanders* 1968, and *Return to the Dreaming,* 1971) are nevertheless important, committed and often potent contributions to Australian cinema and television in the 1960s.

After starting his career with New Zealand's National Film Unit – where he made the Grierson-like short, *The Coaster* (1947) – Holmes instigated the first public service strike in New Zealand, and not long after fled to Australia. His initial work in Australia was completed under John Heyer at the Shell Film Unit, hardly the most apt or nurturing environment for a film-maker of Holmes' overriding political and social allegiances. Moving out from under such corporate and governmental patronage was certainly the making of Holmes as a film-maker, even if he often struggled to get his subsequent films of the 1950s into the marketplace. Thus, both *Captain Thunderbolt* and *Three in One* were funded independently by companies or figures sympathetic to Holmes' leftist views. *Three in One*, for example, was initially conceived as a stand-alone short funded from the European royalties earned by Hardy's *Power Without Glory*. But neither film has ever been widely seen locally, and *Three in One* – which in aesthetic terms easily competes with many comparative international films of its time – has never been released in Australia. Both films were more widely seen overseas before limited showings on Australian television at the end of the decade.

Thus, despite being critically lauded in some circles, Holmes remains a relatively unknown or uncelebrated figure of postwar Australian cultural life. Nevertheless, the breadth and innovation of his work in the areas of both the fiction feature and documentary remains remarkable. Holmes is inevitably one of the truly singular figures in Australian film history, a committed, vital and often rebellious director whose approach and idiosyncratic career is neatly summed up by the title of his episodic 1986 'autobiography', *One Man's Way*.

Adrian Danks

Captain Thunderbolt

Country of Origin:
Australia

Production Company:
Associated T.V.

Producer:
John Wiltshire

Director:
Cecil Holmes

Screenwriter:
Creswick Jenkinson

Cinematographer:
Ross Wood

Editor:
Margaret Cardin

Art Director:
Keith Christie

Music:
Sydney John

Duration:
69 minutes

Genre:
Bushranger

Cast:
Grant Taylor
Charles Tingwell
Rosemary Miller
Harp McGuire
John Fegan
Jean Blue

Year:
1953

Synopsis

Inspired by Frank Clune's 1948 book about nineteenth century bushrangers, *Wild Colonial Boys*, *Captain Thunderbolt* is an idiosyncratic, if at times predictable, story of downtrodden individuals driven to lives of crime. Fred Ward and Alan Blake are sentenced to hard labour on Cockatoo Island after being found guilty of horse stealing by the repressive colonial authorities. While working on a chain gang breaking rocks in a quarry they break free and escape to the Mainland and take up the life of bushranging (Regan adopts the epithet of 'Captain Thunderbolt' not long after). Enjoying their cavalier lifestyle, they mostly steal from the decadent capitalist class and gain the sympathy of many in the community. After the pursuit of Ward and Blake is 'abandoned' by Dalton – a sympathetic policeman with allegiances to the fugitives' families – it is taken up by the sadistic Sergeant Mannix. He relentlessly pursues them to a final shoot-out. Blake is killed and wilfully mistaken for Ward, while rumours persist that Captain Thunderbolt continues to ride throughout the countryside.

Critique

Captain Thunderbolt is one of the most bracing and visually adventurous of bushranger films, a truly indigenous genre somewhat blighted and stunted in its growth by the New South Wales ban on the form in the silent era. Not surprisingly for a film directed by communist Cecil Holmes, it emphasizes the social, political and cultural circumstances that led Fred Ward (Captain Thunderbolt) to a life of crime. The film also draws upon Holmes' experience in documentary – particularly visually – and his own tastes and background as a cinephile. For example, his exaggerated portrayal of the capitalist squatocracy and the higher echelons of the legal system and, at times, highly expressive and self-conscious visual style – most famously evidenced in the shot where the camera peers up through a glass table – are plainly indebted to his sympathetic knowledge of the Soviet Montage School and Eisenstein's theories of character typology. The very real limits of characterization found in the film are also partly a result of this key influence.

Like Holmes' subsequent feature, *Three in One* (1957), *Captain Thunderbolt* met with little success or sympathetic distribution in Australia. Financed and produced independently of the local distribution and exhibition system – which was largely controlled by American and British interests – it struggled for several years to gain a very limited Australian release. A relatively low budget film costing £15,000, it was produced by a company attempting to break into and pre-empt the market for television drama (a medium that was not launched in Australia until late 1956). Ultimately gaining a release in Europe and America, and more than returning its budget from these sales, *Captain Thunderbolt* was a significant departure for Holmes, who had made his name producing documentaries in New Zealand and for the Shell Film Unit (and for leading the first public service strike in New Zealand).

Shot mostly on location in the rural area of New England in early 1951, *Captain Thunderbolt* is less impressive as a whole – there are numerous clumsy scenes and performances – than it is for individual moments and points of emphasis. For example, it contains a very sympathetic representation of a female Aboriginal character, an aspect that perhaps reveals and points towards Holmes' more sustained interest in Aboriginal issues in his documentaries of the 1960s and 1970s (such as *I, the Aboriginal,* 1961, and *Faces in the Sun*,1965). But equally striking is the form of the film itself. Although some of the gaps of narrative and continuity can probably be accounted for by the shorter television version that now survives in the archives, the film's mode of address and point of view are consistently innovative, if not always totally successful in delivery. Therefore, although the most sympathetic, iconic and appropriately-dashing character in the film is obviously Captain Thunderbolt, the film's voiceover is actually given to the policemen – one of whom tells the story through a very self-conscious voiceover flashback. Although this could be explained away in terms of the film's perspective being aligned with the forces of law, the odd, arch and often harsh tone of the voiceover routinely underplays this possibility. Although the film's largely positive view of bushranger life is hardly unique, it does reflect a key shift in the leftist understanding and use of folk culture in this period – the soundtrack features various folk ballads including 'The Wild Colonial Boy' – and the kinds of stories it can tell about class inequity and social injustice. *Captain Thunderbolt* is both a curious anomaly in Holmes' career – his only real attempt at genre film-making – and totally in keeping with his broader preoccupations and values.

Adrian Danks

Three in One

Country of Origin:
Australia

Production Company:
Australian Tradition Films

Producer:
Cecil Holmes

Director:
Cecil Holmes

Cinematographer:
Ross Wood

Editor:
A. William Copeland

Music:
Raymond Hanson

Synopsis

Three in One comprises three separate stories surveying the distinctively Australian theme of 'mateship', introduced by the plummy tones of John McCallum who is seemingly 'captured' relaxing between performances in his theatre dressing room. This trilogy of ostensibly stand-alone short films moves in time from the 1890s through the early Great Depression of the 1930s to the hustle and bustle of modern mid-1950s' Sydney. Though thematically related, each of the three stories takes a different tone and approach, ranging from the initial, often comic, sun-scorched adaptation of Henry Lawson's 'The Union Buries its Dead', through the atmospheric, isolated, low-key night-time Jindabyne setting of Frank Hardy's wonderful 'A Load of Wood', to the more anonymous – though distinctly Sydney-set – treatment of Ralph Peterson's original story and script, 'The City'. The first two stories of *Three in One*, in particular, highlight the relation of figures to the iconic Australian landscape, though each is equally preoccupied by what might constitute community in each of these isolated environments and situations. The closer the film gets to the present

Voiceover:
John McCallum

Duration:
89 minutes

Genre:
Drama

Year:
1957

Joe Wilson's Mates

Screenwriter:
Rex Rienits, from the short story 'The Union Bury its Dead' by Henry Lawson

Cast:
Edmund Allison
Reg Lye
Alexander Archdale
Charles Tasman
Don McNiven
Jerold Wells
The Bushwackers Band

The Load of Wood

Screenwriter:
Rex Rienits, from the story by Frank Hardy

Cast:
Jock Levy
Leonard Thiele
Ossie Wenban
John Armstrong

The City

Screenwriter:
Ralph Peterson

Cast:
Joan Landor
Brian Vicary Betty Lucas
Gordon Glenwright
Ken Wayne
Styewart Ginn

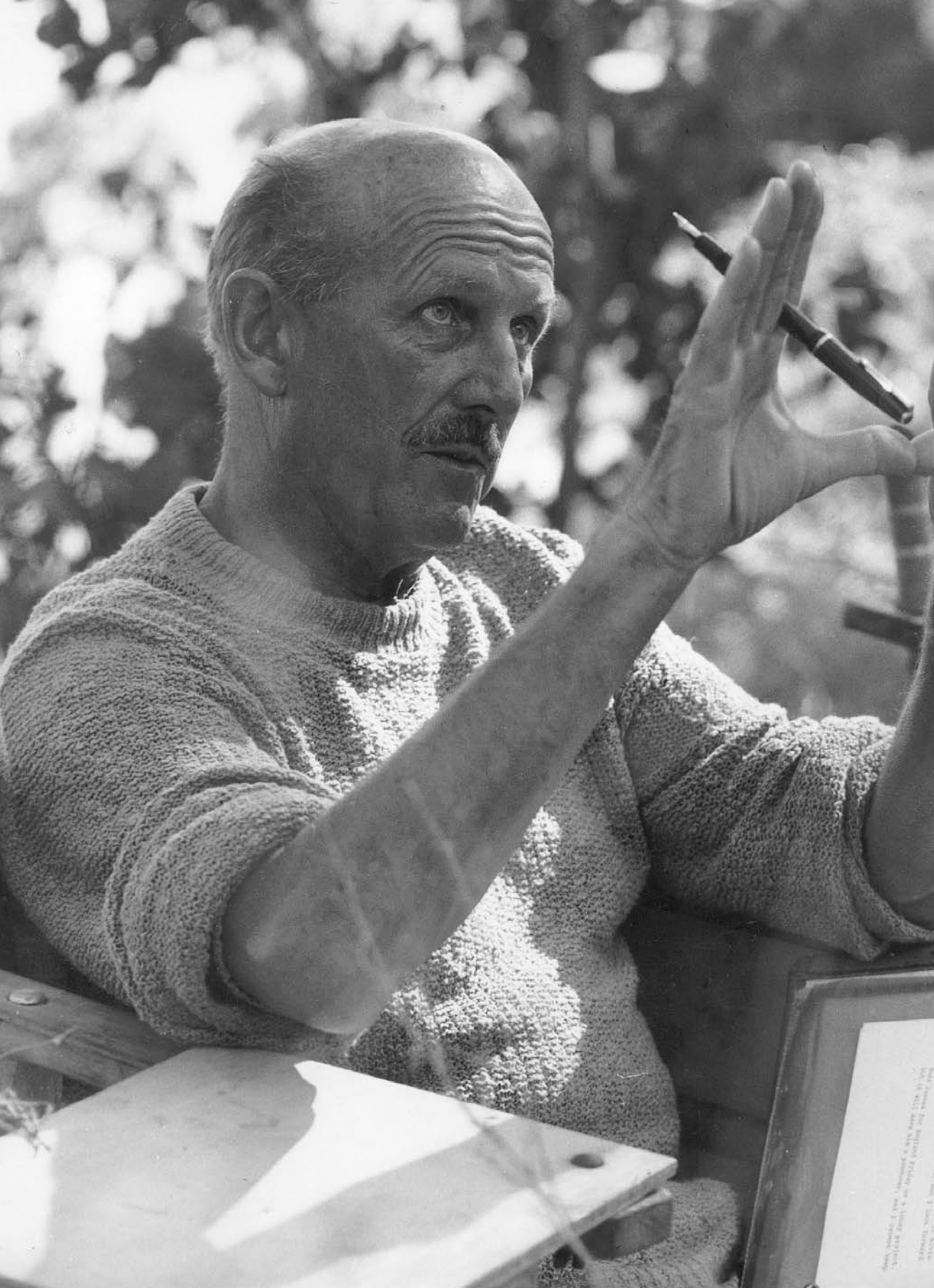
day the more it moves away from such conceptions of community, the final part focusing predominantly on the more conventional cinematic and narratological framework of the romantic couple. But even in this final section – which presents an uncommonly gritty view of Australian life – the couple is characteristically assisted by their workmates and the communal possibilities of modern life are subtly indicated.

Critique

Although rarely screened, Cecil Holmes' *Three in One* is one of the most singular, significant and impressive features made in Australian between World War II and the film revival of the 1970s. The only truly local feature film made in 1957, it is a profoundly-independent work that robustly demonstrates Holmes' idiosyncratic film-making capabilities. A significant aesthetic advance on the more piecemeal triumphs of *Captain Thunderbolt*, *Three in One* nevertheless failed to attain a proper Australian release on its completion, individual episodes ultimately being screened as supporting shorts by a local exhibitor. This sits in contrast to the film's international distribution which, although hardly lucrative, saw it being released in numerous European countries *and* New Zealand, and garnering awards and strong critical notices at the Edinburgh and Karlovy Vary film festivals in 1956.

The strongest section of *Three in One* is definitely the middle one. Initially designed as a short film in its own right, and financed by the European earnings of Hardy's novel *Power Without Glory*, 'A Load of Wood' is a brilliantly shot – by the great Ross Wood – and acted two-hander that evokes a palpably-chilly atmosphere and tension. In many respects, the opening story of the film is the weakest, and is certainly the most leisurely and digressive entry in the trilogy. It does feature some striking exterior shots with low-angle framing, creating vistas that are reminiscent of late 1920s' Soviet cinema, a key point of reference for both Holmes' visual style and his politics. But despite its pro-union stance, and display of game leftist sympathies in the context of the Cold War and a broader anti-communism, the film is more concerned with creating a jovial atmosphere around the two songs contributed by the pub folk band (The Bushwackers) than any truly-potent political or social message. The final section of the film, 'The City', is both more conventional and somewhat bleaker than the two that precede it. It is also the section the film that moves farthest away from the broader concept of 'mateship'. This section is less remarkable for the somewhat-mundane domestic drama that unfolds – involving a young couple despairing about the cost of housing and stalling their marriage as a result – than its portrait of night-time Sydney as a hive of activity and forbidding shadows. Although far from film noir in its broader sensibility, the visual stamp of this imposing style certainly makes its mark. But Holmes' model is equally that of neo-realism: a key stylistic, thematic and ethical benchmark throughout his fiction and documentary work. *Three in One* stands, for all its inconsistency, as Holmes' greatest and most iconic contribution to Australian cinema.

Adrian Danks



DIRECTORS
MICHAEL POWELL (1905–1990)

English film-maker Michael Powell's career in Australia is a tale of extreme tenacity, pragmatism and, ultimately, missed opportunities (amongst his other mooted projects was a film based on Arthur Upfield's 'Bony' novels). The two films that he made 'down under' in the 1960s – *They're a Weird Mob* (1966) and *Age of Consent* (1969) – are amongst a small number of features produced in Australia during that lean decade. They are also amongst the highest-profile and biggest-budgeted Australian films of the era. Though they are, in some ways, studies in contrast – *They're a Weird Mob* working to embrace the Australian idiom and character; *Age of Consent* to escape the pressures and changes of 'present day' Australia on the idyll of Dunk Island – they are, equally, accounts of outsiders or exiles learning (or relearning) the rhythms and nuances of Australian life. In this respect, as well as in terms of their interest in themes of community and creativity (less the case in *They're a Weird Mob*, inevitably), they are less departures from Powell's visionary, highly European and often romantic British work (much of which he made in collaboration with Emeric Pressburger for their production company, The Archers) than somewhat benign revisitations of the more emotionally-engaged and tortured terrains of such masterpieces of the 1940s as '*I Know Where I'm Going!*' (1945), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), films largely set outside England and equally responsive to the specificity of place (even when filmed in the confines of the studio).

Although they were never intended as final works – Powell continued to dream of and plan further features up until the 1980s – both of his Australian films nevertheless display a more relaxed and accepting tone than many of Powell and Pressburger's celebrated works. As a result of this lack of intensity, as well as the relative invisibility of these

Left: *Michael Powell*, Columbia/Nautilus.

two Australian co-productions on the world stage, both *They're a Weird Mob* and *Age of Consent* have been critically-undervalued films, routinely regarded as directorial afterthoughts in the career of one of the greatest film-makers of the mid-twentieth century. Thus, despite the consistently rising reputation of Powell – he is now commonly regarded as Britain's greatest film-maker, alongside Alfred Hitchcock – these two Australian films have mostly met with either silence or faint embarrassment. Nevertheless, in the last decade or so, this position has started to change, with both Australian and international critics and film-makers starting to become aware of some of the pleasures and achievements that these two films offer. Although *Age of Consent* is never going to be regarded as more than an amiable curiosity of Australian cinema, or as a highpoint in Powell's career (it is a disappointing final feature, ultimately), *They're a Weird Mob* has emerged as something else: a classic time-capsule of Australian culture, a prescient model for local film production, and a surprisingly-nuanced portrait of migrant life and how such migrants might negotiate the transition from the governmental and social policies of assimilationism to multiculturalism.

The key difficulty of Powell's Australian films is that they represent and belong to a pragmatic model for making commercial films in Australia: a logical and powerful 'starting point' for a country without a viable feature film industry. The

Age of Consent. Columbia/Nautilus.

films' reputations have suffered mightily from their rejection by both those in Australia pushing for a government-supported film industry and those expecting a clear reaffirmation or even rejuvenation of Powell's film-making powers and points of obsession. *They're a Weird Mob* was made at a particularly low point in Powell's British career. It follows the critical and commercial disaster of *Peeping Tom* (1960), the supremely underwhelming *The Queen's Guards* (1961), and the piecemeal work Powell had started to undertake in British television. Thus, *They're a Weird Mob* represents both a retreat and an embrace of new challenges – core ideas that are coincidentally at the centre of *Age of Consent* – the tale of an expatriate Australian painter burnt-out by the New York art scene. The problem is that the ambition of *They're a Weird Mob*, and the extraordinary work and effort Powell and his collaborators put into securing production funds and wide Australian release, was not visible or evident to international critics or audiences.

Powell himself appeared to be quite pleased with *They're a Weird Mob*, as indicated in the second volume of his magisterial autobiography, *Million-Dollar Movie*, and he was very aware of his own achievements in successfully negotiating deals with notoriously-fickle local exhibitors (who in the 1960s were loathe to show or commit to anything Australian). In this light, Powell's decision to adapt an extremely popular and picaresque novel by Nino Culotta (pseudonym of John O'Grady), a comedy of acculturation and assimilation, should be viewed less as a case of artistic affinity (though he plainly enjoyed it as romp and saw some affinity in its 'outsider's view' of a community) than creative pragmatism – he rightly saw more ambitious and risky films as something to be attempted only after the (re)establishment of a viable feature film industry. In this regard, his approach to film production in Australia is not so far removed from that of his countrymen Harry Watt and Ralph Smart who worked for Ealing in the 1940s and early 1950s. Although *Age of Consent* is based on a 1938 novel by Norman Lindsay which seems somewhat closer to Powell's existing preoccupations – essentially the life of the artist and his attempts to shape the world around him – it is equally broad and stereotyped in its view of character and situation. Powell himself was very dismissive of Lindsay's novel, considering the main attractions of his film to be the picturesque and isolated surroundings of Dunk Island, the star power of James Mason, and the corporeal beauty of a young Helen Mirren. Both films were successful on their Australian release – *They're a Weird Mob* massively so – but both failed to achieve significant overseas exposure.

Ultimately, Powell can be seen as the embodiment of the figure of the 'sympathetic outsider': an overseas film-maker who committed the time and effort to make two popular features in Australia during one of the most difficult periods for local film production. Although there is some continuing disappointment that these films never reached (or even tried to) the level of Powell's work of the 1940s and early 1950s, they should now be regarded, and possibly celebrated, in terms more appropriate to their production conditions and circumstances, as pragmatically visionary and commercially ambitious films for a country just starting to really make films again.

Adrian Danks

They're a Weird Mob

Country of Origin:
Australia

Prod Co:
Williamson-Powell International Films

Producer:
Michael Powell

Director:
Michael Powell

Screenwriter:
Richard Imrie [Emeric Pressburger], from the novel by Nino Culotta (John O'Grady)

Cinematographer:
Arthur Grant

Editor:
G. Turney-Smith

Art Director:
Dennis Gentle

Music:
Lawrence Leonard

Duration:
112 minutes

Genre:
Comedy

Cast:
Walter Chiari
Clare Dunne
Chips Rafferty
Ed Devereaux
Alida Chelli
Slim de Grey
John Meillon
Charles Little

Year:
1966

Synopsis

An Italian sports journalist Nino Culotta is summoned to Australia to work on an Italian-language magazine called *La Seconda Madre*. On arrival, he discovers that the magazine has gone into liquidation and so finds himself stuck in a foreign country he knows little about and with few points of contact. Eventually finding employment as a builder's labourer, he is acculturated into the Australian way of life and its distinctive idiom.

Critique

Throughout this laconic, though often quite genteel picaresque tale, Nino is introduced to a wide array of Australian types, rituals (including that of courtship, and the pub 'shout') and iconic situations, ranging from swimming at Bondi Beach to arranging for the purchase of his own block of land. *They're a Weird Mob* can be seen as an important precursor of the 1970s' 'ocker' film, though its view of masculinity, the Australian character, urban life and cultural difference is considerably less chauvinistic and far more gentle and whimsical than that of such later films as *Stork* (Tim Burstall, 1971) and *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (Bruce Beresford, 1972).

The source novel *They're a Weird Mob* was a huge bestseller when it was first published in 1957. It was reprinted many times, serialized for radio, at one point mooted as a television series, and was followed by a string of further novels featuring its central character, Nino Culotta. The film – the only Australian feature released in 1966 – was a local success that made approximately A$2,000,000 in Australia on its initial release from a A$600,000 outlay. Despite also being a hit in New Zealand, it received very limited release or success elsewhere in the world. Though often dismissed or disregarded in discussions of the film revival of the 1970s, it is nevertheless now regarded as a central work of Australian National Cinema – a significant pointer towards particular possibilities for film production in this country. It is now more commonly discussed in relation to the broader work and life of its director Michael Powell. Powell's work in Australia, often regarded as a significant downturn after such visionary films as *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) and *The Red Shoes* (1948), should actually be considered in more pragmatic terms, providing hard-fought expressions of popular Australian forms made in the context of a country without an established film industry. In this regard, Powell's tireless ability to get films made and seen by large audiences within a climate notoriously hostile to Australian content is equally visionary.

They're a Weird Mob is a film with a curiously hybrid pedigree. It is based on a novel written by a Celtic Australian (John O'Grady) posing as an Italian author, Nino Culotta (it is a mock autobiography), directed and produced by a romantic, almost European Englishman, from a final script adapted by a Hungarian using an Anglo pseudonym (regular Powell collaborator Emeric Pressburger writing as Richard Imrie, who worked on a script first penned by Powell and then elaborated upon by O'Grady), which is itself about the act of translating or understanding

another culture. It is essentially about Nino's acculturation, his initiation into a conception of mainstream Australian culture. In particular, the Australian idiom he encounters, and whose difference is marked by behaviour (such as the peculiar rituals of drinking), language – terms such as 'schooner', 'shout', 'scone', and 'Kings *bloody* Cross', abound in the film – and specific social values. But the acculturation Nino undergoes should not be considered as directly illustrative of a process of assimilation, as it often has been. For example, the film frowns upon the exclusion of migrants because they fail to take on the ways of the dominant 'local' culture; in one scene set on a Sydney ferry the literal embodiment of this xenophobia – a drunk, ex-digger abusing a non-English speaking Italian family – is thrown overboard. Nino, in terms of his wish to understand and adapt, to swim between the flags – to follow the metaphor presented in the film's Bondi Beach-set beach scenes – can be seen as a preferred model. But other possibilities for identity-formation and adaptation abound in the film, and Powell's vision of contemporary Australia is bracingly broad-minded, encompassing and, it can be argued, forward-looking.

The book and the film are most significant for being amongst the first mainstream cultural texts to deal with the Italian or ethnic migrant experience following the large-scale post-war migration that totally transformed Australian society and cultural identity. *They're a Weird Mob*'s largely benign representation of this experience offers a very different set of impressions from the films of the independent film-maker Giorgio Mangiamele, whose work – *The Contract* (1953) and *The Spag* (1962), for example – presents a far more troubled and less populist vision of migrant life in the same period. *They're a Weird Mob* has a lighter, less confrontational tone that in essence explores characteristic or stereotypical Australian traits, rather than a view of the varied and increasingly ethnic experience of the country. Although in many respects a simple film in terms of its broad, laconic, comedy, stereotypes, relaxed tone, and reliance upon a very conventional and episodic narrative structure of a visitor confronting, interpreting, and to some degree commenting upon the idiosyncrasies of local identity, it nonetheless, as critic Tom O'Regan has argued in *Australian National Cinema* (1996), adopts the interesting strategy of using the figure of the migrant as a means to 'other' the local culture. The 'weird mob' of the film's title refers not to the migrant but to the very strangeness of Australian culture as perceived via the gaze of the foreigner. Ultimately, its view of the migrant experience situates its perspective somewhere between the competing governmental policies of assimilationism and multiculturalism, defining ideologies that mark the transition from the immediate post-war era in Australia to the more encompassing migration policies and outlook of the 1970s.

Adrian Danks

Age of Consent

Country of Origin:
Australia

Production Company:
Nautilus Productions

Producers:
Michael Powell
James Mason

Director:
Michael Powell

Screenwriter:
Peter Yeldham, from the novel by Norman Lindsay

Cinematographer:
Hannes Staudlinger

Editor:
Anthony Buckley

Art Director:
Dennis Gentle

Music:
Peter Sculthorpe

Duration:
103 minutes

Genre:
Drama

Cast:
James Mason
Helen Mirren
Jack MacGowran
Neva Carr Glyn
Antonia Katsaros
Michael Boddy

Year:
1969

Synopsis

Expatriate Australian painter Bradley Morahan becomes disillusioned with the international art scene and decides to return to Australia to rejuvenate his love of painting. After arriving in Brisbane and reacquainting himself with various lovers and hangers-on, Morahan retreats to the beachcombing life of Dunk Island, holing himself up in a rustic beach shack while awaiting inspiration. This inspiration arrives in the form of the natural world that surrounds him and in the guise of a young woman, Cora, a free spirit dogged by her mother's 'loose' reputation and the insinuating barbs of her grandmother (a figure who represents a garish and unnatural presence in such beautiful surroundings). Despite the disturbing implications of the burgeoning sexual connection between painter and model – Cora is only about to reach the 'age of consent' – and the reasonably frank but tasteful nudity that appears throughout, *Age of Consent* is actually a surprisingly chaste and innocent movie. As one commentator has suggested, the most disturbing suggestion offered in the film about this May-December romance is actually to be found in the film's closing song, whose lyrics longingly spell out the pedophilic implications of the relationship. Often played for broad laughs rather than truly-felt emotional effect, the film's episodic but wistful narrative leisurely develops the 'romance' between Cora and Morahan while providing numerous asides to a range of other, often grotesque and cartoonish supporting characters.

Critique

English director Michael Powell's second Australian film and last feature is a fairly loose adaptation of Norman Lindsay's controversial and long-banned (until 1962) 1938 novel. Full of references to the work of various Australian and international artists, it departs significantly from Lindsay's novel by shifting the action to north Queensland, emphasizing the relationship between Morahan and Cora, and updating its story to the present day. In contrast to his adaptation of *They're a Weird Mob*, Powell was very dismissive of his source material here, using it as means to help create an environment rather than for any particular insights it offered, or narrative craft he found within its pages. Shot almost entirely on location in Cairns, Brisbane and Dunk Island, it is a leisurely, picaresque and intermittently-arresting contribution to the field of films and novels that dramatize the relationship between a fading artist and the muse who acts to rejuvenate his creativity. In this regard, it is a sun-kissed and somewhat benign final work in the career of a director often preoccupied with the lives of 'artists': visionary autocrats who attempt – and gamely fail – to command and control the worlds around them. Although a significant departure from the darker realms of *Peeping Tom* (1960), *The Red Shoes* (1948), *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) and *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), *Age of Consent* is nevertheless an intriguing and somewhat benign late entry in this encompassing 'series'.

In many ways, *Age of Consent* is a largely-forgotten film of 1960s' Australian cinema. Although it was a relative success at the Australian