

# MCC231 Australian Cinema

## *Critical Film Review*

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### **Romulus, My Father**

based on the *Memoirs of Raimond Gaita*

*"Raimond Gaita's memoir Romulus, My Father ... explores migration, marriage and madness in passionate doses; themes delivered with an alertness of mind, a subtlety of humour and a fully exposed and often frightened heart."*

**Tony Maniaty, The Australian**

**Starring** *Eric Bana,*

*Franka Potente and Marton Csokas*

**Director** *Richard Roxburgh*

**Duration** 105 minutes

**Genre** Australian, biographical, drama and

coming of age film

**Released** 31 May 2007



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PLAY TRAILER

*by Honi Graf*

# ACT I

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## CAST AND CREW

**Director** **Richard Roxburgh**

**Scriptwriter** **Nick Drake**

**Cinematographer** **Geoffrey Simpson**

**Composer**– Basil Hogios

**Producer** – **Robert Connolly**

**Production Company** – Dendy Films/Footprint Films

### Lead Actors

<u><a href="#">Eric Bana</a></u>	...	<u><a href="#">Romulus</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Franka Potente</a></u>	...	<u><a href="#">Christina/Mutti</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Marton Csokas</a></u>	...	<u><a href="#">Hora</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Kodi Smit-McPhee</a></u>	...	<u><a href="#">Raimond</a></u>
<u><a href="#">Russell Dykstra</a></u>	...	Mitru
<u><a href="#">Jacek Koman</a></u>	...	Vacek
<u><a href="#">Alethea McGrath</a></u>	...	Mrs. Lillie
<u><a href="#">Esme Melville</a></u>	...	Miss Collard
<u><a href="#">Terry Norris</a></u>	...	Tom Lillie

**Genre:** Biopic, Drama, Coming of age

**Release Date/s** **Cinema** - 31 May 2007<sup>1</sup> **DVD** - 5 December 2007

### Box Office

George Miller's animated musical Happy Feet was the top-grossing Australian film in 2007 cumulating a total of \$31.8 million in ticket sales. Following in at second place was *Romulus, My Father* with \$2.6 million taken at the box office<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> MPDAA: figures to 31/12/07 as at 11/01/08

<sup>2</sup>

## **Awards: 6 wins and 19 nominations**

### Australian Film Institute Awards

2007 **Won** AFI Award Best Film Robert Connolly, John Maynard

Best Lead Actor, Eric Bana

Best Supporting Actor, Marton Csokas

Young Actor's Award, Kodi Smit-McPhee

**Nominated** AFI Award Best Cinematography, Geoffrey Simpson

Best Costume Design, Jodie Fried

Best Direction, Richard Roxburgh

Best Editing, Suresh Ayyar

Best Lead Actor, Kodi Smit-McPhee

Best Lead Actress, Franka Potente

Best Original Music Score, Basil Hogios

Best Production Design, Robert Cousins

Best Screenplay (Original or Adapted), Nick Drake

Best Sound, Sam Petty , Gary Wilkins , Phil Heywood

Best Supporting Actor, Russell Dykstra

Best Supporting Actress, Esme Melville

### Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards

2008 **Won** FCCA Award Best Actor - Supporting Role, Marton Csokas

Special Achievement Award, Kodi Smit-McPhee

**Nominated** FCCA Award Best Actor, Eric Bana

Best Actor - Supporting Role, Kodi Smit-McPhee

Best Cinematography, Geoffrey Simpson

Best Director, [Richard Roxburgh](#)

Best Editing, [Suresh Ayyar](#)

Best Film

Best Music Score, [Basil Hogios](#)

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## **Bibliography of Interviews**

There are countless interviews on the internet which were too lengthy to list here so I have reproduced only a few. The DVD of the film has a fantastic special features disc that is worth viewing. Items of interest include:

1. Director's Video Diary – Richard Roxburgh
2. Popcorn Taxi Q&A Session with Director Richard Roxburgh, Producer Robert Connolly and Cinematographer Geoffrey Simpson.
3. Panel Session at the Sydney Writer's Festival
4. Interview with Author Raimond Gaita
5. AT THE MOVIES Interview with Richard Roxburgh
6. Australian Teachers of Media Study Guide
7. Original Theatrical Trailer

**Richard Roxburgh print review in the *Sunday Magazine***

**Eric Bana - Print review in *Good Weekend Magazine***

**Writer – Raimond Gaita print review in *The Monthly***

*I know of no other book where the love between father and son  
has been more beautifully expressed.*

Robert Manne

Raimond Gaita wrote the book to bear witness to his father's life in three short weeks. He said he has only met two or three people who shared the same virtues as his father who was a deeply compassionate man. He even refused inheritances that were due to him and instead offered them to his sister. His father's turn of calm to madness was the hardest thing for him to watch saying "even the strongest of people can be undone by misfortune."

*The philosopher Plato said that those who love and seek wisdom are clinging in recollection to things they once saw. On many occasions in my life I have had the need to say, and thankfully have been able to say: I know what a good workman is; I know what an honest man is; I know what friendship is; I know because I remember these*

*things in the person of my father.*  
**Raimond Gaita**

*Extraordinary and beautiful...a profound meditation on love and death, madness and truth, judgement and compassion.*

Richard Flanagan, Sunday Age

*As compelling to read as a novel...the often beautiful evocations of landscape and the episodes of high drama painstakingly recalled...are likely to ensure that Romulus, My Father approaches the success of the book it has already been compared to, the bestselling A Fortunate Life.*

Jamie Grant, Quadrant

*Gaita brilliantly captures the distressing immigrant experience of struggle and displacement in the rugged Australian landscape. This is a deeply personal account of passion, deceit and tragedy.*

Who Weekly

### **Bibliography of Published Film Reviews**



**Romulus, My Father Print review in *The Weekend Australian***

**Kodi Smit-McPhee Print review in the *Age Magazine***

**Raimond Gaita Print review in *The Monthly***

*Australian households spent \$779 million on going to the movies in 2003/04, compared to \$1.6 billion on books.*

**Australian Film Commission,**  
<http://www.afc.gov.au/GTP/cinema.html>

*"The singular thing about this story, given its tragic dimension, its almost biblical reach, is how strangely uplifting it is. Somehow through the pain, there is not only a sense of possibility, but of promise, held in the relationship of that father and son"*

**Richard Roxburgh**

Richard Roxburgh in an interview with Margaret Pomeranz on *The Movie Show*, said he had always been attracted to the migrant story. "When I was a kid at primary school there were a lot of sudden, new Yugoslav immigrants and Greek kids who arrived and I was really attracted to their life and their stories and stories about movement of those people through time. My sister gave me the book for my birthday eight years ago now and I just read it and called her the next day and said, "I'm going to make a film of this," and she said, "I knew you'd say that."

"But on personal level, I suppose there was, you know, a kid in the bush and I suppose that appealed to me, and some of the stories about, you know, a mother in some pain, some of that appealed to me as well. What I encountered really was Rai Gaita's probably natural reluctance to have the thing turned into a film because it's a deeply personal family tragedy, and to hand that over to, you know, artists, to make of it what they would, was not something that he would countenance very easily."

"I certainly don't want to diminish what any of the actors on my film did, but it did make acting seem like it was a bit of a walk in the park. Sorry, actors on *Romulus, My Father*."

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s1912108.htm>

*"Eric Bana in a screen performance that is arguably his best so far"*

IF Magazine

*"A triumph of powerful cinema"*

Australian Financial Review

*"I know I will never forget it"*

Helen Garner (The Monthly)

## On-line Resources and Reviews

<http://www.romulusmyfather.com.au/press.html>

<http://www.afc.gov.au/GTP/cinema.html>

[www.imdb.com/title](http://www.imdb.com/title)

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies>

### 1. At the Movies: Romulus, My Father Interview

**Summary:** Margaret Pomeranz speaks to Director Richard Roxburgh

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s1912108.htm> - 23 May 2007

### 2. At the Movies: Romulus, My Father

**Summary:** Based on the life of Raimond Gaita about his embattled migrant family in post-war Australia. It is

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s1912077.htm> 23 May 2007

### 3. At the Movies: AFI Nominations

**Summary:** Kodi Smit-McPhee **Romulus, My Father**

<http://www.abc.net.au/atthemovies/txt/s2069395.htm> - 24 Oct 2007

## ACT II

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### Critical Review of *Romulus, My Father* and accompanying Literature

*Romulus, My Father, which I read when it first came out in 1998, was the most beautiful homage to a father by a son that I had ever read and I considered it to be a landmark in Australia literature. I have since re-read it several times. It has become a deeply cherished literary terrain for me and continues to be an influence in my life, a reference point that I go to with pleasure and confidence when I need to be reassured about the good things in this world. It is an inspirational book – inspired by love.*

Alex Miller, *The Daily Telegraph*

(Winner of the Myles Franklin and Commonwealth Writers Awards)

#### **Plot**

Set in the late 1950's and early 1960's, *Romulus, My Father* is the true story of a boy Raimond and his relationship with his father Romulus and estranged wife and mother Christina in rural outback New South Wales as they struggle in the face of hardship, depression and isolation. It is a story of impossible and strained relationships that ultimately break as they are forced to face stark realities and make life changing decisions that are irrevocable.

#### **Synopsis**

A turbulent and tormented but true, post-war era story of a migrant family living remotely in the Australian outback, most of which is scarred by a marriage of convenience, infidelity, skewed passions, mental illness, distant parenting, post-natal depression and suicide. A terrible but true tale of the fragile and unforgiving relationships between parents and their children, notably between the absent mother and her son and the estranged husband. It is a telling tale of human frailty, dignity and compassion entwined with an aussie determination to 'make the best of things' in the face of adversity.



## **My Commentary**

A harsh journey into real life as seen through the eyes of a precocious boy struggling to cope with a distant and uncaring mother and a disciplined, hardworking and unrelenting father in isolated Australia in the late fifties to early sixties.

Had it not been for this *Australian Cinema* journalism unit I would not ordinarily have seen this film. I ignored it at the movies, even though it starred Eric Bana who I have watched since his *Full Frontal* and *Chopper* days as the title *Romulus*, sounded very old fashioned and reminded me of roman times (*Troy*). The marketing cover of the father on a motorbike and his son running alongside also did not appeal to me as I lived my life without my German father and I did not wish to see a male version of an immigrant father struggling to make a living in post war Australia; it cut too close to the bone. My mother, on the other hand who probably could relate to the man and the film and who grew up in that era, did go see it at the movies saying, "it was good". Not a great definition or reason to convince me to see a movie as she thought *Chuck and Larry* was "hilarious"! Nevertheless, as I had to watch it for my unit I rented it at 'Blockbuster'. I sat down on a Sunday afternoon and watched it, with my eyes wide open. Geoffrey Simpson's cinematography, and Basil Hogios's soundtrack were outstanding features of the film that played on our stunning landscapes and rural life showing true, emotional intelligence of the film, its surroundings,

scenes and the characters. The early morning light, sunset or 'day after' scenes used by Simpson made the Australian outback stand out from all other films of this nature that I have experienced. He moved me so much that I enjoyed a film that is extremely slow, drawn out, hard to watch sometimes and unrelenting. He is a true genius. By scrolling through his photography archive website I can see why he was chosen.

The use of the bees and swinging light bulb were interesting inclusions and make for an interesting man and story to tell.

The mother, "mutti, Christine", is a woman who always wanted what she didn't have; the finer things in life. Working away in Melbourne in the department stores she comes home infrequently to tell her son of the customers she has served. Later she buys a dress for £20 that would have been the equivalent to a months rent in the grotty back hotel room she shared with Mitru and her baby, instead of buying nappies and food and paying the bills. She does not see the shame and instead tries to use her sexuality to make her husband forgive her, she gets violently attacked instead. She always uses her sexuality to make men 'fall' for her wily ways. She left Romulus for his best friends brother, her son Rai caught her having sex for money in a disused building, she tried unsuccessfully to dance to a romantic song with Rai in a coffee shop, she probably tried to sleep her way to success but she died trying, or rather she gave up and succumb to the numbness of no

life by taking her own. Her dismal life with a new baby in a grungy room at the back of a pub in Maryborough, with no money and no nice clothes were probably all factors in her post-natal depression that eventually led to her own and Mitrus's eventual suicide. Mitru jumped off a clock tower onto his own knife and she later ended it with pills which her son Rai witnessed twice.

Romulus the father was a strikingly handsome man which was made mention in the film with the scene in the soda shop where the women are staring at him. Rai notices and tells Mutti later perhaps in an attempt to see if she has feelings for him and will get back together "guess what? Women smile at Poppy a lot" she replies "I smiled at him once too you know". She then sleeps with her son instead of Romulus leading the viewer to think that her presence at the farm is just for the sake of their son, as in a separated or marriage breakdown.

It is hard at first for the boy Rai to learn that he can't make his mother and father stay together although he wished they did. This is quite vivid when he tells the elderly neighbours "when she stays she and Papa stay in the same bed. But she doesn't stay long. I think she should stay and be more of a family. The wise old lady replies "sometimes what you think and what you get aren't the same things"

One thing of notice, which you don't normally see in periods or dramas was the strong emotional bonds between all the male characters in the film. The best friend, Hora was always there for all them. He was there

for his brother Mitru when Christine spent the rent money on a dress by bringing him food, offering him a hug and time to talk. He spent time talking with Romulus and Rai and stayed to help manage the chickens when Romulus broke his leg and also gave money to Rai when he spent time in the mental institution. The homeless man was also there for the boy when he needed someone to drive the car to make the delivery, just as the Rai rode his bike up some rocks to give him fresh eggs. The strength of mateship shone through and should be seen as a great triumph for all men and a movie for all men to watch with their sons, fathers, friends or brothers. If there was a genre for mens films of "mateship" this one would be included along with *Romper Stomper*, *Chopper* and *Wog Boy*.

The use of the words 1961 and 1962 on the screen midway through the film were completely irrelevant and did not add to the film, in fact it distracted me from the scene. I had to think what years the film meant to portray then I realised that there wasn't a year reference used at the start of the film so was either a missed editing sequence or referenced for some purpose I do not know.

Romulus, determined to give the boy a mother, tries his hand at a mail order bride who later deceives him out of his hard earned money and never shows up. Determined to give his boy a good start in life he sends him to St Josephs boarding school where the boy turns on his mother and rejects her love as she rejected him. Refusing her to come

to stay at the house and visiting him at school again. The following scene shows her taking pills again, flashbacks to first arriving in the country, funeral scene and Romulus stops bike on road to cry. He collects her clothes and the baby (who had been given away for adoption as Christine couldn't cope with the depression to look after her) and he is left bringing up a baby who is illegitimately not his.

This is when the depression hits Romulus, hard. He spends time in a mental institution and Raimond Gaita has often talked in interviews that this was the toughest thing he had to face. Seeing his strong father turn into a vegetable.

All true stories must come to an end, and this one had me guessing to the final scenes if Romulus was going to end it for the both of them in the car or off the cliff. The bees saved the day.

Finally, I enjoyed the film. The stark reality real life in country early sixties Australia. The realism of male suicide, post natal depression and male bonding is not often portrayed in films depicted of that era. No gushing war brides, or uplifting romantic happy ending. Just a simple story about a man and a boy growing up and learning from their mistakes in life.

## Critical uptake of the film

The book was first released in 1998 under the same name by Raimond Gaita. Based on his own life. Published by Text Publishing, Melbourne, it received rave reviews. Although it didn't take much in the box office only \$2.5 million, it had a relatively low budget considering the pulling power of Eric Bana, the story led the actors choice. It did however, receive outstanding reviews and awards worldwide.

*"Enthralling...a tale about madness, suicide, affliction and betrayal...a rare and passionate book, the like of which has seldom been seen in Australia."*

Sydney Morning Herald

*"A sustained dialogue with the past from which the present has been born, and an extended essay on madness and death, love and friendship, beauty, truth and morality...Romulus fills every page with his presence."*

The Age

## At the Movies – TV Show ABC

23 May 2007

### Romulus, My Father

Margaret ★★★★★  
David ★★★★★

*Review by Margaret Pomeranz*

Richard Roxburgh has taken on the mantle of film director with ROMULUS, MY FATHER, an adaptation of the memoirs of Raimond Gaita, who's parents Romulus, (ERIC BANA), and mother, (CHRISTINA FRANKA POTENTE), were post-war immigrants to Australia. By 1960 they were doing it tough on a farm outside Maryborough. It was too much for Christina. She left and returned only intermittently. For young Rai, (KODI SMIT-McPHEE), his mother's arrivals brought joy and pain. When Christina sets up house with another man, Mitro, (RUSSEL DYKSTRA) and has a baby young Rai is sent to live with her.

ROMULUS, MY FATHER, is told very much from young Rai's perspective and Richard Roxburgh was either very lucky or very astute to cast young KODI SMIT-McPHEE who has to bear an incredible load in this film and is so convincing apart from just a couple of moments. And both ERIC BANA and FRANKA POTENTE are excellent. The world, the community of immigrant men without women is beautifully drawn.

And the times of the early 60's is meticulously created, the poverty of that era for so many.

But the core of the film is a child caught up in his love for both his parents, both tough relationships in many ways. This film is another major achievement for our industry, it is ultimately a very quietly moving experience.



### **Circumstance of Production and Release and Box Office**

Upon reading a copy of Gaita's memoirs in 1999 that his sister had sent him for his birthday from start to finish, Richard Roxburgh decided there and then he must make it into a film. He made countless phone calls to the publisher and she said that "he was too late as other people had already offered to turn it into a film". Gaita flatly refused to turn it into a film but Roxburgh was determined and finally got his home phone number from his harassed publisher and sought to convince him to let him turn his life into a film project in person over dinner. It worked.

Production was eight weeks shooting on location in New South Wales with the help of the Film Finance Commission with a considerably small budget.

### **@THE BOX OFFICE**

Total box office receipts in Australia during 2007 was \$895.4 million, an increase of 3.2 per cent on the previous year. US films took the main share of the Australian box office in 2007, accounting for 77.7 per cent of receipts, which is a decrease from 2006's figure of 85.9 per cent. The dominance of US films in the Australian market is consistent with the performance of US films in most markets internationally, in terms of release numbers as well as box office share. UK films ranked second in terms of theatrical market share, taking 13.9 per cent of the Australian box office, up from 2006's 5.3 per cent. Australian films ranked third with 4.0 per cent.



There were 314 films released into the Australian market in 2007: • 25 of these were Australian (20 feature films and five documentaries) representing only 8 per cent of films released; 172 were from the US (or 54.8 per cent of films released); and 32 were from the UK (or 13.8 per cent of films released). In addition, 74 films released in earlier years were still screening. This brought the total number of films earning box office in 2007 to 388, of which 30 (7.7 per cent) were Australian, 224 (57.5 per cent) were from the US, and 37 (9.5 per cent) were from the UK.

The Australian Film Commission ranked the Top 50 films in Australia in 2007 by reported gross Australian box office as at 31 December 2007. The only Australian film to get a ranking was *Happy Feet* which was released just in time for Christmas in December 2006 grossing over \$20 million in 2007. *Romulus* never made the top 50 although it made the most after *Happy Feet* grossing \$2.1 million and more than *Rogue* which grossed \$1.7 million.

For individual films, DVD release can provide an ongoing revenue stream many years after a film's brief cinematic run. *Chopper*, which grossed almost \$6 million at the box office in 2000, was released on DVD in 2001. In 2006, six years after its original theatrical release, it was the sixth highest selling Australian movie title on DVD. *Romulus* made it very fast onto the DVD shelves in under six months in order to capture the home DVD market. Its release on the cinema in May/July 2007 meant that it had to compete during school holidays with the hugely successful US film market including *The Simpsons Movie* [released 26 Jul 07] #4 ranking, *Knocked Up* [released 5 July 07] #14 ranking and *Oceans 13* #18 ranking. It was interesting to note that Australians went to the movies 180 million times in 1928, when the first talking pictures arrived. That's nearly 30 admissions per person, compared to 4.7 per person in 2002.<sup>3</sup> Based on those figures we are still watching films, but not as much in the Cinemas. We are watching movies at home, especially as some of them tend to convert to DVD if they didn't get a good run at the box office, are romantic or lengthy dramas, saving the big screen for musicals or sci-fi blockbusters high in technical visual effects or Dolby digital surround sound that you can't get at home unless you spend a few thousand dollars on a home theatre system, which more and more people are opting for these days when they build or buy a home. The question on everyone's lips is "does it have room for a home theatre?"

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<sup>3</sup> The Australian Film Commission, <http://www.afc.gov.au/GTP/cinema.html>



## Pre and Post-Production Works

Writer, Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Composer, Lead Actors

### Raimond Gaita

Born in Germany 1946, he is Professor of Moral Philosophy at King's College University of London, and Professor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University. His memoir *Romulus, My Father* won the 1998 Victorian Premier's Literary Award. Gaita's other books include, *Good And Evil: An Absolute Conception*, *A Common Humanity: Thinking About Love & Truth & Justice*, which was one of the Economist's best books of 2000, and *The Philosopher's Dog*, which explores our relationship to animals and the natural world and was short listed for the New South Wales Premier's Award and the Age Book of the Year, both in 2003.



### Richard Roxburgh

Born in country town Albury in Victoria, *Romulus* was Roxburgh's debut as a Film Director and is his only one to date. He has commented in numerous interviews how difficult he felt the process was compared to acting and doesn't think he will again anytime soon.



He has however, directed and starred in over 40 film, television and theatre productions in Australia and overseas from the *Dastardly Duke* in *Moulin Rouge* in (2000), *Count Dracula* in *Van Helsing* (2004) to a small part on *Mission Impossible II* (2000). He is the currently starring in an ABC television production alongside Susie Porter, Gia Carides and Paula Duncan in the lead role of Travel Writer Art Watkins on *East of Everything* screening Sunday nights. He has been nominated 6 times for film awards and has won 3.

1998 **Won** FCCA Award Best Actor – Male for [Doing Time for Patsy Cline](#) (1997)

1997 **Won** AFI Award Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role for [Doing Time for Patsy Cline](#) (1997)

1996 **Won** Silver Logie Most Outstanding Actor for ["Blue Murder"](#) (1995) (mini)

2008 **Nominated** FCCA Award Best Director for [Romulus, My Father](#) (2007)

2007 **Nominated** AFI Award Best Direction for [Romulus, My Father](#) (2007)

2007 **Nominated** Silver Logie Most Outstanding Actor for [The Silence](#) (2006) (TV)

2006 **Nominated** AFI Award Best Lead Actor in Television Drama for [The Silence](#) (2006) (TV)

[2002 Nominated](#) Actor Outstanding Performance by the Cast of a Theatrical Motion Picture for [Moulin Rouge!](#) (2001) Shared with: [Jim Broadbent](#), [Nicole Kidman](#), [John Leguizamo](#), [Ewan McGregor](#)

[2001 Nominated](#) AFI Award Best Actor in a Supporting Role for [Moulin Rouge!](#) (2001)

[1999 Nominated](#) AFI Award Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role for [Passion](#) (1999)

Best known as director and writer of *The Bank*, and producer with John Maynard, of the award-winning film, *The Boys*. **Robert Connolly**, was originally turned down by Raimond Gaita to produce the film. He then received a call from Richard Roxburgh help produce it. As he still wanted to turn the project into a film he said “yes”. In 1998 he was named by *Variety Magazine* as one of the 10 best emerging producers in the world.



### **Geoffrey Simpson ACS**

Famous for his cinematography of stunning backdrops and landscapes full of evocative and creative imagery that fills the screen, Geoffrey Simpson, one of Australia’s most successful cinematographers, has a prolific career in Australia and overseas. His first scenes were filmed back in 1975 as second assistant camera operator on the Australian classic *Sunday Too Far Away*.



He is never seen far from the lens and has recently finished shooting Aussie drama, crime, mystery, romance film *The Tender Hook* starring Hugo Weaving and Rose Byrne after *The Starter Wife* (2007) TV mini-series filmed on Hollywood on the Gold Coast starring our own Judy Davis and Miranda Otto along with Hollywood lister Debra Messing from *Will and Grace* fame.

Before *Rumulus*, Simpson was behind the camera for many local and overseas films turning the harsh Australian landscape into breathtaking scene stealing imagery. His Australian films include *Oscar and Lucinda* (1997), *Some Mother's Son* (1996) aka *Sons and*

Warriors (video catalogue title), Shine (1996), The Last Days of Chez Nous (1992), The Shiralee (1987) (mini) TV mini-series, Playing Beatie Bow (1986) Mad Max 2 (1981) (camera operator: second unit) (as Geoff Simpson) aka Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior (USA), The Survivor (1981) (additional photographer) Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) (electrician).

**Eric Bana**, born Eric Banadinovich in Melbourne in 1968 has won 7 performance awards and also been nominated for 7 throughout his acting career.



2007 Won AFI Award Best Lead Actor for [Romulus, My Father](#) (2007)

2001 Won FCCA Award Best Actor – Male for [Chopper](#) (2000)

2000 Won IF Award Best Actor for [Chopper](#) (2000)

2000 Won AFI Award Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role for [Chopper](#) (2000)

2000 Won Best Actor for [Chopper](#) (2000) [Stockholm Film Festival](#)

1997 Won Logie Most Popular Comedy Personality (Full Frontal) as Peioda

His first Australian film since *The Nugget* in 2002, Bana has starred in over 21 feature films and TV shows and come a long way from his early stand-up days as ocker larrikan “Peioda or Peter” in TV show *Full Frontal* to providing the voice for an animated shark called ‘Anchor’ in *Finding Nemo* to providing the beef in sci fi action thriller *The Incredible Hulk*, and bio-epic *Chopper* and *Troy*. With a focus now on “G” rated films, the *Chopper* era seems long behind him. His *Chopper* Read impersonation was eerily uncanny which put Hollywood on notice and Bana on the ‘A’ list for one of the best performances and probably the hardest of his life. To step into a hitman’s shoes of his nature, pile on 10 kilos of body fat and get the mannerisms and lingo down pat was a masterpiece. We can dismiss *Troy* and *Lucky for You* as mid life mistakes.

He will soon be re-animated in Adam Elliot’s *Mary and Max*; an Australian animation feature film alongside Toni Collette and Barry Humphries due for release in 2008/9. He will also star in *Star Trek* (2008), *The Time Traveler’s Wife* (2008) and *Factor X* (2010).

## Franka Potente

A German actress who was first discovered in a nightclub restroom, she co-starred alongside Matt Damon in the action thrillers *The Bourne Identity* (2002) and *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004). I remember seeing her in the earlier action film *Run Lola Run* (1998) with her flaming red hair. Her intensity and sense of self, probably due to her German heritage, makes her a force to be reckoned with. I suspect more fine performances from her. Potente has been kept busy since last year's screening and has made or near completed a number of German films and US TV appearances including *Angels' Choice* (2009) (*pre-production*), *Pope Joan* (2009) (*pre-production*), *Brücke, Die* (2008) (TV) (*post-production*), *The Argentine* (2008), *Guerrilla* (2008), *Traque, La* (2008) (TV), *Eichmann* (2007) and also made it to one episode on US cop show *The Shield*.



## Marton Csokas

A New Zealander born to a Hungarian father, Csokas is hardly recognisable as *Celeborn* in *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) and *The Return of the King* (2003) produced prior to *Romulus*.



My fond remembrance of his previous works was his cool screen presence as *Cady* in the 2001 New Zealand film *Rain*.

## Kodhi -Smit-McPhee

A little powerhouse of emotion and character for such a tender age. He was successfully screen tested early on the casting process but was made to wait as a further 5,000 kids were tested for the part. None stood up to his strength. He naturally won the *Best Young Actor Award* at the AFI's in 2007 and received a *Special Achievement Award* by the Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards for his role as Raimond Gaita.



He has also starred in film and television productions including *The King* (2007) (TV) *The King: The Story of Graham Kennedy, Monarch Cove*" 4 episodes, 2006), *Nightmares and Dreamscapes: From the*

Stories of Stephen King" and is currently filming *The Road* due for release in 2008.

## **Contemporary critique of the general position in the Australian Marketplace and its Value**

The current ranking of Australian films in comparison to overseas markets is that overall Australia ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in box office revenues<sup>4</sup> and in 2006 only had a 5% stake in domestic revenues for domestic film production<sup>5</sup> compared to the US which had 19% and the US which had a 94% share. In 2002, nearly 90 per cent of Australia's 14 to 24-year-olds went to the cinema, an average of 10.2 times each. Teenagers and 20-somethings are the core of the clientele because more of them go to the pictures, and they go more frequently. This probably explains why there were more teenage pictures or romantic comedies successfully produced in the top 50 movies for revenue. Cinema attendance has increased across the board since the mid 1980s, but most noticeably in the older age groups. In 2002, 57 per cent of Australians aged 50 and over went to the pictures at least once, compared to 29 per cent in 1986. And since 1994 cinema-goers over 50 have been attending more frequently than those aged 35–49 (an average of 8.1 times in 2002, compared to 6.7 for 35–49 year olds). *Romulus*, has the appeal for the older 'baby boomer' generation rather than the younger generation even though it centres on a young boy. The dramatic, and pivotal plot themes are too engrossing and drawn out for youth appeal as they would be prone to walking out or switching off due to boredom.

### **Film Genre**

I classify *Romulus* into four genres; **Australian, Biographical, Drama and Coming of Age.**

### **Australian**

Looking back on the early days of the Australian film industry and the Australianness of the films, I recall images of luscious landscapes, windswept surf, rugged desert or bush. Themes of inspiration, hope, pride, and a determination to succeed against all hardships, failures and some romance. *Romulus* fits this genre. It is a film about life in

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<sup>4</sup> **The Australian Film Commission**, Australia and the World: International Comparisons, <http://www.afc.gov.au/GTP/cinema.html>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Screen Digest; European Audiovisual Observatory; Centre national de la cinématographie France; Canadian Film and Television Production Association; British Film Institute; Screen International in <http://www.afc.gov.au/GTP/cinema.html>

Australia which was written, filmed, produced, directed, financed and starred Australians as did the following great Aussie films:

*The Sentimental Bloke* (1913)

*In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933)

*Kokoda Front Line* (1942)

*They're a Weird Mob* (1966)

*Sunday Too Far Away* (1977)

*The Man from Snowy River* (1980)

*Crocodile Dundee* (1986)

*The Castle* (1997)

*The Dish* (2000)

*Australia* (2008)

## **Biographical**

Biopic Films (or biographical pictures) are a sub-genre of drama and epic film genres. Films of this nature depict and dramatize the life of an important or historical event or actual person (or group) from the past or present era. Films of this nature are usually written as a memoir or novel first before being turned into a film which Romulus, Raimond Gaitas real father was based. Some well known Australian biopics include:

*The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906)

*The Legend of Damien Parer* (1965)

*Newsfront* (1978)

*My Brilliant Career* (1979)

*The Year my Voice Broke* (1987)

*Evil Angels* (1991)

*Shine* (1990)

*Chopper* (2000)

*Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002)

Biopics differ from films “based on a true story” or “historic films” in that they attempt to comprehensively tell a person’s life story or at least the most historically important years of their lives. Because the figures portrayed are actual people, whose actions and characteristics are known, biopics are considered some of the most demanding films of actors and actresses. Traditionally biographical films focus on beloved, historically important people. However, recently some have focused on more dubious figures such as *Chopper* Read and lesser known figures such as David Helfgott in *Shine* and Lindy Chamberlain in *Evil Angels*.

Big-screen biopics cross many genre types, since these films might showcase a western outlaw (*Ned Kelly*); a criminal (*Chopper*); a musical composer (*Shine*); a religious figure (*Evil Angels*) or leader of a movement; a war-time military hero (*Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli*); an entertainer (*The King: Graeme Kennedy story*); an artist (*Sirens* based on Norman Lindsay); an inventor, scientist, or doctor; a politician or President; a sports hero (*Phar Lap*) or celebrity; or an adventurer.

In many cases, these films put an emphasis on the larger events (wartime, political or social conditions) surrounding the person's entire life as they rise to fame and glory or above their lot in life. Some begin with the person's childhood, but others concentrate on adult achievements.

## **Drama**

Dramatic films are serious films that present stories with settings or life situations that portray realistic characters in conflict with either themselves, others, or forces of nature. A dramatic film shows us human beings at their best, their worst, and everything in-between. Subject themes have various kinds of dramatic plots, twists and turns. Dramatic films are probably the largest film genre because they include a broad spectrum of films.

Dramatic themes often include current issues, social problems, mental illness or disease, injustices, drug addiction, poverty, political unrest, the corruption of power, alcoholism, sexual inequality or sexual liaisons, corruption, violence toward women or other explosive issues. These films have successfully drawn attention to the issues by taking advantage of the topical interest of the subject.

Social dramas or "message films" expressed powerful lessons, such as the harsh conditions of farming life in the colonial or post war days. Problems of the poor and dispossessed and mental illness have often been the themes of great films, including *Romulus*.

Films such *The Piano* (Jan Campion, 1993), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir 1975) *Monkey Grip* (Ken Cameron, 1982), *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (Gillian Armstrong, 1992) and *Lantana* (2001) are dramas but there are so many overlapping themes. An Australian drama/biopic to match or outdo all previous Australian bio epic period drama films will be the release in 2008/9 of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* starring Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, Jack Thompson, David Wenham, Ben Mendelsohn and David Gulpilil . Some good Australian dramas to watch include:

*Hard to Windward* (1958)

*Picnic At Hanging Rock* (1975)

*The Devils Playground* (1976)

*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1976)

*Proof* (1991)

*The Piano* (1993)

*Lantana* (2001)

*Little Fish* (2005)

*Three Dollars* (2005)

*Noise* (2007)

### **Coming of Age**

Coming of age films represent a young person's transition from adolescence to adulthood. The age at which this transition takes place varies as does the nature of the transition. It can be a simple legal convention or can be part of a ritualistic cycle, similar to those once practiced by many societies. In societies today, such a change is



associated with the age of sexual maturity (mid-adolescence); as well as it is associated with an age of responsibility.

The term *coming of age* is also used in reference to different media depictions in stories, songs and movies that have a young character or characters who, by the end of the story, has developed in some way, through the undertaking of responsibility, or by learning a harsh lesson. This was true for Rai when he rejects his mother's love after so long yearning for it and declaring it's better that she not come home at all. He had 'grown up' to not need his mother. This was his coming of age turning point which appeared after he went to boarding school, before his mother died. Coming of Age films to see include:

*Stork* (1972)

*Stormboy* (1977)

*My Brilliant Career* (1979)

*Annie's Coming Out* (1984)

*Malcolm* (1986)

*The Year my Voice Broke* (1987)

*Flirting* (1990)

*Romper Stomper* (1992)

*Strictly Ballroom* (1992)

*Bootmen* (2000)

*December Boys* (2007)

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### **Other**

<http://www.filmsite.org/biopics.html>

<http://www.filmsite.org/dramafilms.html>

*Lecture Notes and Hand outs from MCC231 Garry Gillard*

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