

STRICTLY BALLROOM (1992): DEPARTURE FROM TRADITIONAL ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN DISCOURSES OR VEILED CONFIRMATION OF OLD NATIONAL-ENCOURAGEMENT MECHANISMS?¹

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The search for an original and well-defined identity appears to be a recurrent topic throughout Australian history. Always in flux, the question of 'Australianness' has been of remarkable relevance and, especially since the 1980s, it has triggered a non-stop process of encouragement of national values, ideals and experiences. In 1988 the country celebrated its Bicentennial,² a commemorative tribute where great effort was directed towards the extolling of an authentic, common and strong Australian national identity. At present, nonetheless, the components of this 'identity' still remain uncertain. Although official discourses have insisted on a predominantly white, male and western character as defining features of 'the' Australian type,³ the truth is that Australia has become a multicultural country, a kind of 'melting pot' where diversity and plurality shape a society marked by constant diasporic movements between the continent and the rest of the world. In this sense, Australia can no longer be perceived as the exclusive site of Anglo-Saxon white heterosexual men. Women, Aborigines, homosexuals and migrants of non-western origin do constitute a reality as Australian as any other, and they play a fundamental role in the constitution and public acknowledgment of the nation's cultural identity. To give but one example, Sydney is well-known for having become the annual venue of the Mardi Gras Festival, taken over by gay and lesbian groups to publicly present themselves and their culture to the so called 'straight' community, both in Australia and all over the world (O'Regan 1996: 271).

Moreover, Aboriginality and its more or less recent conversion into an object of tourist attraction constitutes an important source of revenue for the country, which is most willing to export worldwide a profitable and exotic, but also stereotyped, image of Australia and its 'oldest' community.

Nonetheless, despite their legitimate condition of Australian citizens, these 'Other' identities have been for long forced to remain silent, and have been denied any single or appropriate locus of self-affirmation within official Australian discourses. They have suffered the disdain of their own country and have been rejected as potential subjects of representation within the social, cultural, and artistic national panorama. However, if as Kay Schaffer affirms, "national identity is a cultural construction" (1990: 8), then it seems obvious that official notions of 'Australianness' are nothing but a myth, a mystification, a falsification. Some of the implications of this official discourse have been simply taken for granted, thus ignoring the fact that they are part of a constructed and imagined representation of Australian nationalist culture. Unfortunately, these very same meanings have been relentlessly reproduced in the field of the arts and the media, Australian cinema being no exception, since it has also become an accomplice to these convictions and a clear exponent of the evolution that the question 'what is it to be an Australian?' underwent in the last decades of the twentieth century.

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Since its very beginnings,⁴ the Australian film industry has experienced a set of cultural, political and financial changes that have redefined its position within the world market. The commencements of Australian cinema were complicated. As was the case of other national industries, the Australian film industry had to compete with the almighty American market and resign itself to occupying a rather underdeveloped and marginal position with respect to it. E.G. Whitlam marks the years between the two World Wars as the weakest period of national production; although there was a quantitative peak in 1911, when 51 Australian feature films were produced, in 1913 the local production suffered another decline from which it did not recover until the late 1960s (in Murray 1994: 1). During this 50-year period, almost no national feature films were produced and Hollywood and British products covered the empty space. The national market was especially damaged by the arrival of the Hollywood talkies —e.g. *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), the 'brain-drain' of Australian actors and technicians, the birth of commercial radio in the 20s and the introduction of TV in the 1950s. Hollywood's influence continued during the 1940s and 1950s; as a matter of fact, Charles Chauvel's films were the only indigenous productions made in that decade by the Australian film industry (Matthews 1984: 6-7). At the end of the 1960s, the unfavourable situation that the national film industry was undergoing, made the Australians aware of the need to awaken and encourage the Australian national market. As Sue Matthews explains, during the 1970s there was a re-examination of the nation's

extreme dependence on the so-called ‘mother country’ in almost every cultural aspect. Out of a sense of patriotic duty that Australia should concern itself with international recognition and its own self-respect, and after 18 years of conservative rule by Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, the Liberal Prime Minister John Gorton established the Australian Film Development Corporation in 1970 “to promote all aspects of art in Australia as well as the birth of the new film industry” (1984: 2-3). With the help of government funding, a new creative phase in Australian filmmaking started in the early 1970s. The ‘New Wave’ Australian films of this period set out to provide audiences (both local and foreign) with a new sense of national identity.⁵ The encouragement of an indigenous cinema implied, as Whitlam suggests, the rebirth and reinforcement of national pride and self-confidence in a country until then silenced both in foreign and domestic policies (in Murray 1994: 3). Australia was thus reclaiming its voice, its independence from the metropolis, and cinema seemed to be one of the best vehicles to demonstrate its distinctiveness, to Australians and to the rest of the world.

The national filmic trend in Australia changed direction at the end of the 1980s. As Rayner explains, the Australian government established in 1988 the so-called Film Finance Corporation (FFC) in an attempt to make local productions profitable. This new support to the national film industry was however conditioned by the criteria of popular and commercial success, both within and outside national frontiers (2000: 131-132). The AFFC was also conscious that, in order to achieve this popularity, a re-orientation in the perception of the country was needed. As a result, the cinema of the 1990s obliterated the monolithic version of ‘Australianness’ characteristic of the first years of the revival, and centred instead on the multicultural reality of the country. Consequently, most 1990s films reflected the diversity and plurality of Australian society, demonstrating that minorities also had their place in the country and that they could be represented too.

In the early 1990s, three films in particular were noteworthy for the impact they had both on Australian and foreign audiences: *Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann, 1992), *Muriel’s Wedding* (P.J Hogan, 1994) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994). The three of them may be seen as inaugurating a new commercial and aesthetic Australian style. Some critics (Quinn 1994-5, Craven 1999) agreed that fantasy was one of the main features that these films presented both in their narratives and visual forms. They were “young, funky and irreverent films” (Quinn 1994-5: 23) whereby a different and challenging attitude towards questions of identity and nationhood was clearly favoured.

Nevertheless, what was clearly distinctive of these productions with respect to the local cinema of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was, over and above everything else,

the new type of ‘Australianness’ they endorsed. Generally speaking, these films presented characters who, for one reason or another, did not fit into the dominant Australian pattern but rather challenged it, thus revealing an ideology that these and other Australian films of the 1990s, such as *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991), *Bad Boy Bobby* (Rolf de Heer, 1994) or *The Sum of Us* (Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling, 1994), wanted to convey. Not only did they emphasise the individual and his/her individuality and personal concerns but, above all, they disclosed the existence and relevance of alternative Australian identities and the need to celebrate the diversity of the nation.

Strictly Ballroom’s plot centres around Scott (Paul Mercurio), a young dancer who dreams of winning the Australian Pan Pacifics ballroom dance competition with the performance of his own creative steps. The film thus portrays the protagonist’s personal and artistic rebellion against the repressive prescriptions of the Australian Dance Federation and, metaphorically, his inner search for freedom both in the public and the domestic spheres of his life. Aware of the on-going re-definition of Australia as a fresh, plural and multicultural country, the film relies on the potential of a new participant —the Spanish community, whose presence not only satisfies the popular expectations of the 1990s, but also envisions the phenomenon of diasporic communities within Australia and the integrity of the various ethnic groups within the country.

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The film’s approach to the non-Australian community in general and the Spanish girl (Francisca) does not come to terms satisfactorily with Francisca’s marginalised status, as a woman and as a member of an ethnic minority. Such inadequacies can be perceived, not only in the film itself, but also in the filmmaker’s own words, as expressed just after the release of *Strictly Ballroom* in 1992. Asked in an interview about the main features of the film, Baz Luhrmann affirmed then that its “telling” style, together with the use of a particular narrative structure, should be identified as the key elements (Taylor 1992:8). No doubt, Luhrmann’s personal style, based on the use of bright distinct colours and fast-pace editing, became one of his most personal distinguishing marks and one of the reasons why, not only this film, but also his more recent features such as *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and, above all, *Moulin Rouge* (2001) became so successful. In *Strictly Ballroom*, nevertheless, the novelty of Luhrmann’s technique is undermined by the conventionality and formulaic character of the story, which retells the classical myth of “a[n] outsider trying to overcome a repressive regime” (Taylor 1992: 8). As is expected, the male protagonist will achieve his objective, but only with the help of Francisca (Tara Morice), the Spanish immigrant girl displaced to the margins of Australian society. However, not a single word is devoted to this character in the above-mentioned interview, even though she plays a co-leading role of substantial importance for the development and resolution of the film’s main conflicts. No direct allusion is made

to the topic of ethnicity either. The purpose of this paper is accordingly to fill the gap in Luhrmann's interview and emphasise the relevance of such a character, analysing the meanings of the sexual/ethnic minority it represents in order to demonstrate the ambivalent treatment that the film offers of such social variables. The point of departure of my analysis will be the fact that, despite the utopian multicultural ending that the film celebrates, *Strictly Ballroom* ends up by exclusively supporting the dominant ideology of the country where the narrative is set, that is, by enhancing over and above everything else the English and Irish white male values that have traditionally defined the 'national type' of Australian culture (Schaffer 1990: 12, 20).

The character of Fran represents difference with respect to the official 'unmarked' Australian male protagonist; she is 'marked' both sexually and ethnically, and therefore stands for a discordant position that destabilises and threatens the site of the male protagonist and, to a large extent, that of the official Australian discourse, based on the aforementioned 'white-heterosexual-male' axis. It is true that one of the basic sexual restrictions she has to endure comes precisely from her own community, and most specifically from her father Rico (Antonio Vargas), constructed under Latino male stereotyped parameters of chauvinism, male violence and strict parenting. Significantly enough though, she will be able to 'escape' this oppressive environment, but only thanks to the masculine 'protection' of yet another male character, Scott, who eventually convinces Rico of his good intentions regarding Fran. As a matter of fact, the basic structural element around which the film develops elevates once and again hegemonic masculinity as its defining feature. Ballroom dancing reaffirms the position of man as leader with the maxim, as the character Liz Holt (Gia Carides) explains at one point in the film, "where the man goes the lady must follow". It thus privileges male initiative and centrality with respect to the female partner, who is relegated to a secondary level under the man's guidance. Fran's commitment to following Scott's steps and his innovative way of dancing — "I wanna dance with you, *your way*" (emphasis added)— consequently reinforces the male character's superior position, not only within the narrative, but also within the dominant Australian discourse that favours male values.

It is nonetheless Fran's ethnicity in particular that opens up the debate with respect to the way in which such a topic is addressed in Luhrmann's film. The inter-ethnic relationship established between Scott and Fran does not apparently constitute a problem in itself; the film tries to persuade the audience that Fran is not rejected by Scott's family because of her different nationality, but because she is not the dance partner he needs. In this sense, one of Fran's most important signs of authenticity, i.e. her ethnic identity, is clearly underestimated and, above all, misrepresented, thus proving what Shohat and Stam affirm when they say that

issues of race and ethnicity are, in films, as in real life, “submerged” (1994: 220). In this connection, David Callahan also notes that, precisely within the context of Australian films, “‘obviously’ ethnic characters often exist uneasily on the edge of their ethnicity” (in Craven 2001: 96). The representation of ethnic conflicts on the screen thus tends to be vague and diffuse or, what is even worse, repressed. Consequently, by camouflaging inter-ethnic frictions beneath the plot’s main surface and avoiding any explicit reference to conflict, the film places itself within a secure territory that ensures and reinforces its privileged position within power structures.

Fran’s position as an alienated and diasporic subject is nonetheless emphasised both formally and narratively: she is literally pushed into the fringes of Australian society, inhabiting a poor and filthy house beside the rail tracks where she lives a life of Spanish customs and traditions. In her effort to get integrated within the local community, she attends lessons at the Hastings dance academy. Nevertheless, unable to make herself noticeable among the rest of the dancers, Fran remains relegated to the everlasting “beginner” category where she must resign herself to dancing alone. Scott’s remark, “a beginner has no right to approach an Open Amateur” after Fran’s insistence on being his dance partner underlines the position she occupies as marginalised subject, and re-writes Spanish presence in terms of the unknown ‘Other’ that threatens the Australian official order. Accordingly, Fran reproaches Scott for his refusal to accept her as a partner: “You’re just really *scared!* You are scared to give someone new a go because they might be better than you are! Vivir con miedo es como vivir a medias!” (emphasis added). These words reveal the hidden fears of the white Anglo-Saxon Australian male when faced with something or someone he does not entirely comprehend or, as Bhabha puts it,

the image of post-Enlightenment man tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonised [wo]man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his actions at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. (1994: 44)

Fran’s interest in contributing with her own steps is perceived by Scott as a perilous audacity for, seeing in her the ‘mimic woman’ who is at once resemblance and menace, “white but not quite” (Young 1990: 147-148), he dreads the collapse of the values he stands for. Fran not only follows and repeats Scott’s movements, but introduces as well a Spanish initiative through her dance. In the process, the masculine and national Australian ‘essence’ becomes hybridised and its authority, challenged. The artistic couple that both protagonists constitute is therefore re-read as a dangerous sexual and inter-ethnic union, which provokes new fears and anxieties in the rest of the local community. This is the reason why Francisca cannot be the appropriate suitor, and must therefore be replaced by a less menacing

partner. Tina Sparkle (Sonia Kruger), with the white blonde Australian beauty her very surname implies, appears to be the perfect partner for Scott, since she is willing, as orthodox ballroom dancing requires, to merely follow and accept the man's guidance.

However, the passionate power inherent in Spanish music and the energy *flamenco* transmits to the tedious Australian dancing style makes Scott discover that it is precisely Fran's difference that attracts him and, consequently, he ends up by choosing her as his dance partner. Spanish dance is perceived by the male character as fresh, original, unconventional and, above all, liberating. *Flamenco* therefore represents the sort of freedom Scott dreams of and, Fran, the means to achieve it.

As a matter of fact, music plays an important function in *Strictly Ballroom*. Yet, it is surprising that within the eclecticism that, according to Luhrmann, distinguishes the film's soundtrack, there is no allusion at all to any of the Spanish or Latin styles that proliferate in the narrative (Taylor 1992: 9). *Rumba, samba, cha-cha-cha, tango*, and *paso doble* are, to mention but a few, compulsory dances of the Australian Ballroom competition, and some of the styles Scott must perform in order to succeed. Moreover, Latin and Spanish rhythms determine some of the most important moments of the film, since they contribute to the instigation and evolution of most of the attitudes of the characters. To give an example, Scott's decision to exhibit for the first time his 'eccentric' and personal way of dancing takes place only after hearing *Samba* tunes on the ballroom's loudspeakers at the Southern District's Waratah Championship. At the same time, the type of music employed can be very telling as regards the kind of message the narrative intends to communicate at any given moment. Thus, the rhythm that can be heard when Scott performs his sinful solo conjures up notions of freedom, individuality and movement. The kettledrum sounds inevitably remind the spectator of Aboriginal tribal rhythms, that is, of the colonial 'other', thus allowing for yet another interpretation of the music in binary terms that alludes both to its threatening and appealing nature. On the one hand, this new rhythm represents Scott's progress towards the menacing unknown: his decision to perform his own steps is a dangerous adventure (as is his choice of Spanish Francisca), since it may entail his elimination from the official competition. On the other hand, he cannot help feeling strongly attracted towards the difference and 'uncanniness' of his own new style.

As was said before, the Spanish musical and artistic tradition becomes fully represented by the world of *flamenco* _called *paso doble* in the film. *Strictly Ballroom* thus resorts to the stereotyped images which, for many decades, characterised Spain abroad. As José Álvarez Junco observes, during the mid-nineteenth century Andalusian images and references such as bullfighting or flamenco made Spain

fashionable for travellers (1996: 95). Later on, as Laura Kumin explains, “*flamenco* was used by the Franco regime to promote an image of Spain associated with bullfights, wine, sun and sand” (1999: 300). *Strictly Ballroom* ‘obscures’ this happy and luminous scenery and presents instead a dark atmosphere where things associated with the Spanish world are once and again perceived in negative terms. Intimidating *flamenco* guitar notes are played every time the camera frames Fran’s house, thus making the spectator aware of the danger that the Spanish community represents. Similarly, the same notes are associated with Australian characters that represent a menace for the male protagonist, as is the case of Barry Fife (Bill Hunter), the president of the Australian Dance Federation. However, Spanish art is at times conceived in positive terms as well. *Flamenco* denotes passion, authenticity and individual temperament, attitudes of fundamental importance since they help the Australian protagonist to re-affirm his own ‘identity’. Lacking much of the Spanish ‘true spirit’, Scott learns from Fran’s *yaya* (Armonia Benedito) the need to ‘feel the rhythm’ from the very heart, and assimilate “the dichotomy of the flamenco essence, as eloquent an expression of intense sorrow as it is of uncomplicated, sheer love of life and joy” (Kumin 1999: 298). As a result, Spanish characters contribute in an efficient way to the formation and development of Scott’s personality; in more practical terms, they make the Australian male protagonist’s eventual triumph possible.

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Spanish culture thus represents that without which the Australian ‘I’ cannot be possibly defined. The film seems to become stylistically aware of this and strives to demonstrate it by centring on whatever is related to Spanishness. The closure of the film is the clearest example, since it openly celebrates social harmony between different ethnic groups, thus doing away with former conflicts and supremacist intentions on the part of some Australian characters. The scenes preceding the film’s climax concentrate, in a rather unnatural way, on specific motifs that somehow ‘guide’ Scott in his future election of a female partner. Thus, the overture from *Carmen*, together with flashes of shots where a dancer puts a *toreador* jacket on or where a white boy is playing with an Aboriginal girl are obvious narrative mechanisms that necessarily point to the final union of the inter-ethnic couple.

The performance of the last number at the Pan Pacific’s final links Scott and Fran in a final union that apparently implies, as O’Regan says, a multicultural resolution where “the worlds of the Spanish migrant and the older Australian [are] brought together” (1996: 319). For O’Regan, the film seems to advocate tolerance and respect for different ethnicities, while at the same time openly celebrating the inter-ethnic romance of the protagonists. However the latter ingredient contradicts in a way the traditional conventions of contemporary Australian cinema, which rarely explores heterosexual relationships. As Debi Enker explains, “Australian cinema seems sceptical about the capacity of love, and particularly passion, to endure. And

even when it flickers for a while, it generally dies” (1994: 220). The explanation for such a celebratory and romantic ending may lie, once more, in the film’s insistence on concealing colonialist viewpoints under ‘politically correct’ discourses. In my opinion, differing from O’Regan’s view, *Strictly Ballroom*’s ending must not be understood as the exaltation of ethnic integration, but rather in terms of support and promotion of nationalist Australian ideas. On the whole, the film clearly advocates the white Australian man as the supreme figure who dominates over gender and ethnic minorities, and Scott Hastings appears as the only ‘winner’ of this artistic and cultural competition. The perception of Fran as an equal victor is wrong, since her only function throughout the film has been that of contributing to Scott’s eventual triumph at the Pan Pacific’s final. Her flamenco steps provide him with the self-assertive enthusiasm he formerly lacked. Now, he reappears on the dance floor, stronger and determined, willing to let everybody know that he is the best. Fran consequently constitutes a mere instrument at the service of Australian official values, for she remains on the fringes of the narrative and nobody knows for sure whether she is finally welcomed into the local community or not. Scott thus benefits from Spanish music, steps, gestures, clothes and spirit in what could be considered to be a cultural appropriation of the ‘Other’ since, as bell hooks explains, “it is by eating the Other that one asserts power and privilege” (1992: 36). Scott does not simply ‘appreciate’ the positive values of Fran’s culture but makes it his, thus showing his capacity to master and conquer, not only the world of ballroom dancing, but the world of the Spanish ‘other’ as well.

Scott finally learns that he must not live in fear but stick to his dreams. Once resolved to do so, and disregarding official ballroom norms, he performs the last *paso-doble* triumphally, receiving the eventual acknowledgement of both Australian and Spanish audiences. More importantly, this triumph unveils in a way the truth about his parents’ past, brings them together once again, and makes Scott’s father re-emerge from a subjugated and silenced past. Since family conflicts are finally resolved and openly displayed and celebrated, the film demonstrates again that Scott and Scott’s story are its exclusive concerns. The film’s closure can be consequently regarded as a ‘happy ending’ only as far as Australian official values are refurbished and reinforced, while non-Australian ones are left aside.

The social, cultural and political changes in Australia during the 1990s showed the need for an immediate re-definition of official assumptions of race, class, ethnicity and gender discourses. Some decades before, the need to find an appropriate way to express the local cultural values and to promote matters concerned with national identity had led arts in general and the Australian film industry in particular to make a substantial revision of the forms and contents of its existing policy. The result was the commercialisation of ‘official’ representations of the country through different features, which conveyed a rather stereotyped image of Australia, and which were

perceived as cultural flagships of the nation. Although the filmic scene that emerged in the 1990s saw a continuation of these national-encouragement mechanisms, several transformations affected the novel productions that started to fill the Australian cinemas by that time. The diversity that now characterised the country had to be apprehended, and Australian cinema tried to reflect this new situation on screen. As O'Regan explains, "a national cinema is obliged to enact, express and represent the *national lifeways and aspirations* of people in Australia" (1996: 176, emphasis added). Luhrmann's *Strictly Ballroom* undoubtedly accommodates to the new situation—which tacitly recognises the weight that minorities have—by incorporating a non-Australian woman as the partner of the central male character. Nevertheless, the happy ending vanishes the moment we remove the superficial layer that the 'official' and 'culturally appropriate' narrative constitutes and discover the subtly hidden agenda which places non-Australian characters as second-class citizens. As was said before, the film essentially focuses on the Australian storyline while the Spanish one is 'marketed' as a mere instrument for the local male protagonist to triumph. Spanish art is conceived in terms of commodification, since *flamenco* appears as fashionable and profit-making precisely in an age where 'lo latino' seems to be all the rage. In this sense, it could be questioned up to what point *Strictly Ballroom*, as a 1990s film, constitutes an actual departure from traditional older Anglo-Australian discourses. Although the film does go beyond the 'local', the Spanish ethnic minority in Luhrmann's movie emerges as a sort of valuable mechanism which reassures the popularity of the film, not only among a white Australia attracted by the Spanish joyful spirit, but also among those on the fringe who see themselves represented in a mainstream Australian production, something that, until the 90s, one could have never imagined.

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Notes

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2. The Bicentenary commemorates the 200th anniversary of permanent European settlement in Australia. It marks the events of 26 January 1788, when the eleven ships of Captain Arthur Phillip's First Fleet arrived from Britain and gathered in Port Jackson to found

the colony of New South Wales (2001: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ABS@.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/9ce698f1be81bcb7ca2569de0025c18d!OpenDocument>).

3. As far as gender issues are concerned, Australian culture has traditionally been constructed as an essentially masculine one. One of the formulated discourses that has definitely contributed to the creation of the Australian myth has been that of hegemonic masculinity. Within this domain, woman has generally been relegated to a marginalised

position where she has been given neither place nor voice. She has been excluded as subject of representation, and has been instead spoken for to the point of becoming, as Schaffer puts it, "the colonised sex" (1990: 8) in a predominantly phallogocentric culture. Accordingly, official discourses based on ideals such as masculinity and mateship have traditionally placed the white, heterosexual man of Anglo-Irish origin as the Australian type *par excellence*.

⁴. The starting point of Australian cinema is usually located at the end of the 19th century. The well-known *Cahiers* critic Serge Grünberg affirms that the first fiction film to be made in the whole history of cinema was precisely an 1899 Australian film, directed by Joseph Henry Perry and entitled *Soldiers of The Cross* (1994-5: 27). Jonathan Rayner, however, points out that this production was a mere combination of filmed reconstructions, and that the first narrative feature film of considerable length was *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), also an Australian production by Charles Tait (2000: 3-8).

⁵. One of the emblematic symbols that came to fully epitomise this domain was the landscape. As Gibson says, "in trying to differentiate itself from the Old World, Australian society began to define itself with essentialist myths of land" (in Murray 1994: 52). The main reason for the dominant role ascribed to the male character lies precisely in the special relationship that he maintains with this *leitmotiv* of the Australian tradition. Much of the Australian myth responds to the male desire to control and possess an alien land to reaffirm his position as master and conqueror. Meanwhile, the western conception of the land as something female (the so-called 'mother earth'), places woman both outside and within the Australian bush tradition. As Schaffer indicates, she functions as a metaphoric sign for the Australian landscape: being the fetishist 'Other', the land-as-woman is represented as the negative component that man must appropriate in order to re-assert his identity. She is, in Schaffer's words, the "harsh, cruel, threatening, fickle, castrating mother. She is dangerous, non-nurturing and not to be trusted" (1990: 62).

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