



Camden Council Library Services – Movie Club

Sunday Too Far Away (1975)

Discussion Questions

1. Is it a masculine film? The film spends a great deal glorifying and mythologising the male body and 'men's work'. But does this hold true for the entirety of the film? Does our perception shift? Think, for example, about the scene when Shelia Dawson witnesses the men shearing where "The act (shearing) that was once beautiful now appears brutal" (Felton, ["She Invited Herself: Sunday Too Far Away"](#), 2014). Is it comfortable for them and for her? How does our perception shift?
2. A key feature of the film is competition and struggle. The shearers struggle against their employer. They compete with each other to become 'Top Dog'. They come into conflict with the 'scabs'. The very lifestyle itself is a struggle to maintain sobriety and focus beyond the shearing shed, with many, like Old Garth, left broken. Is the film a flattering portrayal of the masculine life of hard drinking and hard working? Why and why not?
3. Felton claims that the film "never quite settles on its identity or purpose" (Felton, ["She Invited Herself: Sunday Too Far Away"](#), 2014), while Danks praises it as "a profoundly in-between work", half inspired by the rural art of the nation's past but also early 1970s 'Ocker' comedies (Danks, *Sunday Too Far Away*, *Metro Magazine*, pp.94-102). How coherent is the film? What do you consider to be its purpose or identity?
4. Sunday was produced during an era of 'Quality' Australian films, which started with [Picnic at Hanging Rock](#) (1975), that "gave an acceptable public face to Australian cinema that politicians, cultural elites and audiences could unproblematically endorse" (O'Regan, [Australian Film in the 1970s: the ocker and the quality film](#), 1995). Before that was an era of 'Ocker' films (like [The Adventures of Barry McKenzie](#), 1972 and [Alvin Purple](#), 1973) that were generally rude and crude and featured colourful slang, sexual comedy, and projected "not (the) nostalgic rural Australian beauty, but the vulgarity, philistinism and energy of an urban contemporary Australia" (Rohdie, 1982, quoted in O'Regan, [Australian Film in the 1970s: the ocker and the quality film](#), 1995). This kind of humour is featured, if toned down, in Sunday, but transferred to the more traditional and nostalgic rural shearing shed. Does this appropriation question the myths of traditional Australian mateship? Does it still have an iconoclastic feel?

5. The title of the film comes from "[The Shearer's Wife's Lament](#)": "Friday night too tired; Saturday night too drunk; Sunday, too far away." Foley is caught between being the icon of the shearing shed, being both 'Top Dog' and their selection as union representative, but he himself is not happy and wanting to escape the lifestyle. He expresses to barmaid Ivy his intention of sobering up, saving money and buying a prawning ship in four or so years, although this has a less than promising start. He especially fears becoming like Old Garth, who was once 'Top Dog' and is now a washed up drunk who lost his wife and family. What does this say about the lifestyle? Is Foley's plan a hopeful note in the film, or something that adds to the ever degrading effects of the lifestyle? What do you make of his shift when he takes the lead against the 'scabs'?

6. The ending of the film has been criticised, in particular the hasty, anticlimactic resolution of the strike with it only referenced in a passage at the end overlaid with images of the abandoned shearing shed (Wilshire, [Of Myths and Men: Sunday Too Far Away](#), *Metro*. Spring 2006, Issue 150, p154-157). The original script by John Dingwall, called *The Shearers*, would have made a longer film and focused more intently on the labour strike. But Wilshire argues that, given the 94 minute time frame, a more drawn out strike set piece would have removed the film's dramatic and human dimension. Do you feel that the film ends abruptly? How does this affect the discussion of Unions in the film? Is the film about the shearing strike or is it an exploration of human dimensions?

7. Sunday is considered one of the leading examples of the Australian New Wave Cinema, which dates from 1970-1990. This has been divided into two categories, the publicly funded era from 1970-1980 and the commercial, tax incentive period from around 1980 onwards. The former, due to the source of funding, needed to depict Australian life. However, with this restriction came an unusual result, where filmmakers began to question the myths and the cultural identity of Australia. In some cases it was the treatment of Aboriginals ([The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith](#), 1978), and in many there was a questioning of the outback hero or mateship ([Wake in Fright](#), 1970, [Sunday Too Far Away](#), 1975). The second generation, which was privately funded and made use of tax incentives, was either indifferent to these discussions ([The Mad Max Series](#), 1979-2015) or were celebrations of national icons ([Gallipoli](#), 1981, [Breaker Morant](#) 1981, [Man from Snowy River](#), 1982, or the more tongue-in-cheek [Crocodile Dundee](#) (1986) (O'Regan, [The enchantment with the cinema: Australian film in the 1980s](#), *Australian Screen* (with Albert Moran), Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books, 1989. pp.118-145). The latter were significantly more successful with moviegoers (Godden, [An Essay on Australian New Wave Cinema](#), 2013). What does that say about the earlier, iconoclastic films? What does it say about the Australian audience? Are we different today, that is, more receptive to critiques of national symbols, icons, and myths?