

Assignment 2. Critical Review and Bibliography of...

“Look both Ways”

by Benjamin Britten (30454517)



Part I: Film Information

Credits

Crew (in order of appearance in the closing credits) and companies

Written and directed by	Sarah Watt
Producer	Bridget Ikin
Director of Photography	Ray Argall
Production Designer	Rita Zanchetta
Costume Designer	Edie Kurzer
Editor	Denise Haratzis (ASE)
Associate Producer	Barbara Masel
	Vicki Sugars
Executive Producer	Andrew Myer
Casting	Angela Heesom
Special Effects	Film Trix
Production Company	Hibiscus Films
Principal Investor	Fcc Australia
Distributors	Becker / Dendy / Globe Films

Cast (in order of appearance)

SBS Newsreader	Mary Kostakidis
Meryl	Justine Clarke
Julia	Daniela Farinacci
Rob	Rob Hoad
Nick	William McInnes
Doctor	Leon Teague
Phil	Andrew S. Gilbert
Andy	Anthony Hayes

Crew (in order of appearance in the closing credits) and companies

Maria	Elena Carapetis
Policewoman	Tamara Lees
Train driver	Andreas Sobik
Anna	Lisa Flanagan
Train driver's wife	Irena Dangov
Current affairs reporter	Jacquelynne Willcox
Emily	Laura Peisley
Train driver's son	Alex Rafalowicz
Phil's toddler	Violet Gilbert
Miriam	Jacqueline Cook
Jasmine "Jas"	Olive Gilbert
Et al.	

Facts

Release date	18 th August 2005 in Australia 14 th April 2006 United States 21 st September 2006 in Germany
Working title	"Life Story"
Genre	Drama (part-animated)
Country	Australia
Runtime	100 min
Language	English
Sound Mix	Dolby Digital
Awards (14)	AFI Award - Best Direction (Sarah Watt) - Best Film (Bridget Ikin) -Best Screenplay (Sarah Watt) -Best Supporting Actor (Anthony Hayes)
	FIPRESCI Prize Sarah Watt

Facts

	FCCA Award	- Best leading Actor (William McInnes) -Best Director (Sarah Watt) - Best Editor (Denise Haratzis) - Best Film (Bridget Ikin) - Best Screenplay (Sarah Watt)
	IF Award	- Best Direction (Sarah Watt) - Best Editing (Denise Haratzis) - Best Script (Sarah Watt)
	Discovery Award	Sarah Watt
Award nominations (12)	AFI Award (7)	
	Screen International Award	
	IF Award (4)	

Bibliographies

interviews with filmmakers

(Note: at the time and subsequent is almost the same since this movie is a new release!)

- x DVD “Look Both Ways”, special features: commentary with Sarah Watts et al.
- x DVD “Look Both Ways”, Disc2: interview with Sarah Watt (unfortunately not available for me)
- x Senses of Cinema: Interview with Sarah Watts and Andrew S.Gilbert by Jonathan Dawson. (http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/37/look_both_ways.html)
- x Look Both Ways Blog: many comments by Sarah Watt, William McInnes and others. (<http://lookbothwaysfilm.blogspot.com/>)
- x Video stream of Brad Balfour's interview with Sarah Watt on timesquare.com. (<http://www.timesquare.com/multimedia/watt/>)

reviews in newspapers, critical essays in journals or discussions in books

- x Review summary by Jeannette Catsoulis, The New York Times. (Leads to the complete review which is not for free)
(http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=323128)

“Bogged down by the stylistic gimmickry of bustling montages and jarring

animated segments, "Look Both Ways" aims for existential drama but succeeds only in reminding us that misery loves company."

- x Various reviews access on http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/look_both_ways/

Examples:

"Looking Both Ways allegedly won Best Film at a recent Australian Academy Awards ceremony. While it's not ground breaking, director Sarah Watt's use of animation and collages provides us with quite a lot of ribs for her barbie."
2006 Harvey Karten

"Look Both Ways takes a while to get going, beginning with an overly plotted premise and some clunky exposition. Soon, however, it finds its groove and develops into a well-rounded, funny and appealingly quirky drama."
Shlomo Schwartzberg

- x Various reviews on the official web page (click on reviews)

<http://www.lookbothways.com.au/main.html>

- David Stratton, At the movies , The Australian
- Margaret Pomeranz, At the movies, Limelight Magazine
- Peter Thompson, Sunday
- Paul Byrnes, SMH
- Andiee Paviour, WHO Magazine
- Michael Fitzgerald, Time Magazine
- Megan Spencer, Triple J Radio
- Fenella Kernebone, The Movie Show
- Rob Lowing, The Sun-Herald
- Paul Le Petit, The Sunday Telegraph
- Richard Kuipers, Variety
- Frank Hatherley, Screen International
- Marta Jary, Filmink
- Vicky Roach, Daily Telegraph
- Michael Adams, Empire
- Jo Chichester, Vogue Australia
- Chris Murray, OK Magazine
- Richard Glover, 702 ABC
- et al.

(Note: Unfortunately, I couldn't find lots of critical essays or discussions in books beside the official site's references. Maybe because "Look Both Ways" was released in the last year and only recently released in the USA. Germany's release date is actually in five month.)

film's online presence

Google's research brings a lot of relevant results. But on many websites "Look Both Ways" is just mentioned as a new release. Below I list the six most helpful references that have been my source of information.

- x The official website with official trailers, photos and information

<http://www.lookbothways.com.au/main.html>

- ✗ The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382806/>)
- ✗ The distributor's information (<http://www.dendyfilms.com.au/lookbothways.html>)
- ✗ The ABC database (<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s1433709.htm>)
- ✗ Yahoo's movie database
(<http://au.movies.yahoo.com/Look+Both+Ways/movie/13891/>)
- ✗ Switzerland's "The Cineman"
(<http://www.cineman.ch/movie/2005/LookBothWays/review.html>)

To get an overview about the movie, the official website is the best address since it is felicitous either in content and design.

Part II: Critical Review of Film and its Literature

critical review of the film

“Look Both Ways” tells a story about a life changing weekend for the five main characters Nick, Meryl, Phil, Anna and Andy. All five have to cope with their own fates whereas Anna and Andy sharing a common problem: Anna's pregnancy. Nick finds out that he got cancer, Meryl – returning from her dad's funeral – sees disaster whole day long and Phil lost connection to his family. It is actually Nick who brings the turning point for everybody when especially Phil and Andy start thinking about their lives facing Nick's death bringing disease. Meryl however finds in Nick the man who is understanding and loving her. Finally, all comes to an happy end when Nick and Meryl decide to face Nick's cancer together, Phil gives up smoking and shows effort towards his family and Andy and Anna stick together again.

It is a hot day, when Meryl is returning from her dad's funeral. And it is like always: she imagines death and disaster in every situation. Being killed in a train accident or robbed by an ambler. She is walking home, when she almost witnesses the death of a man falling on the railway line. There she meets Nick a newspaper photographer who just got the diagnosis of having a spreading cancer. He and his co-worker, the newspaper writer Andy, have been sent to cover the accident. While Andy is still interviewing people, Meryl and Nick share their way home, chatting, not knowing, that their ways will come along soon again. When Andy arrives home later, he encounters Anna who reports him her unintentional pregnancy.

The next day, Nick's photography about the dead man's partner Julia is on the newspaper's front-page. Phil, Nick's and Andy's editor, decided to do so. Andy is not happy about it and starts to argue with Nick at the cricket game. But Nick, confused from his second short meeting with Meryl and lost in his thoughts about cancer, is not responding. Later he decides to visit Meryl again and spends the night with her. Andy however has different problems. He can't identify with his father role and gets in trouble on the phone with his ex-wife. Besides Phil makes the decision to quit smoking. The train driver and Julia are still trying to handle the death shock / the loss. Nick escapes from Meryl this night because he can't sleep, but he goes back the next morning and invites her spontaneously to meet his mother at lunch.

Andy spends the Sunday with his children while Phil is celebrating his daughter's

birthday and Nick is overstrained by the situation, still thinking about his disease. That leads to a conflict with Meryl when he says “I can't really start anything”. In addition, Andy is overwhelmed by the events of the weekend, too. His turning point comes when he meets Nick (who is coming from his argue with Meryl) at the railway line and gets his bad news. He finally goes back to Anna. So does Nick. He encounters Meryl at her place and both apologize. A photo collage at the end shows a possible joint future of both.

“Look Both Ways” was a totally enjoyable movie for me. Sarah Watt composed an atmospheric drama about love, death and relationships. Besides the interesting story, “Look Both Ways's” style and the performance of the actors are persuading. Especially Justine Clarke acted lovely as Meryl while William McInnes was a convincing Nick. Even if not lead acting, Andrew S. Gilbert's facial expression was perfect and could expressed more than someone could say with words in the role as Phil. After all I would like to refer to Peter Thompson (Sunday) who said in his review: *“The remarkable thing about Sarah Watt and her new film Look Both Ways is she takes us inside her characters, into their rich, often bizarre imaginations. And she does it with such wit and such love for them that they feel like people we know. Or should know.”* And there remains nothing to add for me.

Critical uptake

I think “Look Both Ways” illustrates an Australian life in the modern time. As many Australian movies of the past have been dramatic in a very special way, Sarah Watt's drama treats a global concerning: Love, Death and relationships. Whereas Death is the main topic of the film. Nowadays, humans are facing different danger than 50 years ago. Cancer, AIDS and global warmings are three of the main topics – all related to death. I'm not wondering that “Look Both Ways” is about cancer, since Australia is the country with the strongest sun worldwide and the highest rate of skin cancer. However, in my opinion, the movie does not try to deal with one specific topic typical for its release time. It rather makes an effort to let the spectators think about themselves and life in general. In a time, where (western) civilizations are highly developed, it might be the most critical intention films can have. People complain about, politics, social disparity and unemployment and forget to think about how good they are living.

Circumstances of production

Unfortunately, I couldn't find box office figures for “Look Both Ways” for Australia. But in my research I often read that it was a rather low budget production with many sponsorships. As the movie was supported by the Adelaide Film Festival, “Look Both Ways” shooting location has been in Adelaide as well. I guess, nobody expected its success, even if I doubt a worldwide success at all.

Prior or subsequent work of the filmmakers

“Look Both Ways” is Sarah Watts first feature film. Originally, she is an animator and has been famous for her animated films “Small Treasures” and “Living with Happiness” which both were short films as well. So, it is understandable that “Look

Both Ways” has animated parts, too. These parts represent Nick's and Meryl's thoughts and give the movies its depth. It is kind of a exploration of personal states and that's what Watt is famous for with her trick films as well.

Bridget Ikin, as producer, has been working for SBS Independent which commissioned Sarah Watt's short films (above mentioned), too. For her “Look Both Ways” was totally enjoyable work, since she is kind of specialized on personal, passionate cinema, which “LBW” definitely is. She established as a producer with Jane Campion's “An angel at my table” (Silver Lion, Venice Film Festival 1990) and Alison MacLean's “Kitchen sink” (in competition Cannes, 1989).

LBW's cinematographer Ray Argall worked together with Sarah Watt producing her short films. So, it is not remarkable, that he came out of “retirement” to produce her first feature movie together, as well. His career started long time ago, when he received the AFI Award for “Best Director” in 1990 for “Return home” he had already produced a couple of films.

The most remarkable cast in LBW is William McInnes. He is Sarah Watt's husband and as she had also to face cancer two years ago, he probably could really feel the role of Nick. McInnes is well known for his lead acting in “Seachange” and mini-series “My Brother”.

Even if the role of Meryl is her first lead acting, Justine Clarke acted together with the “big ones” of the film industry like Cate Blanchett (in “Hedda Gabler”) or worked together with Sam Neill in “The Brush off”.

In my opinion, the casts were perfect and well chosen and guaranteed LBW's success. On the other hand it is LBW's style that is totally remarkable, created by the filmmakers as a team.

General position of Australian films

“Look Both Ways” was released in August 2005 in Australia, so you can describe it as a movie of the modern times. Most of the Australian movies, I have seen, look a bit trashy. But this film is different, it is very artistic. And maybe that is the sign of Australian cinema nowadays. Australian cinema seems to be in a process of change. Like “Little Fish”, “Look Both Ways” is not only different in its style, but even in its content. Thus, this movie could have a chance on the international stage. Many older Australian film's style, speech and topics were very specific for the Australian people and very hardly understandable for international spectators. Maybe that will change, because artistic movies with global subjects might be successful beyond the boundaries. Even and because of this very own Australian style...

Genre and Australian Cinema

When Sarah Watt was planning her first feature film she was thinking of a love comedy. And actually “Look Both Ways” is about a love story. But during the production the main topic changed to an overall “thinking about your life and death” one. So, I would rather classify the movie as a drama. It is its variety that makes “Look Both Ways” very interesting, but even hard to classify. It has a lot of different classical genre elements, for example when Meryl stumbles and falls down, everybody may identify the slapstick. Or when we think about Anna's misery about being unintentional pregnant, that might be a part of a woman's movie, a maternal

melodrama (could also be woman's movie love story). Beside these classical genre indicators there is one typical stylistic element as well. The use of animations. If you look into the biography of "Look Both Ways's" director, Sarah Watt, it might not surprise you. But, however, it caused the biggest discussion about this movie. I read heaps of reviews people praised "Look Both Ways's" excellent story and performance of the lead actors. But on the other hand they questioned the animations. Actually, there are two different animations included in the film: the cartoons (drawings by Sarah Watt) and the photo collages. The paintings represent Meryl's thoughts about disasters. The photo collages express Nick's mind about death. In addition, there are also a few animations used for his thoughts. For example at the cricket field when he "looks into Andy's head". Nevertheless, we would never call the film an animated movie. If there is a technical approach finding the type of genre it could be like this:

First, the main topic is to find. Second the subtopic is to find. Third is to figure out the main styles / formats of the movie.

As I do so, I come to the conclusion, that "Look Both Ways" is about the developing of five main characters in three days (Friday to Sunday), facing their personal fates. That is the issue of a classic drama. In addition the film deals with a romance between the characters Meryl and Nick (romance). As it is treated in an enjoyable manner, we would rather call it a romantic comedy. Finally it uses animations to create depth of the characters, let the spectators see Nick's and Meryl's minds.

So, under the line, in my opinion "Look Both Ways" is a part-animated, romantic comedian drama.

As I mentioned above, "Look Both Ways" is an example of the Australian cinema nowadays. And I figured out, that it has "only" the Australian style dealing with global contents. It means that the film is not dealing with a special Australian topic, like many dramas are about the social problems of Australians in films.

In my opinion, there are two main things characterizing a movie. On the one hand the topic, that might be very special for a certain region (e.g. Aborigines in Australia or Sioux in America or gangs in Sao Paulo, Brazil), and on the other hand a movie's style including casts, shooting locations, language etc. If both is very typical, like a movie about an African tribe with African actors filmed in Kenya, the nationality is very obvious and you might think of an typical African film. But, especially if the subject of a movie is a global one, it might be more difficult to identify it as a film of a certain nationality. "Look Both Ways" is a movie of that kind. I think, its subject is rather a general one than a specific Australian. But its style indicates it certainly as an Australian movie, as it was shot in Adelaide with Australian actors who all have that specific Australian accent.

References (additional to above mentioned)

- x <http://www.wikipedia.org>
- x <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0382806/awards>
- x <http://www.hollywood.com/celebs/detail/id/1343070>
- x <http://au.movies.yahoo.com/Look+Both+Ways/movie/13891/>