

Chapter Thirteen: A Wider Angle: Australia's War Films of the New Millennia

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Abstract

Australian war films have rarely been studied as a genre, though there is an implicit study of the ANZAC war movie subgenre, which until the twenty-first century has represented the bulk of Australian war filmmaking. This chapter first offers an overview of Australian war film genres from 1914 to 2000, and a summary of attempts at war film genre definitions, largely drawn from American film studies. It then explores the ways in which post-2000 Australian war films fit, expand, modify, and rupture existing war genre descriptions, creating a space in which Australian war film productions can inhabit and intermix both with other Australian genres and with international war film genres. Australian war cinema is part of a wider intertextual representation, and many of these characteristics and trends are shared with Australian television productions on war themes. The subgenre of ANZAC movies also continues, but with a shift from the relatively simplistic themes of the 1980s to more nuanced representations of ANZAC encompassing more than just the First World War. An expanded palette of themes, settings, tropes, iconography, and industrial conditions also emerges from other war films. Recent war films frequently cross genre boundaries: they are more likely to participate in international collaborations and offer representations of war beyond the purely Australian.

Introduction

The ANZAC¹ legend has shaped a small but distinctive genre of Australian war feature films, part of a larger set of artefacts about ANZAC embedded as a central feature of Australian culture. Despite its prominence, however, the genre of Australian war films is larger than just ANZAC, potentially revealing a broader genre of 'war cinema'. While not as common as other genres in scholarly discussion (some prominent genre texts do not even mention it),² war cinema is nevertheless well-established. Though this literature mostly centres on American World War Two films, it is still germane to the present discussion of Australian war cinema. In defining the genre, Robert Eberwein's summary of Kathryn Kane's definition insists on war 'as the basic narrative structure' of the film, eliminating for example 'costume dramas with major battle scenes'.³ Steve Neale agrees, making depiction of combat 'requisite' and 'dramatically central'.⁴ Neale refines Kane's boundaries by excluding 'home front dramas and comedies and other films lacking scenes of military combat,' but recognises 'generic overlap'. Unlike Neale, Lawrence Suid does include home front films for showing 'the impact of war on the civilian population'.⁵ Thomas Doherty 'provides the most expansive conception' in including 'military education and civilian orientation, combat films, home front melodramas, wartime comedies, martial musicals, and the newsreels, combat reports, and documentaries chronicling the front-line action',⁶ while Eberwein himself focuses:

with varying emphases, (1) directly on war itself (battles: preparation, actual, aftermath and damage); (2) on the activities of the participants off the battlefield (recruitment, training, leisure, recovery from wounds); and (3) the effects of war on human relationships (home front, impact on family and lovers). While some films easily meet all three criteria, others are notable for qualifying on the basis of one in particular.⁷

Eberwein goes on to list the major conventions of World War Two movies, beginning with the emergence of certain stock characters, including the tough-but-kind-hearted seasoned leader, the green recruit, and a representative sprinkling of regional, ethnic, and class stereotypes. Women typically appear as loyal girlfriend/wife, the floozy, or the wise sustaining mother. Eberwein's main narrative elements include basic training with a tyrannical squad leader, demanding exercises, bonding activities, leave, sexual initiation, and graduation, but interestingly lists nothing around actual combat. He also observes that films frequently feature specialist branches of military, including prisoners of war.⁸

There has been little overt scholarship on the genre of Australian war film that seeks out the 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text, and subject'.⁹ This is hardly surprising, given the historical neglect of genre (outside of a self-consciously nationalistic cinema) in both Australian film production and film criticism,¹⁰ though there is implicit writing on the ANZAC war genre, much of it by this author.¹¹ Most critical work assumes a genre perspective when examining ANZAC cinema in the light of national mythology. Australia's war cinema is predominantly about World War One (such as *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (Alfred Rolfe, 1915), *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (Charles Chauvel, 1940) and *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1981)). A handful of films have been set in other wars, such as the Boer War (*Breaker Morant* (Bruce Beresford, 1980)), World War Two (*The Rats of Tobruk* (Charles Chauvel, 1944) and *Attack Force Z* (Tim Burstall, 1982)) and Vietnam (*The Odd Angry Shot* (Tom Jeffrey, 1979)), but very few have deviated from representing the quintessential Australian soldier. So, while there is no discussion of an Australian war genre, its subgenre—ANZAC cinema—is much more clearly defined through the large body of work for both the big and small screen.

Early Australian War Films

Eberwein's list of characteristics of American World War Two genre films largely works for ANZAC films, though differences are evident. Australian ANZAC films tend to concentrate on themes of mateship, bushmen larrikins, and self-sacrifice,¹² aligning with the main features of the ANZAC legend and the stereotypical ANZAC character, who is 'a superb fighter, something of a larrikin, instinctively egalitarian, distrustful of authority, endlessly resourceful, dryly humorous and above all, loyal to his mates'.¹³ Unlike American war films, ANZAC films have largely eschewed portraying the exceptional heroic figure, preferring rather to focus on the classic underdog of Australian popular mythology which takes the form here as common soldiers. While Great War era war films (1915-1918) often represented Australian soldiers as upper-class city types, the idealised ANZAC soldier soon consolidated as a bushman. Women are characteristically absent or minimally present in ANZAC films, around whom Australian soldiers are usually portrayed as awkward.

ANZAC war movie plots typically revolve around the ordinary soldier pitted against the stupidity of higher command. Over time, the enemy in ANZAC genre films gradually shifted from being Turks and Germans (and, rarely, Japanese) to the British as the key villains. Innocent Australians as sacrificial lambs on the altar of British class-bound stubbornness is a common motif. Iconography includes a concern for the landscape, often drawing visual links between Australia and various battlefields. Thematically, early Australian war films focused on binary contrasts between heroic Allies and barbarous enemy soldiers and spies (for example, *Within Our Gates* (Frank Harvey, 1915), *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell* (John Gavin, 1916)). Between the two world wars, representations tended to be comic, with respectful humour directed at both casual Australian and formal British characters (such as

Diggers in Blighty (Pat Hanna, 1933)). The revival of the genre in the 1970-80s saw the entrenchment of the bushman-ANZAC who, despite his natural martial talents, was the tragic victim of British Imperial arrogance (*Gallipoli*).¹⁴

Australian war genre films occur in several distinct periods. The First World War saw nearly twenty strongly Imperial patriotic war dramas made, adapted to recruiting purposes, and featuring heroic Allied soldiers and civilians, subversive fifth columnists, villainous Huns and Turks, and treacherous spies. Films such as *The Hero of the Dardanelles*, *Within Our Gates*, *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell*, and *The Enemy Within* (Roland Staveley, 1918) were box-office hits. Several films of varying success were made on purely British and French military topics, such as a trio of Cavell films (*The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell*; *Nurse Cavell* (W. J. Lincoln, 1916) and *La Revanche* (W. J. Lincoln, 1916)), *The Joan of Arc of Loos* (George Willoughby, 1916) and *The Murder of Captain Fryatt* (John Gavin, 1917), tapping into a contemporary interest in Australia for broader themes. Documentary war features, such as *Australia Prepared* (1916) and *With the Australians in France* (1916) were also popular, and eclipsed war dramas at the box office by 1917.¹⁵

Between 1919 and 1945, ten war films were made, including some of the era's most successful Australian features, such as *Ginger Mick* (Raymond Longford, 1920), *Diggers* (Frank Thring, 1931), *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, and *The Rats of Tobruk*. They were all on Australian themes and—bar the last two, which adopted a more heroic tone suited for the new conflict—were comic in portrayal. Three iconic actors marked the shift in the typical ANZAC image in this era, from Arthur Tauchert's stocky urban larrikin to Hanna and Chips Rafferty's long, lean, comic bushmen. As in the Great War, documentary features such as *Kokoda Front Line!* (Ken G. Hall, 1942) and news-reels were also popular.

After a long silence, caused by muted nationalism under long-reigning Prime Minister Robert Menzies and the virtual extinction of Australian film production between 1944-1960, the last forty years have seen a steady trickle of war films emerge, beginning with the great era of period film making in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Four war films, *The Odd Angry Shot*, *Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli* (the definitive Australian war film), and *The Lighthorsemen* (Simon Wincer, 1987) set in Palestine, formed part of a broader screen realisation of ANZAC alongside a number of television mini-series, the most influential of which was *Anzacs* (John Dixon, George Miller, Pino Amenta, 1985), a jingoistic, anti-British, and populist soap-opera. This navel-gazing era of Australian film-making was obsessed with nationalistic themes, though several mini-series offered critiques of these.¹⁶

Since then, Australian war films have shown greater diversity in theme, subject matter, and style. As Valerie Krips has observed, social change demands that our national myths of identity move with the times.¹⁷ *Blood Oath* (Stephen Wallace, 1990) and *Prisoners of the Sun* (Bruce Beresford, 1997) offer welcome relief from the ANZAC polemic excesses of the 1980s, the first refusing easy moralizing in its courtroom drama of Japanese officers prosecuted for war crimes, and the second examining the lives of a group of women civilian prisoners of the Japanese.

Australian War Films in the 2000s

Australia's war films of the new millennia have continued to create representations outside the narrow confines of earlier ANZAC cinema. Various trends, such as changes in film financing on a national and international level, shifting audience expectations, and aesthetic progressions have helped reshape the genre of Australian war cinema. Of the eleven feature

films under consideration here, five are from the ANZAC sub-genre, four which address Great War ANZAC themes: *Beneath Hill 60* (Jeremy Sims, 2010), *William Kelly's War* (Geoff Davis, 2014), *The Water Diviner* (Russell Crowe, 2014), and to some extent, *Broken Sun* (Brad Haynes, 2008), while *Kokoda* (Alister Grierson, 2006) represents one of Australia's two iconic World War Two battles. Standing alone in its uniquely stylised representation of Australians at war is *Canopy* (Aaron Wilson, 2013), about an Australian pilot shot down over Singapore in 1942. Any discussion of ANZAC films must acknowledge the intertextuality of film and television, and the post-2000 television productions such as the miniseries *Changi* (Kate Woods, 2001), *Sisters of War* (Brendon Maher, 2010), *Anzac Girls* (Ken Cameron, Ian Watson, 2014), *Gallipoli* (Glendyn Ivin, 2015), and *Deadline Gallipoli* (Michael Rymer, 2015), and the telefeature *An Accidental Soldier* (Rachel Ward, 2013) have played a significant part in the complex interplay of genre. The remaining five Australian war films of the post-2000s address non-ANZAC narratives: *Charlotte Gray* (Gillian Armstrong, 2001), *Katasha* (Igor Grabovsky, 2008), *Lore*, (Cate Shortland, 2012), *The Railway Man* (Jonathan Teplitzky, 2013) and *Hacksaw Ridge* (Mel Gibson, 2016).

Preoccupations and Themes

Perhaps the most important defining aspect of genre is not mechanics but theme.¹⁸ Even within the sub-genre of ANZAC films, there are distinct sub-groups. Several are preoccupied with reshaping representations of well-known campaigns; *The Water Diviner*, for example, which alongside the miniseries *Gallipoli*, *Deadline Gallipoli* and the first three episodes of *Anzac Girls*, seeks to reframe the Gallipoli campaign, which is an example of what Pierre Nora called 'a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of national memory.'¹⁹ *The Water Diviner* offers a refreshing exploration of the post-war impact and meaning of the Gallipoli campaign, blending into the even more savage Greco-Turkish conflict of 1919-22, while at the same

time appealing to the myth of a rapport between Australians and Turks.²⁰ It explores personal rather than national redemption, as a farmer is haunted by his wife's dying taunt that he can find water but not their missing sons.

Other ANZAC films tackle theatres of war and units that have a lower profile in the ANZAC legend. *William Kelly's War* and to a lesser extent *Broken Sun* show the infantry war on the Western Front, while *Beneath Hill 60* highlights the activities of the otherwise unheralded Australian tunnelling companies. It is the first Australian feature film to focus on the Western Front since *Diggers in Blighty*, although the miniseries *Anzacs* set several episodes on the battlefields where the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) really came of age, a welcome relief from Australia's obsession with Gallipoli. As a critic noted, 'This is our first really good movie about the Western Front. It's not faultless, but it does what it does very well'.²¹ These three films, like *The Water Diviner*, mainly deal with themes other than the ANZAC legend. *William Kelly's War* is thematically unfocused, split between the family collective (rather than the national collective) at war and Billy's private post-war quest for vengeance. The courage of Billy, Jack, and cousin Paddy is not generalised to equate to ANZAC martial values. In place of nationalism is a conflicting package of home-spun virtues and chilling vigilante justice. *Broken Sun* concerns itself with broader themes, the principal characters' responses to harrowing and haunting war experiences, and comparisons of differing cultural notions of honour, mercy, violence, attitudes to prisoners, and 'the nature of courage and the futility of vengeance'.²² The Australian and Japanese main characters both reject the implicit and explicit values of their countries, which call on them to kill in the name of the nation, instead embracing the theme of common humanity. *Broken Sun* refuses the usual ANZAC subgenre combination of antiwar sentiment allied to a heroicisation of the ANZACs; its 'unrelentingly grim' anti-war message admitting no part of the ANZAC legend.²³ *Beneath*

Hill 60 keeps its focus firmly on the characters, especially its homely principal, Oliver Woodward, telling a warmly human story in a war theatre that historically reduced men to mere statistics.

Several ANZAC films shift their focus beyond the First World War. *Kokoda* is the first feature film entirely devoted to the Japanese invasion of New Guinea, and offers a classic tale of the heroic survival of a motley band against an unseen enemy, foregrounding themes of perseverance, courage, and the triumph of the underdog. *Broken Sun* also offers perspectives on the Second World War as its Japanese protagonist, Masaru, wrestles with his culture's demand for a heroic death to wipe out the shame of capture. *Canopy* is vastly different. Critics mostly praised its minimalistic approach, one badging it as 'closer to a fairy tale than a war film, its soldier like a hero on a perilous, mystical journey through a primordial forest, with a sort of pre-linguistic logic guiding the action,' adding that it 'lays claims to an epic grandeur of a very different kind than its band of genre brothers'.²⁴

Films on non-Australian campaigns focus on various theatres and themes: secret agents in the French Resistance (a muddled attempt at heroic romance in *Charlotte Gray*), an intelligence battle over the deployment of the new Soviet rocket (the even more thematically muddled *Katusha*), a German girl coming to terms with her Nazi family past in a coming-of-age story (*Lore*), the post-war PTSD struggles of a British survivor of the Japanese Burma railway camps wrestling between revenge and redemption when confronting his former captor (*The Railway Man*), and an American pacifist earning respect through his singular heroism (*Hacksaw Ridge*). Virtually all films of this era present an intrinsic horror of war, if not a downright pacifism. However, two films also revel in the violence they portray. *William*

Kelly's War justifies its vigilante brutality, while *Hacksaw Ridge* is accurately described as having a 'fulsome strain of pornographic violence'.²⁵

Subgenres and Genre Crossovers

There are non-ANZAC subgenres that also emerge from this body of films. *The Railway Man* clearly fits the category of prisoner-of-war film, as do aspects of *Broken Sun*. The main character in *Canopy* spends most of the film attempting to avoid his final fate: capture by the Japanese. These films join a larger body of Australian work on a similar theme, including *Paradise Road* (Bruce Beresford, 1997) and mini-series *Changi*, *Sisters of War*, *The Cowra Breakout* (Philip Noyce, Chris Noonan, 1985), *Always Afternoon* (David Stevens, 1988), and *The Alien Years* (Donald Crombie, 1988)). These, of course, are situated in an even larger pool of international prisoner-of-war screen media.

Another subgenre discernible is women in war. *Charlotte Gray*, *Katusha*, and *Lore* all explore the participation of women in war and the impact that it has on them, fitting in to other Australian productions such as *Sisters of War*, *Anzac Girls*, *Paradise Road*, *The Private War of Lucinda Smith* (Ray Alchin, 1990, mini-series), as well as silent-era war films such as *The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell* and *The Joan of Arc of Loos*. Again, this genre fits into a larger international body of work on women and war.²⁶

Others belong to genres common outside of Australian cinema. *Charlotte Gray* shares genre features with Resistance films. Sadly, critics agree that, 'Despite the potential of this film to pay tribute to the heroism of female agents whose work has never been properly acknowledged, *Charlotte Gray* is marred by being a sentimental romance and period piece, and by caricaturing the Francophilism of the story's creator'.²⁷ The second half of *William*

Kelly's War and much of *The Water Diviner* share aspects of quest genres, where the lone hero sets out to accomplish a specific mission. *Lore* also has its heroine on a coming-of-age quest, as the eldest child seeking safety for herself and her siblings unexpectedly also finds enlightenment about the war and a pathway to adulthood. *William Kelly's War* has throwback elements to early Australian bushranger movies, sometimes considered local manifestation of a global Western genre, and have been badged 'kangaroo westerns' or 'meat pie westerns'.²⁸ (See Chapter Fourteen in this collection for a discussion of the Australian Western.) In a genre reversal, though, the bushrangers in *William Kelly's War* are the villains. *Hacksaw Ridge*, uniquely for an Australian war film, is a quintessentially Hollywood war movie in subject matter, theme, and style, being described as a modern take on an 'old-fashioned [American] war film' and 'wearily formulaic film-making' reminiscent of John Ford and John Wayne genre films.²⁹ It is also the only film in this group that is arguably a blockbuster.³⁰

Tropes

A reviewer noted that *Beneath Hill 60* 'conforms in many ways to the classic war film, as defined by British post-war filmmakers. A group of soldiers, performing a dangerous mission, under fire', complete with classic plotlines: 'challenges to the leader; there will be individual acts of sacrifice. We know not everyone will come out alive and, at certain points in the story, we know what's coming'.³¹ The statement is equally true of most of the other films under discussion here, from *William Kelly's War* to *Hacksaw Ridge*.

The characteristic ANZAC trope of mateship finds its way into all the ANZAC films, including *Canopy*, where the mate turns out to be a Chinese guerrilla, not an Australian. Similarly, an egalitarian approach to hierarchy shows itself across the ANZAC films. In

Beneath Hill 60, Lieutenant Woodward must earn the trust of his men through an act of courage. Mateship is put to the ultimate test in the classic war film's moral dilemma: deciding between fulfilling the mission or saving the life of a mate, a trope repeated in *Kokoda*. The latter also has the men disregard rank and elect their leader after the lieutenant's death early in the film. In *William Kelly's War*, it is more the politicians, courts and police that are held in contempt as Billy and Jack implement their own vigilante justice. Billy's exceptional marksmanship fulfils a standard Western trope of 'the protagonist [as] an exceptional fighter'.³²

Beneath Hill 60 has the usual suspects of clichéd character types – the coward who will redeem himself via a heroic death; the cynical non-commissioned-officer who becomes supportive; the criminally dogmatic superior officer whose arrogance leads to the death of the innocent; the war film characters who speak of home despite this being a certified cinematic death sentence; and the hero who, having saved his mates, is killed within inches of safety. *Hacksaw Ridge* has a similar spread of tropic characters, from initially sceptical officers who finally recognise Doss's battlefield virtues to the usual spread of fellow soldiers who represent the American melting pot. Doss's father fits the abusive father trope, unintentionally inspiring the son to great moral heights. Doss is the characteristic outsider who becomes an insider, another typically ANZAC trope. The derided 'Choco' soldiers of *Kokoda* win respect by proving themselves as resilient as the famed men of the AIF. In *William Kelly's War*, Billy's marksmanship overcomes the ridicule of his unit but ironically sets him apart from his fellows rather than integrating him within the platoon. Anti-authoritarianism emerges in the non-ANZAC *Katusha* as well, where officer Vadim Panchenko sexually abuses the lead character, Irina Orlova, whose silent suffering appears to be condoned by Stalin's hierarchy.

As an extension of the move from outsider to insider status, these films are often marked by the enemy-turned-friend trope, a shift characteristic since the 1980s, when anti-war rhetoric demonised the military and political hierarchy while portraying the enemy sympathetically.³³ Joshua Connor, the principal character in *The Water Diviner*, is befriended by two Turkish Gallipoli veterans, showing the human side of the enemy.³⁴ *Beneath Hill 60* lets us into the life of a couple of Germans who are killed when the Australians blow up their sap. Poignantly, while the viewer mourns, the Australian characters in the film laugh and joke at their success. In *Broken Sun* and *The Railway Man* the Japanese become personally known to the Australian and British protagonists, and former enmity becomes friendship. *Charlotte Gray* problematises the distinction between good and bad characters by playing on the uncertainties of allegiances in occupied France. However, several films still retain a simple portrayal of the enemy. In *Canopy* and *Kokoda*, the Japanese are shadowy menacing figures, rarely glimpsed, while *Hacksaw Ridge* presents the Japanese as undiluted enemy. *William Kelly's War* offers a brief representation of a brutal German officer.

Another commonality of Australian war movies is the 'based on a true story' trope, used to add authenticity. *William Kelly's War* claims to be based on real characters and events,³⁵ though no AIF records seem to match such characters, and the historical cattle-duffing has been given a fancifully melodramatic makeover. *The Railway Man* and *Hacksaw Ridge* also use the same claim. *The Water Diviner* was 'inspired' by a single line in a letter in 1920, a claim which struck one critic as 'a more honest and accurate statement than the more usual "Based on a true story"'.³⁶ Not all the films have explicit statements of historicity, but the mere act of using historical settings tends to create that effect.

The films bear a number of other tropes common to historically-based films to deliver information quickly, such as voice-over (for example *William Kelly's War*, *Kokoda*), titles introducing settings or giving a summary conclusion (*William Kelly's War*, *Beneath Hill 60*, *The Railway Man*), actuality footage (*Hacksaw Ridge*), epistolary narrative (*William Kelly's War*) and flashbacks (*Beneath Hill 60*, *The Water Diviner*, *Broken Sun*, *Canopy*, *The Railway Man*). One commentator noted how the use of tropes in *Hacksaw Ridge* undercut the original story, by depicting Doss's refusal to touch weapons 'as personal rather than principled, a response to specific life events rather than religious reflection and conviction'.³⁷ This cinematic shorthand replaces a lifetime of conviction with a handful of traumatic incidents to account for Doss's non-violence and teetotalism.

The 'sonic tropes' characteristic of Australian Gothic cinema, referring to the capacity for certain sounds to conjure stable connotations,³⁸ takes on its own tropic life in Australian war films, the sculptured battle noise being a particular feature of *Beneath Hill 60*, *The Water Diviner*, and *Hacksaw Ridge*. *Canopy* uses a 'rich, complex and terrifying soundscape' of ambient sound and processed war noise as its prime drivers, replacing the usual focus on characters and action, which seems to parallel the use of bird calls as a sonic fetish 'in Australian Gothic cinema to connote the uncanny, malevolent landscape and the Other.'³⁹

Iconography

Landscape features prominently in Australian war films. In *Broken Sun*, Jack's farm is filmed in the back-lit warm yellows of dawn and dusk, evoking the landscapes of Boyd and Drysdale.⁴⁰ Motifs, including a contrasting use of barbed and plain wire to signal tension and its resolution, rope associated with hangings, and a rabbit trap add to the iconography. Jack's Great War experiences and Masaru's time in the prisoner-of-war camp are filmed in blue-

toned claustrophobic close-ups, which recurs in war scenes in other films – *Beneath Hill 60*, *The Water Diviner*, *Kokoda*, *The Railway Man* and *Hacksaw Ridge* – in contrast to the brightly-lit scenes of home, especially in *Beneath Hill 60* and *William Kelly's War*. Several also use the standard slow overhead pan to reveal the human carnage caused by battle. The iconic mud of Western Front Great War films finds an echo in the deep mud of *Kokoda* and *Hacksaw Ridge*, while *William Kelly's War* silhouettes its soldiers on a ridge-line in tribute to an iconic war photo. *Broken Sun*, *Kokoda*, *Canopy*, and *Lore* use close-ups of items of equipment, insects and plants to create a visual signature, the latter foregrounding 'texture and sensation through strategies such as handheld camerawork, a very shallow depth of field and moments of slow motion or jump cuts to convey characters' affective states'.⁴¹ *Canopy's* emphasis on location 'has been described as "remarkably visceral. You can feel the stickiness of the tropics, the drench of perspiration, and the ever-present fear"'.⁴² The iconography of *Kokoda* draws heavily on war cinematographer Damien Parer's powerful images in *Kokoda Front Line!*

Industrial Context

Government subsidies and incentives have often underpinned the Australian feature film industry, otherwise vulnerable to the economies of scale of international films. Changes in government funding in the mid-2000s led to a revival of genre film production, which had previously suffered under the stigma of being merely commercial.⁴³ International collaborations also increasingly underpin the finances of Australian films, supplemented by the box-office draw of film luminaries such as Russell Crowe (*The Water Diviner*), Cate Blanchett (*Charlotte Gray*), Nicole Kidman and Colin Firth (*The Railway Man*), and Mel Gibson (*Hacksaw Ridge*), though these collaborations have sometimes blurred the notion of national cinema.⁴⁴ For example, *The Water Diviner* used Australian, Turkish, and American

funding, while *Charlotte Gray*, *Lore*, *The Railway Man*, and *Hacksaw Ridge* also depended on international finance, as well as telling non-Australian stories to circumvent the often-limited international audiences for parochial and culturally inaccessible Australian narratives.⁴⁵

But the complexities of satisfying international financiers and funding bodies can discourage filmmakers with limited access to finance, who instead downsize their ambitions and produce their films independently. *William Kelly's War* is perhaps the most 'audacious' example of an indie movie in Australia, achieving reasonable success from a limited release.⁴⁶ The labour of love of director Geoff Davis and his family was filmed 'on the smell of an oily rag' largely on the Davis family property, and features just one *bona fide* big-name actor, Tony Bonner.⁴⁷ *Broken Sun* was also made on a limited budget, while a lack of finances forced drastic cuts in the making of *Katusha*, inflicting fatal flaws and resulting in a very limited release. It was panned by reviewers, one of whom suggested it might find a niche in cult followings of bad films.⁴⁸ *Kokoda's* cinematic canvas was also cramped by its small budget, to which some of its weaknesses can be attributed.⁴⁹ With a limited 'culture of marketing local genres to national audiences',⁵⁰ Australian audience expectations can be particularly difficult to predict. Some war films, in particular *Beneath Hill 60*, *The Water Diviner*, and *Kokoda*, disappointed with break-even or little better returns, especially domestically, while others made fair to good returns internationally, such as *Charlotte Gray*, *The Railway Man*, and *Hacksaw Ridge*. The latter film also attracted unusual audience support, as the Seventh-day Adventist church sought to leverage its profile by promoting the film.⁵¹ However, many of the films struggled to reach audiences, especially the independent productions. Even some television productions that pitched themselves to the heart of popular ANZAC sentiment at the height of the Gallipoli centenary in 2015 failed, though others captured an audience with

fresh portrayals of stale topics.⁵² Anticipating audience taste has always been a fraught experience for producers, and genre pieces can fail as dismally as any other, even as popular interest in ANZAC continues to grow.

Conclusion

Australia's war films of the new millennium have gone a considerable way to diversifying the genre, especially as defined during the parochial era of the 1980s period films. ANZAC movies, once the almost exclusive product of the genre, have been made with greater subtlety, topical variety, and thematic diversity. The jingoistic quality is replaced by an interest in new theatres of war, character diversity, atmosphere, and themes of non-violence and reconciliation, though landscape remains a feature. Several ANZAC films (*Beneath Hill 60*, *Kokoda*, *Canopy*) attracted positive critical reviews for their success at genre film-making, though others, like *The Water Diviner*, were attacked by some for lacking a clear generic focus.⁵³ More significant has been the willingness of Australian-made war films to tackle non-Australian subjects. Films set in France, Burma, the Ukraine, and Okinawa, though sometimes reflecting the national and cultural origins of their directors, speak well for an expanding palette of themes, icons, characterisation, and tropes. War films of this millennia have shown increasing maturity in scope, adding much needed richness to a genre that was effectively suffocating under its own conventions. However, Australian war genre films in the 2000s still face the varied challenges of finding funding, fresh vision, and audiences in an increasingly diversified entertainment market.

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