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The Tracker (Rolf de Heer 2002) and *The Proposition* (John Hillcoat 2005): Two Westerns that Weren't?

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Rolf de Heer's 2002 film *The Tracker* is an allegorical work of occasionally heavy-handed didacticism dealing with race relations between indigenous Australians and European Australians in the 1920s. Critics were quick to pigeonhole its genre, with Richard James Havis describing it as having 'the punch of a good Western with a clean and direct script'.[1] Like a mediaeval morality play, the characters are endowed with near-mythic status, identified not by their proper names but rather by their function in the narrative arc. The archetypal roles presented are The Fanatic (Gary Sweet), The Follower (Damon Gameau), The Veteran (Grant Page), the seldom-glimpsed Fugitive (Noel Wilton) and The Tracker (played by David Gulpilil in a similar role to that he had played a few months earlier in Philip Noyce's *Rabbit-Proof Fence* [2002]). The film was very popular at the Adelaide Festival[2], which commissioned its making for the 'Shedding Light' indigenous film programme, and at other festivals around the world[3] and lived up to the praise it received from critics such as Havis. Three years later yet another Australian film featuring David Gulpilil as an Aboriginal tracker was released. Also praised widely as an Australian version of the Hollywood Western genre film, John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005) is set in the 1880s and was described by Jim Schembri as 'one of the most skilful westerns ever'.[4] Like de Heer's film, *The Proposition* was quite successful, picking up numerous awards.[5] Its treatment of the race issue is just as strident as *The Tracker,* with Brian McFarlane referring to the white characters treating the Aboriginals like 'objects of fear and loathing, as if they scarcely belonged to the same species'[6] as he compares their racism to that of Ethan Edwards regarding American Indians in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956). Due to the function they both serve in attending to the injustices meted out to Aboriginals by white settlers, these two Australian films beg analysis regarding their participation in notions of the Western if the presence of Indians is considered to be a defining characteristic of the genre. Ed Buscombe affirmed "Next to the cowboy, the Indian is the most prominent figure in the Western"[7], and directors of an American Western transplanted onto Australian soil might reasonably expect correlations between the indigenous peoples of the two continents, subjugated as they both were by the colonising European. Hence, this paper addresses the following question: does the presence of Aboriginals, like the presence of Native Americans in Hollywood Westerns, serve to include *The Tracker* and *The Proposition* in the Western genre? The conclusion it draws is that the Aboriginal, particularly when played by David Gulpilil, can be understood as an important cipher enabling the categorization of films such as these as Australian anti-Westerns.

Comparisons of *The Tracker* to films of the classic location-based Hollywood Western genre are inevitable due, in no small part, to *The Tracker*'s faultlessly filmed anamorphic widescreen images of the nameless white horsemen tenaciously hunting their quarry. Their quest proceeds through a stunning but treacherous landscape (the semi-desert South Australian outback at Arkaroola) hiding wild spear-throwing natives at any if not every turn. Citing John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), one of the 'classic Westerns'[8], cinema

academic Brian McFarlane notes: 'Rolf de Heer's *The Tracker,* for much of its length, recalls the Western in its narrative, its iconography, the characters who enact its conflicts, and its ideology.'[9] Certainly, the iconography of *The Tracker* hollers Western: uninhabited landscapes, saddled horses, guns, wide-brimmed hats, stockwhips and campfires. Nonetheless McFarlane concludes 'despite all these echoes, *The Tracker* is not a Western. However resonantly it begins as a transplanting of a familiar genre, it ends, perhaps not wholly in its own interests from the point of view of taut drama, as a meditation on racism.'[10] That *The Tracker* meditates on the ugliness of racism is inarguable: de Heer boldly depicts the shameful rubric of a time when official policy regarding Aboriginals amounted to little short of genocide, as concentrated in the mind and actions of one relentless martinet, The Fanatic. Drafted into the expedition, The Veteran is a character contrasting markedly: his world weary mien is one of casual indifference to The Fanatic's racism. Completing the trio is The Follower, who, being young and inexperienced, develops from a stance of disdain towards the abilities of the Aboriginal man to one of respect and, tellingly, he is the only white man to survive the outback ordeal. For it is The Tracker who proves superior as he toys with his nonplussed and naïve bosses struggling with the harsh surroundings. He knows the land down to each individual pebble. He effortlessly produces nourishing bush tucker. He evokes a new understanding of justice as the audience is lead to consider western 'white' law versus traditional 'Aboriginal' law.

In further contrast to Hollywood conventions, De Heer makes several radical decisions to undermine audience expectations of the typical Western. The story starts suddenly, with no exposition other than the brief subtitles, an opening lament sung by indigenous folk singer Archie Roach and vision that grows from a still painting of the landscape, well after the manhunt has commenced. Sympathy for neither party is garnered: the audience is given little information about the alleged crimes of the wanted Fugitive, nor how the rag-tag bunch of pursuers came to be formed. Most significantly, the film's conclusion radically subverts many Hollywood Western's endings by privileging Aboriginal justice over that of the white man. The Tracker recycles the neck chains he is forced to wear into a weapon of freedom and justice, using them to hang The Fanatic from his own petard on a dead Mulga tree. When The Tracker eventually spears The Fugitive in the leg for raping a local Aboriginal girl (a crime committed during the hunt), as overseen by a 'jury' of her local elders, The Follower protests 'But you're a Christian. I heard you give Absolution.' To this The Tracker replies, in less sacerdotal than sarcastic tones: 'God respect Aboriginal law as much as he respect white fella's law. Maybe more.' Although making no direct reference, the analogy is drawn between the actions of The Tracker and the current status of customary law in the Northern Territory, where a Magistrate may legally lessen the sentence for someone spearing a defendant's leg if it is deemed to be part of traditional Aboriginal payback.[11] The Tracker's final comment to The Follower, suggesting with more than a little irony and humour that the culpable party was probably a white man, is a reference to earlier racist jibes voiced by The Fanatic: 'Probl'y white fella, boss, they are murderers: shifty, thieving … can't trust 'em one bit!' With that, the film ends and The Tracker walks off into the bush, laughing, having shed all trace of the trooper's uniform and any obligation to his former masters.

The Tracker certainly stands as a political indictment of Australia's racist past, but to assume no Hollywood Western serves a similar purpose is short-sighted. Although some commentators may well believe in the immutability of the 'classic' Western, such as it was in the 1930s and 40s perchance, what actually constitutes a typical Western to be subverted remains open to conjecture. Regardless, the notion of subversive anti-Westerns is not new. According to Philip French, the genre of the Western has experienced an evolution of sorts, from films that unapologetically celebrate the white man's triumph over the American frontier to films that are less simplistic and more self-reflective: 'There is general agreement that … the Western has changed significantly since World War II, becoming more varied, complex and self conscious.'[13] But Tag Gallagher charges critics such as French with neglecting to consider the pre-war Westerns, let alone the vast numbers of silent Westerns made in the 1900s: '… rich lodes of ambivalence are overlooked in order to bolster a specious argument that 'classic' westerns are simple and naïve.'[14] Gallagher notes that the Hollywood Western has gone through innumerable changes and permutations in its more than a century of favor: 'in 1912, heroes were almost routinely ambivalent, endings unresolved, and visions tragic.'[15] Gallagher argues that in efforts to meet the public's demand for more and more films, writers stretched audience expectations of their products,

> 'Self-consciousness' is too readily assumed to have come to movies only in reaction against Hollywood's so-called 'classic codes' (whose existence, never demonstrated, is at least to be questioned) … A superficial glance at film history suggests cyclicism rather than evolution.[16]

The realization that Westerns have a long history of establishing and then deconstructing conventions seems to have evaded some reviewers.[17] Such deconstructing, revisionist Westerns question the typical narrative of righteous white mans' violence, particularly against Native Americans, and despite the suggestion by Brian McFarlane that *The Tracker* is not a Western because it is 'a meditation on racism'[18], there are many examples of self-conscious, even parodic Hollywood Westerns that address racism, amongst whose company *The Tracker* would not seem out of place. In Delmer Daves' *Broken Arrow* (1950) Jimmy Stewart's character falls in love with an Indian woman (Debra Paget) and benefits from the wisdom of her race as he tries to achieve peace between white man and Indian. In Anthony Mann's *Devil's Doorway* (1950) the hero is a Shoshone Indian (Robert Taylor) who has heroically fought in the white man's wars only to be cheated by the white man's treacherous theft of Indian lands. In Howard Hawks' *The Big Sky* (1952) Dewey Martin elects to live with the Indians to keep his marriage to an Indian princess, played by Elizabeth Threatt (an actress reputed to be of Cherokee heritage). Mel Brook's *Blazing Saddles* (1974) serves to parody racist attitudes towards American Indians. Clint Eastwood's *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) gave strong supporting roles to Native Americans. Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* (1990) favours the Native Americans, with John Saunders describing it as an 'unequivocally sympathetic portrait of the Sioux'.[19] Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995) has an odd, but wise Native American assist and guide the wounded white man, Johnny Depp's William Blake on his journey through the world of the 'stupid white man' toward death. Indeed, if McFarlane's reference to John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) is meant as an example of a

classic Western that is not a meditation on racism this choice is perplexing, since it is often remarked that the film's primary theme concerns the repugnance of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), a racist who means to kill his kidnapped niece, Debbie (Natalie Wood), as a way of expunging the - to his mind - execrable miscegenation that has occurred. It seems that this is one of the fundamental lessons in *The Searchers,* and as Margot Hill asserts: 'John Ford's *The Searchers* is one of the great Hollywood westerns, a powerful anti-racist film.'[20] Edward's loathsome attitudes, while not leading to overt punishment in the films diegesis as they do the racist Fanatic in *The Tracker,* nevertheless function to make John Wayne's erstwhile hero serve as a negative role model. Katharine Lawrie explains:

> The viewer initially identifies with the conventional character of Ethan Edwards, but is gradually forced to reject this 'hero' and his values … Through forcing our realisation of the old-order 'hero's' greed, racism, and violence, Ford intends to show the inevitable outcome of the absolute capitalist ideal, an ideal that in practice is entirely undesirable. Manipulating our expectations, *The Searchers* makes the viewer temporarily compliant in the values embodied by Ethan, and thereby makes us question our own values.[21]

If *The Searchers* is a classic Western it is difficult to see why *The Tracker* is no less a Western than Ford's 1956 meditation on racism.

Perhaps, if *The Tracker* somehow fails as a Western, it is because it lacks the genre-defining presence of the once near-ubiquitous John Wayne, the iconic star of *The Searchers*. Another recent Australian film described as a Western is John Hillcoat's *The Proposition* (2005), of which many critics applauded but of which Italome Ohikhuare said:

> … what makes a good Western is not always the movie itself, but rather the film's star. For example, John Wayne…need I say more? When John Wayne's in a movie, you're interested, no matter how boring it is. Granted no one can compare to a legend like Wayne, but he still proves the simple fact that the central figure of a Western - 'the lone ranger' - can spark life into an otherwise listless story. A major drawback of *The Proposition* is that Guy Pearce (*L.A. Confidential, Memento*), who plays Charlie, simply has no spark.[22]

Like *The Tracker,* Hillcoat's 104 minute film certainly has all the apparent hallmarks of a Hollywood Western: uninhabited landscapes[23], saddled horses, guns, wide-brimmed hats, stockwhips and campfires. But the setting of a Western movie serves as more than just background scenery to the action: as John Cawelti points out, the genre concerns 'a story which takes place on or near a frontier'[24], where the frontier is not just the shifting border between the civilized white society and the uncivilized wilderness, it is also the border between white man's justice and the prejudiced perception of the native man's brutal lawlessness. In addition to the frontier setting and iconography as also seen in *The Tracker*, in *The Proposition* there is the further presence of a lone white renegade, Charlie Burns, a John Wayne-like role played by Pearce (although played none too well,

according to Ohikhuare), who is burdened with a quandary devised by local law enforcer Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone): either hunt down and kill his older brother Arthur Burns (Danny Huston) or watch his younger, mentally deficient and innocent brother Mikey (Richard Wilson) hang on Christmas day. The film commences with the uncompromisingly violent depiction of Arthur Burns' crimes: the rape and murder of a white settler family. Hillcoat's film has none of the sensitivities about violence of de Heer's film, in which bloodshed is depicted by stills of Peter Coad's child-like paintings, but like *The Tracker*, *The Proposition* is a movie that attempts to say something about Australia's racist past. Director John Hillcoat said 'The British regime was all-encompassing and was utterly ruthless when dealing with the aboriginal people.'[25] The film is book-cased by archival black and white stills: photographs of shackled Aboriginals are alternated with shots of white settler families in the opening and closing frames. After the film's premise regarding Stanley's 'Catch 22' has been explained there is a scene in which several chained Aboriginals have been brought down from the hills. In yet another appearance as a tracker, Stanley's servant Jacko is played by David Gulpilil, and he translates the captive Aboriginals' account of the whereabouts of the fugitive Arthur Burns. This scene turns into a subversive undermining of Stanley's authority as the Aboriginals mock him, via the collaborating mouthpiece of Gulpilil. Another nod to the Aboriginal resistance occurs when the Aboriginal character Toby, upon finishing work for the landowning settlers, takes off his shoes and socks and defiantly walks off barefoot into the bush. Then there is the character of Two Bob (Tommy Lewis), an Aboriginal member of the outlaw Burns gang, who, when he slits Jacko's throat, calls him a 'traitorous dog' for working with the white troopers. Such scenes, whilst possibly not providing the primary theme of the movie, are sufficient for *The Proposition* to also be seen as a meditation on racism. Certainly, it is hard to imagine Nick Cave, author of the screenplay, intending otherwise with Carol Hart stating 'Cave's motivation for writing the film script was that the subject of black resistance had not been given adequate representation in other Australian films and it was his intention to correct this absence.'[26]

Does the presence of an anti-racism sub-theme also undermine *The Proposition*'s credibility as a Western? Peter Galvin had no doubts that the film met the central criterion, as he saw it, of the Western:

> In this place, says [Nick] Cave, morality "is a luxury. In extreme circumstances, as in *The Proposition*, morality gets suspended in some way." What Cave is describing is, in essence, the dramatic basis of the western…. As in *Blue Murder* (Michael Jenkins, 1995), which absorbed the traditions of the gangster movie, and was able to express them in an aggressive and unmistakably Australian vernacular, *The Proposition* succeeds in the same way just as brilliantly in terms of the western. Hillcoat and Cave use certain generic conventions as a channel through which to guide their own research and ideas about the Australian frontier experience.[27]

Like the screenwriter Cave, director Hillcoat probably intended the film to be seen as a subversive Western, saying in an article entitled 'The making of an Australian western': 'I was influenced by the anti-westerns, especially of the 1970s, from directors like Robert Altman and Sam Peckinpah, as well as *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* and *Wake in*

Fright'.[28] Perhaps failing to recall his comments about *The Tracker,* Brian McFarlane calls *The Proposition*:

> … a sort of Australian Western … it tells a story of crushing violence and racial relations … Attempts to maintain echoes of decorum in such a place and time recall John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), and the comparison by no means diminishes *The Proposition*.[29]

In another journal McFarlane also states:

> The hatred and fear of the Indigenous are dispersed over several characters here, rather than being focused in one as it is with Ethan Edwards, but it is alarming in its pervasiveness. […] *The Proposition,* by not sentimentalizing them, by not offering noble savage images, makes a powerful statement on their behalf as any Australian film has.[30]

Again, McFarlane brings forth the ideal of *The Searchers,* and with this conflation, once more brings forth confusion as to why an Australian film that meditates on racism cannot qualify, at least for him, as a Western.

Perhaps there can never be an Australian Western that authentically and unequivocally qualifies as a Hollywood Western. The Western frontier in America, while having deserts and hostile natives, was eventually 'won' by the white invaders and the Indians were defeated. The far vaster, more inhospitable, more barren and 'dead-er' centre of Australia still resists colonization by white man and its inhabitants, the Aboriginal people, have never signed a treaty or surrendered to the white invaders. In attempting to explain *The Proposition*'s inability to truly impress as a Western, Dave Hoskin wrote:

> Westerns have always looked uncomfortable in the outback, almost as if they're not really supposed to be there. Despite the superficial similarities to America's own Wild Frontier, there's something profoundly different about our country's dead heart, and the relative failure of introducing the western to our film culture would seem to back this up. At its heart, the western is about taming the land for white people, but despite over two hundred years of trying, the outback still resists us.[31]

One character actor who always looks as if he's 'supposed to be there', in the outback, is David Gulpilil but the Aboriginal tracker has not always been portrayed as sympathetically as he is by Gulpilil. Before his domination of the role, and in a time when the prevailing moral, cultural and intellectual climate was one of white supremacy, Aboriginal trackers were complicit in the colonial mission as they traitorously policed their own people and this sinister role was usually performed by a sideline character in the films narrative, a kind of 'Man Friday' for the intrepid white man. Clyde Combo in *The Overlanders* (1946) and *Bush Christmas* (1947) or Henry Murdoch in *Kangaroo* (1952) exemplify this function, existing as 'simply a menacing but clever adjunct to the colonial drama'[32], as Marcia Langton put it. But ever since breaking into the Australian film industry with his wide-grinned role in Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1971), Gulpilil has been the cinematic face of proud Aboriginality. Indeed, his star power is such that to see him murdered in *The Proposition* was an unexpected blow to audience expectations of him as a possible protagonist. The canny casting of Gulpilil works because his star power operates meta-textually. Like Mel Gibson as a Catholic actor performing the role

of a religious minister in M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* (2002), Gulpilil brings extra-diegetic star contexts. Michael DeAngelis explores the star function of Gibson:

> It is useful to consider the nature of star-spectator interactions in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy which, as Elizabeth Cowie explains, involves a 'happening and continuing to happen' that permits a spectator to construct and engage in scenes of desire (133)[33]. Rather than prescribing a set of instructions for viewers on how to interact with or react to the actor through the performance, Gibson's roles and performances (in the first decades of his career, at least) 'hook' by inviting viewers to engage in a process of negotiating their place in relation to him.[34]

The Australian audience 'desires' to see Gulpilil as a successful Aboriginal, excelling in both the civilized world of the movie industry and his Aboriginal community in the wilderness. He not only acts as a proud Aboriginal in the movies but also acts in our fantasies as a proud Aboriginal in his world outside the movies. Darlene Johnston's documentary film *One Red Blood* (2002) follows Gulpilil from the set of *The Tracker* to his home in Arnhem Land, where he is shown living in the bush with competence, authority and credibility. His stock acceptance speech at awards ceremonies is 'Thanks. I deserve it'[35], reinforcing the view that Aboriginals deserve recognition and respect. In depicting the struggle to 'win the west', the Hollywood Western has often leant favourably to the side of white justice. Frequently, the hero role has been performed by John Wayne - or someone like him - who is typically torn between the opposites of the wilderness and civilization and who (sometimes grudgingly) defers to the white man's law. In *The Tracker,* the hero role served by the John Wayne stereotype is subverted: it is the indigene who is the hero, rebelling against white man's racist injustice to the Aboriginal community. Finally, this atypical hero turns his back on the white man's justice and acts to protect the opposite world of the Aboriginal. As such, this film with an indigenous hero might be convincingly described as an anti-Western, because, like an anti-John Wayne, Gulpilil's mere presence signifies an outback adventure featuring righteous indigenous resistance to white injustice, and both de Heer and Hillcoat use him effectively as they paint pictures of an outback in which Aboriginals alone belong. They proudly mock the white man and disdain his black lackey. They barely notice the swarming flies or the baking heat and find bush tucker where white men are starving. They are still masters of the land.

John Ford was undoubtedly a master of the Hollywood Western and in defining the term 'auteur', Peter Wollen identifies one of the antinomies prevalent in Ford's films as characteristic: the opposition between 'European versus Indian'.[36] Of course, John Hillcoat has only just begun directing and little can be determined in an auteur analysis of his limited oeuvre. On the other hand, having written, directed and/or produced eleven feature films, Rolf de Heer may someday be afforded similar status to Ford as auteur: at his present rate of productivity and the growing popularity of his work such a lofty achievement seems possible. At any rate, in the two films he has helmed that feature Aboriginals (*The Tracker* and *Ten Canoes* (2006)), de Heer has already demonstrated a perceivable interest in depicting an antinomy between European and Aboriginal[37], yet he summarizes *The Tracker* as follows: 'The film is really a subversive political Western, in a way.'[12] Both de Heer and Hillcoat seem to have been more interested in making

Australian Westerns that, through their favorable portrayal of Aboriginals, depart from the expectations of a 'classic' Hollywood Western.

It would be a strange Antipodean Western or its trope that avoids depicting the Aboriginal. To do so might avoid comparisons with the American European's maltreatment of Indians and thus alleviate concerns by critics such as Brian McFarlane, seemingly confused by *The Tracker* and *The Proposition*'s functions as meditations on racism, but would ultimately fail to acknowledge the fundamental difference between the Australian dead heart and the American frontier: the white man won possession of the American West, but the Aboriginal still masters the outback. Nevertheless, both Hollywood and Australian filmmakers have at times revised the racist attitudes of white protagonists like Ethan Edwards, portraying the indigenous people favorably. As such, the Australian anti-Western of recent years frequently features as its hero a proud Aboriginal played by the genre-defining David Gulpilil. He is a part of the iconography of the Australian anti-Western and therefore *The Tracker* and *The Proposition* are two Australian films that are best described as belonging to this sub-genre. Were a monolithic studio system in operation in Australia, we might expect to see heavy promotion of such Australian anti-Westerns as a new sub-genre, thus stimulating a profitable cycle as Rick Altman argues is the typical genrification process, genres being 'not just *post facto* categories, but part of the constant category-splitting/category-creating dialectic that constitutes the history of types and terminology.'[38] Instead, we are left to reflect on the historicity of genres: how they may seem to be stable, unchanging categories which, in the case of the Western, promote a culturally appropriate element such as racism towards Indians, but at a later stage in history demonstrate the opposite ideals. In short, the Western genre resists theory as it changes historically, cyclically revising previous attitudes regarding the invading white man and the resisting native.

Notes.

1. Richard James Havis, 'The Tracker,' *Hollywood Reporter.com* http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr/reviews/review_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=2076924. Accessed 23 May 2006.

2. According to de Heer's Vertigo Productions website, the Adelaide Festival of Arts was looking for a project to include in its 2002 film program when Judith Crombie, Head of the South Australian Film Corporation, approached Rolf de Heer and asked him if he had 'anything of such and such a size, within specific parameters.' And de Heer said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, I do' ('*The Tracker* Production Notes', *Vertigo Productions* http://www.vertigoproductions.com.au/information.php?film_id=8&display=notes. Accessed 16 May 2006), referring to a shelved treatment he had written some ten years earlier. With the brief provided, de Heer then set about turning his decade old treatment into a new script as commissioned by the Adelaide Festival. *The Tracker* was presented by the Australian Film Finance Corporation, Adelaide Festival, and SBS Independent, in association with the South Australian Film Corporation. It was produced with the financial assistance of the Australian Film Commission and jointly commissioned by the Adelaide Festival of Arts 2000 and SBS Independent. *The Tracker* was developed with

the financial assistance of Screenwest and The Lotteries Commission of Western Australia.

3. *The Tracker* was selected for screening in Official Competition at the 59th Venice International Film Festival 2002 and was the Festival of Ghent (Belgium) 2002 winner for Best Screenplay and winner of the Festival of Paris 2003 Critic's Choice Award. In 2002 in Australia it was the Australian Writer's Guild Award winner for Original Screenplay, the APRA-AGSC Music Awards winner for Best Original Song for a Feature Film ('Far Away Home'), the winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Script Writing, the Film Critics Circle winner for Best Film, Lead Actor, Music Score and Cinematography and the Inside Film Awards winner for Best Film, Lead Actor and Music Score. David Gulpilil was also the AFI Awards winner for Lead Actor and was awarded Best Actor Tudawali Award for 2002.

4. Jim Schembri, 'The Proposition,' *The Age*, http://www.theage.com.au/news/film-reviews/the-proposition/2005/10/06/1128191821372.html. Accessed 23 May 2006.

5. *The Proposition* won the 2005 Film Critics Circle Of Australia Awards for Best Musical Score and Best Cinematography; the 2005 Inside Film Awards for Best Feature Film, Best Cinematography, Best Music and Best Production Design; and the 2005 AFI Awards for Best Original Music Score, Best Production Design. Best Costume Design and Best Cinematography.

6. Brian McFarlane, 'Outback and Brokeback,' *Meanjin*, 65, 1, 2006: 67.

7. Ed Buscombe, *BFI Companion to the Western*, New York: Atheneum, 1990: 155.

8. Brian McFarlane, 'Back tracking: Brian McFarlane considers racial matters and their historical representation in recent Australian cinema,' *Meanjin*, 62, 1, 2003: 61-62.

9. McFarlane, 'Backtracking', 62.

10. McFarlane, 'Backtracking', 62.

11. Similar proposals have been made for West Australian law while lobbying to remove the legislative inequality picks up pace in the Northern Territory (see Patricia Karvelas, 'Excuse of tribal law to be axed,' *The Australian*, 23 May 2006: 1).

12. Rolf de Heer, interview, *The Tracker* DVD Extra, Vertigo Productions, 2002.

13. Philip French, *Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre*, New York: Viking Press, 1973: 12-13.

14. Tag Gallagher, 'Shoot-out at the genre corral: Problems in the 'Evolution' of the Western,' in *Film Genre Reader III*, Barry Keith Grant, ed., Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003: 272.

15. Gallagher, 267.

16. Gallagher, 268.

17. Just as Mark A. Reid notes that today's critics have been blinkered regarding so-called evolution of the black gangster film:

> … recent articles that discuss the representation of race in black gangster films have narrowed their survey to discuss such trendy 'gangsta rap' films as *Boyz N the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991), *New Jack City* (Mario Van Peebles, 1991) and *Juice* (Ernest Dickerson, 1992). Consequently, these scholars inadvertently suggest that there exists no history or tradition for black gangster films. (Mark A. Reid, 'The black gangster film,' *Film Genre Reader III*, Barry Keith Grant, ed., Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003: 473).

18. McFarlane, 'Backtracking', 62.

19. John Saunders, *The Western Genre: From Lordsburg to Big Whiskey*, London: Wallflower Press, London, 2001: 108.

20. Margot Hill, 'The big picture,' *Socialist Review*, http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr210/picture.htm. Accessed 11 April 2006.

21. Katharine Lawrie, 'Hero, Text and Ideology in John Ford's *The Searchers*,' *Film 220, Queen's University Film Studies* http://www.film.queensu.ca/Critical/Lawrie2.html. Accessed 26 May 2006.

22. Italome Ohikhuare, '*The Proposition*: The little Western that couldn't', *Socal*, http://www.socal.com/articles/2174-9.html. Accessed 23 May 2006.

23. *The Proposition* was filmed in Winton, Queensland in the fictional town of Banyon.

24. John G. Cawelti. *The Six-gun Mystique*. Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1971: 35.

25. John Hillcoat, '*The Proposition*,' *Landmark Theatres* http://www.movienet.com/proposition.html. Accessed 23 May 2006.

26. Carol Hart, 'Portraits of settler history in *The Proposition,' Senses of Cinema*, 38, http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/06/38/proposition.html. Accessed 23 May 2006.

27. Peter Galvin, '*The Proposition:* Cover Story,' *Inside Film*, 80, 2005: 26.

28. John Hillcoat quoted in Peter Krausz, 'The making of an Australian Western: John Hillcoat and *The Proposition,' Metro Magazine*, 146/147, 2006: 20.

29. Brian McFarlane, 'The AFI Awards and how to win them,' *Metro Magazine*, 146/147, 2006: 14.

30. McFarlane, 'Outback and Brokeback', 68.

31. Dave Hoskin, 'Marked by the darkness and by blood and one thousand powder-burns: *The Proposition,' Metro Magazine*, 146/147, 2006: 22-24.

32. Marcia Langton, 'Out from the shadows', *Meanjin*, 65, 1, 2006: 59.

33. Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

34. Michael DeAngelis, 'Star formations and alien invasions: Mel Gibson and *Signs'*, *Film/Literature Quarterly*, 34.1, 2006: 30.

35. Inside Film Awards, *The Tracker* DVD Extra, Vertigo Productions, 2002.

36. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, British Film Institute, London, 1998: 66.

37. In *Ten Canoes* this antinomy is only inferred. By insisting the actor's dialogue be voiced completely in the Aboriginal dialect of Ganalbingu, and remain undubbed even for foreign markets, de Heer subtly emphasises the 'Other-ness' of the entirely indigenous cast and the European-ness of the anticipated audience (see Starrs, D. Bruno, 'The audience as aurator again? Sound and Rolf de Heer's *Ten Canoes*', *Metro*, 149, 2006).

38. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: British Film Institute, 1999: 65.