

land for the First Time” that “it became clear to me [Kincaid] ... that the mother I was writing about was really Mother Country” (Bouson 111). This comment, which speaks of a political awakening, raises the question of when exactly this turning point occurred; Kincaid visited England for the first time in 1985, but the above-mentioned essay, “On Seeing...,” was published as late as 1991. Did the crucial “writing” take place during the first trip (for example, through a diary entry anticipating the eventual essay) or several years later? And what does this turning point mean for interpreting Kincaid’s texts written before/after it? Bouson does not answer these questions as directly as her biographical approach would warrant and require.

Another difficult issue that Kincaid scholars perennially struggle with is the relationship between Kincaid’s life, interviews, and fiction. Are the interviews always where the “Truth” is found, as Bouson seems to assume – that is, can they always be unproblematically used to unlock the mysteries of Kincaid’s life as well as her fiction – or do interviews at times participate in Kincaid’s artistic and therapeutic project of (re)writing her life in ways that in themselves invite and merit further study? Bouson could have addressed this methodological conundrum more explicitly, either by convincing us of the desirability of her straightforward reliance on interviews or, alternatively, by overtly weighing the pros and cons of her approach.

This study does not answer all the questions that critics have raised about Kincaid’s multi-layered myth-making and masquerade and about the exact nexus of the personal and the political in her oeuvre; there is still room for further analysis and theorizing in Kincaid scholarship. Nevertheless, professors teaching Kincaid to undergraduates and graduate students will greatly benefit from Bouson’s solid academic prose and the wealth of information she has gathered. She has written a highly informative and accessible book that, in its clarity, provides an important service to the field.

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Jindabyne. Movie. Director: Ray Lawrence; Writer: Beatrice Christian; Producer: Catherine Jarman; Starring: Laura Linney and Gabriel Byrne. Australia 2006; U.S. release April 27, 2007.

Ray Lawrence’s *Jindabyne* is the first full-feature adaptation of Raymond Carver’s fiction since Robert Altman’s *Short Cuts* (1993). Exploring one story in depth, and set in Australia, the film’s beautifully menacing landscape matches the edginess of the characters and their struggles to come to terms with a horrific event.

While Raymond Carver buffs are still debating whether Robert Altman’s 1993 *Short Cuts*, based on nine Carver stories and one poem, should be set in Los Angeles rather than in the Northwest, director Ray Lawrence (*Bliss* 1985; *Lantana* 2001) daringly sets one Carver story in Jindabyne, Australia. Carver was indeed a Northwest writer, if only because he was born and grew up in Oregon and Washington State and was an ardent fisherman. Carver’s equal passion for fishing and story writing is brilliantly transferred to the screen and to the Australian landscape in *Jindabyne*. The

core of "So Much Water, So Close to Home," the story Lawrence adapted for the film, revolves around what happens when four fishermen on a weekend trip discover the corpse of a young woman in the river where they are fishing. This story was also included in *Short Cuts*, but Altman's fast-moving pace between the nine intertwined plots in Los Angeles is in *Jindabyne* replaced by a full exploration of one story.

To set the record straight, most of Carver's stories are not, in fact, set in the Northwest. His choice of setting varies widely from places like California ("What Do You Do in San Francisco?"), El Paso ("What We Talk About When We Talk About Love"), or the East Coast ("Cathedral"). Many Carver stories have no recognizable geographical location other than what has come to be known as Carver Country, more a state of mind than a place, anywhere regular people are down on their luck or struggling to make sense of their lives. *Jindabyne* is a film full of regular people with the backdrop of a magnificent landscape; the characters lead an existence filled with both ordinary and extraordinary tensions. The choice of setting, cast, and plot in *Jindabyne* is thus an excellent match for "So Much Water, So Close to Home," one of a handful of Carver stories actually set in the picturesque Northwest.

Laura Linney (Claire) and Gabriel Byrne (Stuart) lead the cast of a host of ordinary people in the small town of Jindabyne who are all struggling with various everyday problems even before the horrific event that changes their lives occurs. Lawrence has managed to imbue all of the characters with an edginess that is mirrored in the beautiful but menacing landscape where a killer lurks. Claire is at turns fragile and fierce, and Stuart, if slightly less of a macho chauvinist than in the story, is both gentler and creepier. His longing for physical tenderness is subtly portrayed and plausible. Claire teeters between balanced and high strung, making their relationship intense, and Stuart watches with longing when couples around him show overt signs of physical care. It is therefore both shocking and strangely expected at mid-film when Stuart is seen alone caressing the face and hair of the young woman's corpse as she floats in the river.

The shocking and expected are persistently weaved into the film in ways that give the viewer a slight – yet uncomfortable – advantage over the characters. Although the scene above is not included in the story, it does not depart from its tone either. In Carver's version, Claire is the first-person narrator and focalizer, and it is difficult to distinguish between what actually happens at the river and what she imagines has happened. In the film this discrepancy is transferred to the camera, which shifts between different character-focalizers throughout. Claire is isolated in the story by being overwhelmed by her own emotional reactions; in the film she is additionally frustrated by being cut off from other people as she does not have access to what they know, see, and feel. Viewers, however, get a larger, though equally disturbing, picture.

It is worth noting that Lawrence has based *Jindabyne* on the expanded version of "So Much Water, So Close to Home" rather than the minimalist one from *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981). This is clear in the film's exploration of Claire's past in which she had a mental breakdown right after the birth of her child that separated her from her family for many months. This information is not given in the 1981 version of the story, but appears later during Carver's expansive phase

in which several stories were revised to fuller, longer versions. In the movie Claire's past becomes a bone of contention between the spouses, and Stuart uses it as a bitter retort when she pries for information about the fishing trip. But Claire also has a dirty secret of her own that reveals her as a hypocrite; while she points her finger at Stuart for concealing the truth about "what really happened out there," she cannot muster the courage to tell him about her second (terminated) pregnancy. This, like other adaptations for the film, is a plausible development given the relationship and its tensions in the text.

Jindabyne opens with a scene that is not included in the story, but is one such plausible event that grows out of the suggestiveness of Carver's fiction. A landscape shot zooms to the truck of the young woman's killer, parked behind a mass of boulders, and then focuses on the driver waiting for his prey to arrive on the dusty road below. In the interior of the truck the camera follows the man's hands picking up his binoculars. Suddenly we are seeing the world from the eyes of a predator as he follows his victim-to-be advancing on the road. Then the camera cuts to the young woman in her car, tuning her radio and contently singing along with a favorite song about Jindabyne. Bliss and calamity are intermingled, here as elsewhere in the film. The backdrop in this scene of the arid and magnificent Australian plain is just one of many uses of emotional and geographical landscapes that echo back to Carver's story in a strikingly resonate manner. Although this opening scene is absent from the story, Lawrence has chosen to include a parallel scene that Carver describes with detail. When Claire drives over the mountain pass to attend the girl's funeral, she is threatened by a truck driver who forces her to pull over. The reader understands from the trucker's staring at Claire's body and demanding that she opens the car window that she is in danger of being raped, and the connection to the molested girl in the river is fresh in our minds. Lawrence brings this scene into the movie almost exactly as it is in the story, with the mountainous wooded landscape a threat simply because of the distance from help.

Added to the film's accompanying soundtrack of intensely suggestive music juxtaposed with characters' singing, Jindabyne's towering landscape has viewers on the edge of their seats. Carver liked stories that made the blood pump, and Lawrence's 124-minute production keeps the adrenalin surging. While Carver's fictional universe is virtually free of political or social commentary, and Jindabyne includes a plot filled with racial tensions between aboriginal and white communities (the young woman belongs to the former), the links between the two versions' portrayal of a contemporary world disturbed by a serial killer who preys on women are worth some more scrutiny.

Carver wrote and published most of his stories in the 1970s and 1980s, a period that corresponds closely with the epoch of two of the most infamous serial killers in U.S. history, Ted Bundy and Gary Leon Ridgway (better known as the Green River Killer), both of whom operated in Carver's home state Washington, capturing, molesting, and killing their female victims in river and lake areas within a few hours' driving distance from Carver's home town Yakima, where "So Much Water, So Close to Home" is set. Though the story does not make any direct references to these serial killers, anyone familiar with the period or area will be struck by the resemblances. The com-

munity of Jindabyne, too, is plagued by a killer, and at one point in the movie Billy, the youngest of the fisherman, wonders if the current case is connected to an unsolved murder years before. Though we are not given the answer to this, viewers nevertheless follow the killer as he dumps the body, and as he positions himself in different areas watching others, presumably stalking his next victim.

Carver's fiction, as critics have noted, is saturated with voyeurism, and in giving the killer a point of view (though limited) in *Jindabyne*, Lawrence is transposing this voyeurism into its eeriest manifestation. Though Carver's voyeurs are more benign, driven mostly by curiosity rather than (blood) lust, this is one of many adaptations from fiction into film that function well in the film. Sometimes the camera zooms out of a scene at a distance that suggests one person is spying on the others; this is especially the case when the fishermen are outdoors and the camera implies that somebody is watching their activities. The suggestion is that killer is following them; indeed, in one shot, the camera zooms to the license plate of the car the men have parked for their hike, implying that the watching eyes have made note of it for later reference. In some scenes we actually see the killer watching from a distance, as at the end of the movie during the ceremony for the dead girl.

Another successful transposition from fiction to film is the pervasive use of water as a metaphor for the life-giving and life-taking forces that surround us. This is beautifully and menacingly weaved into the landscape of both versions, yet with significant differences. In Carver's version, since all the focalization belongs to Claire, it is her relationship with water that is paramount and that adds both a local and a poetic, even surreal, flair to the story. The title is taken from words uttered by Claire when she is exasperated with Stuart: "So much water so close to home, why did he have to go so far away to fish?" (*Fires* 1983). Claire also identifies so closely with the dead girl that she imagines that it would be her in the water: "I look at the creek. I float toward the pond, eyes open, face down, staring at the rocks and moss on the creek bottom" (*ibid.*).

In *Jindabyne*, since many characters in the community are given focalization, water is employed as a shared element of their community and history. We learn in an embedded scene, a film within the film shown for the schoolchildren, that the town was moved to a higher elevation in 1964 so that it could be submerged in dam water. The lake over the old town, a 20th century Atlantis of sorts, plays a crucial role in at least three separate scenes. The first is early in the film when Stuart takes his young son Tom to the lake to fish; the boy reels in a clock rather than a fish, and the two share stories of the legend of the underwater city where the old townspeople presumably still live. Later, while the men are away fishing, Claire takes Tom to the lake for a swimming lesson. The boy seems terrified of water, so after he practices holding his breath once, Claire leaves him on shore so she can swim, something she soon regrets, as a strange man appears to be accosting the boy while she is at a distance. The camera moves to underwater, and we see her body from below. A parallel is the young woman's corpse that has just been found in the river by the men in a different location. The viewers are invited to make the connection between the two female bodies in water. Finally, in a late scene, Tom is taken to the lake by his friend Caylin-Calandria, and as she tricks him into believing she is drowning. He tries to save her

and almost drowns, but manages to swim. This intense scene shares the eerie, yet aesthetically fascinating, tone of the movie as a whole. In this way, Lawrence brilliantly transfers the pervasive and lyrical water motif from the story into the film.

The girl in the scene above, Caylin-Calandria, is not in Carver's story, but she fits well with the film's focus on the community rather than the individual. Not only do we learn about the lives of the three other fishermen that accompany Stuart, but we see the connections (and disconnections) between four generations of characters, as well as two separate communities, white and aboriginal. Some of Claire's functions in the story as a clairvoyant, echoed in her name as well as her visions of the men and of the corpse, are transferred to the seven-year-old Caylin-Calandria, who seems to share some kind of communion with her dead mother, and believes, or makes Tom believe, in zombies, and demands that he assist her in the sacrificial murder of the class mascot, a guinea pig. The young actress, Eva Lazzaro, is nothing less than a rare find; she fills her role as sweet and diabolic, cunning and spontaneous, with a jaw-dropping performance.

The main change from story to film is Lawrence's insistence on making the murder of the young woman a racial issue, something he handles less subtly than the story's inherent gender tensions. Though Carver enthusiasts might wince at this addition in the film, it is in fact weaved fairly well into the plot by making the murdered girl a member of the aboriginal community. The penultimate scene of the movie, however, risks teetering into sentimentalism, when the two communities gather (yet stand apart) to mourn the girl in an aboriginal ceremony. The pained expressions of the mourners mixed with the teary-eyed singer that bring this scene to closure are luckily counterbalanced by ambiguity; it is uncertain, in the story and in the film, whether Claire and Stuart will be reconciled, although his efforts at apology seem to bring everyone closer. Most significantly, Lawrence chooses to punctuate the film with a short scene that brings the whole full circle: the killer is once again seen lurking in his truck behind a mass of boulders.

This aspect of *Jindabyne* is one of the few features that it shares with Altman's *Short Cuts*: both films have a coherence of structure and plot (though chaotic in *Short Cuts*, there is still a plot) which are absent in Carver stories. Lawrence portrays a whole community linked in different ways and struggling with some of the same issues: relationships are falling apart, the generation gap strains families, white and aboriginal communities are at odds. Altman brings characters from nine different stories into contact with each other, where they have no connection at all in the fiction. Both films open and close with scenes that serve to structure the whole into a meaningful unit: *Jindabyne* by zooming in on the killer at the start and end, and *Short Cuts* by running the opening credits while helicopters spread pesticide over all of Los Angeles and ending with an earthquake scene that shakes the whole city. Yet both films end on a note of arbitrariness – the earthquake in *Short Cuts*, and the killer waiting for his next victim in *Jindabyne* – that is consistent with the mood of uneasiness in Carver's fictional universe.