

ADAPTATIONS

ROBBERY UNDER ARMS ranks with Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* (1874) and Steele Rudd's *On Our Selection* (1899) as one of the Australian works most frequently adapted for stage and screen. The very popular stage-melodrama version by Garnet Walch and Alfred Dampier, first performed in 1890, was followed in 1907 by one of the earliest Australian feature films, produced by theatrical entrepreneur Charles MacMahon. In 1911 Dampier's daughter Lily and her husband Alfred Rolfe made another silent film version under the title *Captain Starlight*, presumably to distinguish it from MacMahon's film.¹ Actor Kenneth Brampton, however, went back to the original title for his 1920 silent film, which he directed as well as wrote, also playing the leading role as Captain Starlight. While a number of major figures in the Australian film industry, including Raymond Longford, Ken Hall and Charles Chauvel, later planned to undertake adaptations of *Robbery Under Arms*, none of these ventures came to fruition. Eventually, Jack Lee directed a sound and technicolour version for the English Rank Organisation, released in 1957, starring Peter Finch as Starlight. This was followed in 1985 by another Australian production by Jock Blair, made in separate versions for both film and television, with Sam Neill as Starlight.

An adaptation of a work to another medium can be seen as a materialised reading, one determined not only by the constraining technologies, legal regulations and generic conventions prevailing at the time the adaptation is made, but also by assumptions about audience expectations and prevailing moral standards. As a police magistrate himself, Rolf Boldrewood became incensed at claims

¹ 'Introduction', Alfred Dampier and Garnet Walch, *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Richard Fotheringham (Sydney: Currency Press, 1985), p. lviii.

that *Robbery Under Arms* encouraged young Australians to break the law.² His narrator, Dick Marston, supposedly writing the story in prison as he awaits the carrying-out of his death sentence, devotes many pages to regretting his choice of the illegal vocation of bushranging. Boldrewood's police are generally presented sympathetically. They may fail to recognise the wily gentleman bushranger Captain Starlight when he is right under their noses, but that is attributed more to Starlight's great skills as an actor than to police stupidity. The narrative reserves its harshest treatment for the non-professionals, such as the bounty-hunters who are shot by old Ben Marston and other unregenerate bushrangers, who are carefully distinguished from Starlight and the younger Marstons.

When *Robbery Under Arms* was adapted for the stage in 1890 by Walch and Dampier, the generic conventions of stage melodrama meant that they needed to find a villain. Their choice fell partly on the lesser of the two main policemen in the novel, Sub-Inspector Goring, who in the opening scene of the play harasses Aileen Marston in the way characteristic of all melodrama villains: threatening to arrest her father if she refuses to let him have his way with her. In the novel one of the bounty-hunters harasses Aileen, so provoking her father into shooting at him (418:15–24). In both cases there are obvious echoes of the harassment of Ned Kelly's sister Kate by Constable Fitzpatrick, supposedly one of the factors leading to her brothers' becoming bushrangers. The stage version, then, simply dispenses with Boldrewood's whitewashing of the police. Significantly, in the play it is a middle-ranking officer who is corrupt, rather than the police system as a whole. One of the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama was that villains tend to come from the middle class rather than the aristocracy: to be the naval captain rather than the Admiral of the Fleet, for example. So a senior authority figure is still available to restore order and harmony at the end and to see that the villains are suitably punished, as Police Inspector Sir Ferdinand Morringer does in Dampier and Walch's *Robbery Under Arms*.

² See 'How I Wrote *Robbery Under Arms*' (1904), reprinted in *Rolf Boldrewood*, ed. Alan Brissenden (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), pp. 491–8 [p. 498], from *Life*, 1.1 (1904), 58–61.

The major villain of the stage version is however the evil bushranger Dan Moran. In the melodrama, he holds Sir Ferdinand captive in Terrible Hollow and only the arrival of Starlight saves the day (Act IV, scene 1), whereas in the novel Moran and his cronies are never let into the secret of Terrible Hollow. It is also Moran rather than Goring who provides the play with its exciting climax. Attempting to stab Dick Marston, he instead kills Kate Morrison who, in saving Dick at the cost of her own life, is allowed to be much nobler than Boldrewood's original character.

Slap-stick humour is also a standard feature of nineteenth-century melodrama, a feature generally overlooked by modern commentators. It is provided in this stage adaptation by two Irish new-chum policemen, O'Hara and Maginnis, plus an equally stereotyped old maid, Miss Euphrosyne Aspen. These three comic characters proved so popular that they were included, often with only minimal changes to their names, dialogue and actions, in the very large number of versions of the story of the Kelly Gang presented to Australian audiences both on the stage and in early silent films immediately preceding Federation and in the two decades afterwards.³

In the novel, Warrigal, the half-caste Aboriginal, is portrayed as intensely loyal to Starlight but otherwise untrustworthy and villainous; in the melodrama adaptation he becomes a basically comic character. This was generally the way in which Indigenous Australians were portrayed on the nineteenth-century Australian stage. They inherited the traditional role of the Irish servant in earlier Australian plays like *The Currency Lass* (1844) and *Arabin* (1847): characters who are 'other' to the main players but are good-hearted, loyal, cheeky trickster figures. In Dampier and Walch's *Robbery Under Arms*, Warrigal becomes a kind of antipodean Puck (from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), a title actually bestowed on him by one of the play's reviewers.

Very little is known about the two earliest film adaptations of *Robbery Under Arms*, as only a few still shots from the 1907 version survive. The publicity brochure prepared by J. and N. Tait for the

³ See Introduction to *The Kelly Gang*, in *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage 1834-1899*, ed. Richard Fotheringham (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), pp. 558-61.

film's premiere screening at their Athenaeum Hall, Melbourne, on 2 November 1907, claimed that 'the book has been closely followed' and that the film is a 'faithful pictorial expression of the incidents and atmosphere of the pleasantest of the two great Australian novels'.⁴ In justification of this preference for Boldrewood's novel over Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*, copious praise was given to what were seen as Boldrewood's virtues:

'Robbery Under Arms' is essentially a sane and wholesome book. The author seldom preaches, and only moralises under stress of extreme provocation; but the story is in its essence an essentially moral stimulant and corrective. Its atmosphere is Australian; its ideals and underlying contentions are Australasian. There is the warmth of genial suns in it, the breadth and freshness of remote wide spaces. The writer's art, perfect in its apparent artlessness, makes the story of Dick Marston one of the most convincing stories ever written, and quite the most convincing Australian story. Marcus Clarke depended for his efforts on his literary craftsmanship. Rolf Boldrewood relies on the appeal to human nature and the primary civilised instincts.⁵

This, together with detailed discussion of Dick Marston's family background and childhood complete with quotations from the novel, suggests that the main focus of the film was on him. Indeed, one of the two stills found in the intervening pages of the brochure shows the scene of the 'Marriage of Dick Marston'; the other, Starlight reacting to Moran's insolence. Later references to 'his dear lost brother Jim' and to 'a manly and effective exit for the too-alluring and seductive Starlight'⁶ confirm that the film was faithful to the novel in allowing Dick to live, while killing off Jim and, unlike the melodrama, also Starlight.

While presenting *Robbery Under Arms* as a more Australian novel than *His Natural Life*, and arguing that the screen was far superior to the stage in depicting its story – 'The horses live on the films, and the scenery convinces'⁷ – the brochure was also concerned to draw a distinction between Boldrewood's bushrangers and members of the

⁴ National Film and Sound Archive (ScreenSound Australia), Canberra, item 343344, quotations taken from pp. 5 and 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

real Kelly Gang, whose exploits had also recently been filmed:

The story of the Marstons is not the story of the Kellys. The Kellys, however you may gild them, remain brutal realities, blackly stained with ruffianism and vile association. The realism of their exploits is essentially unwholesome and degrading. But the Marstons were always in a certain glamour of the ideal. None of their actions can be twisted into an incitement of vice or lawlessness. Their story is the story of men of nominally good instincts, twisted by heredity and weakened by insidious elements of circumstantial environment. With them, the psychological pull is always in the direction of decency and honest living. Their story, as told in these admirable films, is a direct encouragement to do the right thing.⁸

Dampier and Walch's melodrama version of *Robbery Under Arms* continued to be performed in the first decades of the twentieth century and appears to have provided the script for the 1911 film *Captain Starlight* made by Dampier's son-in-law. As a review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 18 March 1911 indicates, the film followed the melodrama much more closely than it did the novel as it opens:

at the home of the Marstons, passes on to an exciting race for the Gold Cup, won by Rainbow, shows how the bushrangers stick up the mail coach at the Rocky Rises, and exhibits Sir Ferdinand Morringer threatened with death in Terrible Hollow at the hands of the brutal Dan Moran, and his rescue by Starlight. One of the most applauded of the scenes . . . was the burning of the stables and the rescue of the horses, and Starlight's Last Stand also excited enthusiasm.⁹

The order of events in the film appears to have been identical to the melodrama's and includes scenes that were only in the melodrama, such as Moran's capture and taunting of Sir Ferdinand. It is not clear, however, whether the melodrama's resurrection of Starlight was also followed or whether concern over the bad influence on the young of bushranger films resulted in a changed ending for the

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹ Reprinted in Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 14–15.

film. Certainly, an advertisement for *Captain Starlight* in the *Age* on 5 April 1911, suggests that questions were being raised about the moral tendency of the work. In reply, it was claimed that the film:

throws no HALO OF ROMANCE OVER CRIME, but, on the contrary, brings home the oft-told truths that the WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR IS HARD; and that still, for the evil doer – though his sins were as scarlet – there is yet open the path of redemption, leading to REPENTANCE! PARDON! PEACE!¹⁰

The echo here of Starlight's final speech in the melodrama: 'men, who, having passed through the furnace, are purified, who have sounded the depths of true woman's devotion, and are now contented – happy',¹¹ suggests that he might have been allowed to survive after all.

The great success of both the 1907 and 1911 adaptations of *Robbery Under Arms*¹² resulted in further efforts to film the novel, two of which were prohibited by the censor. A film under the direction of Raymond Longford, who had been a member of Dampier's company and later appeared in the 1911 *Captain Starlight*, was planned in 1916 by the Crick and Jones partnership but abandoned after discussion with the authorities. In 1918, Alfred Rolfe was also refused permission to attempt another adaptation, with the censor making clear that the reason did not lie in the material itself but in perceived differences between audiences for the novel, the play and the film:

The book itself, as we all know, might be styled as one of our few Australian Classics, nor could any reasonable objection be raised to the spoken play, in which case an audience is composed almost exclusively of adults; in the moving picture proposition we are immediately faced with an entirely different set of circumstances – here the audiences are comprised largely of women, young children, and impressionable boys. One thing is certain, the story of Starlight on the screen would be neither edifying nor educational.¹³

¹⁰ Reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Fotheringham, p. 112.

¹² See Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film*, pp. 7–8, 15.

¹³ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 100.

In 1920, the actor Kenneth Brampton finally managed to make another silent film version of *Robbery Under Arms*, starring himself as Starlight. The Dampier and Walch melodrama remained a noticeable influence as seen, in particular, in the representation of Warrigal as an Aboriginal boy, very loyal to Starlight though in other respects displaying none of the trickery of the stage Warrigal. The film does, however, depart markedly from the melodrama in its ending, either because Brampton did not wish to deny himself the opportunity for a wonderful death scene, or to placate the censor. Because of the objections to and censoring of earlier film versions, Brampton went to great lengths to emphasise the moral of the story, through the use of intertitles such as 'The bad men were punished, and that is as it should be' and 'The women suffered as is their lot'. So Starlight had to die, in a scene that strongly recalls his last stand at the end of Act IV in the Dampier and Walch melodrama. But both Jim and Dick Marston were allowed to live and eventually, after their time in prison, go on to happier lives with their sweethearts, so reinforcing the idea of the native-born white man as the future of Australia. Warrigal's fate, accordingly, was of no concern to this film and we see no more of him after Starlight's death scene. A notable feature of the 1920 film was that Warrigal was played by an Aboriginal actor, Jackie Anderson, at a time when using blacked-up white actors was still the norm for film as well as stage. His dialogue, as indicated by the intertitles, was still, however, the usual stage pigeon, such as 'The troopers! . . . Coming! . . . Plurry quick!'

In the thirty-seven years between 1920 and the next film version, three of the best known early Australian directors were involved in further fruitless attempts to make a sound version of Boldrewood's novel. Raymond Longford issued a prospectus in the late 1920s for 'Australian National Films Ltd' in order to raise the funds to produce *Robbery Under Arms* 'as a feature picture for the world market and make it more a record of early Colonial life than a treatise on bushranging'.¹⁴ He claimed to hold the world rights to the novel and planned to spend £15,000 on the film's production, as against the £1,000 that the 1907 film had cost. As in 1907, and with the box office success of the recent 1927 adaptation of *His Natural Life* in

¹⁴ National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, item 406948, p. 6.

mind, Longford argued that *Robbery Under Arms* was the better of the two novels: 'it has the advantage over the latter novel of being of a less morbid nature and is not based on a controversial phase of Australian history. It has the initial publicity of a world read novel and every exhibitor knows of its box-office value, even that of the former crude picturisations of the work in the earlier days of local production.'¹⁵ Nothing came of Longford's plans, however, and in 1933 the film rights to *Robbery Under Arms* were sold to Cinesound Productions.¹⁶

Ken Hall of Cinesound claimed that *Robbery Under Arms* was 'the film I wanted to make more than any other' and attempted to do so for almost twenty years.¹⁷ Initially, the problem remained one of censorship, following the banning in New South Wales of Harry Southwell's *When the Kellys Rode* in 1934. There were also, however, some questions about who owned the screen rights to the novel, not to mention the problem of 'the preparation of a suitable screenplay: Hall commissioned several writers to work on the script but none succeeded in reducing the long, rambling novel to a manageable shape.'¹⁸

Charles Chauvel, who had appeared in the 1920 film, may have had some involvement in Cinesound's eventually unsuccessful plans to film the novel. Among his papers in the Mitchell Library is a first-draft script dated 12 October 1950, which has some interesting similarities to the English film of *Robbery Under Arms* eventually made in 1957, in both the particular aspects of the novel it chose to highlight and in allowing Jim Marston to be the only gang member to survive. At the beginning of the script is a list of reasons why the script departs from the novel. In many cases, this mainly involves the condensation of time (such as leaving out the Marstons' childhood), the omission of minor characters such as Miss Falkland, and the avoidance of duplication essential to any adaptation of a novel to film. But it is clear that the moral issues that had led to earlier bans

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Unsigned letter to Cinesound, 14 March 1933, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, item 447544.

¹⁷ Ken Hall, *Directed by Ken G. Hall: Autobiography of an Australian Film Maker* (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1977), p. 93.

¹⁸ Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film*, p. 225.

were still seen as a potential problem since some changes were deliberately made to justify allowing Jim Marston not only to live but to escape going to prison at the end of the film: 'if Jim goes on two raids, it stamps him definitely as a bushranger, and never afterwards can we say, he was "led into it" by Dick inadvertently. It makes Jim definitely a guilty man and he could not therefore be allowed to escape justice at the end.'¹⁹

It is also clear that, as in the 1957 film, the decision was made to focus on the romances of the Marston boys rather than on the Starlight–Aileen love story, which had been the main focus of the melodrama:

The sequence where Ben Marston is wounded and taken back to the Hollow, and where Aileen is brought to the Hollow to nurse him, would be put back in if it were decided to make any 'love-affair' between Starlight and Aileen. In other words, if the Subject were to be Starlight's story and not that of the two boys.²⁰

One major difference from the 1957 film lies in this script's faithfulness to the novel in showing Warrigal as having an 'instinctive hatred' of the Marston boys and so betraying them at every opportunity:

It was Warrigal who gave the boys away when he was arrested – gave them away from sheer mad revenge. Starlight has practically killed him for his treachery but Warrigal still follows him abjectly. Warrigal comes down the Trail towards them. He is cowed, but he eyes Dick revengefully still.²¹

Near the end of the script, Warrigal is again shown betraying the boys to the police as they attempt to escape to the islands. When Starlight discovers Warrigal's treachery he kills him before going off to join Dick in the final shoot-out with the police. Both are killed but Jim has got away and the final scene is of 'a small sailing vessel on its way to the islands'.²²

Given the similarities between them, it would be interesting to know what, if any, connection there was between the 1950 draft script in the Chauvel papers and the screenplay for the film made in Australia in 1957 by the J. Arthur Rank Organisation. According

¹⁹ Charles Chauvel, Papers, 1933–51, Film scripts, ML MSS 666/2, p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 343.

to Hall, *Robbery Under Arms* had been Arthur Rank's 'favourite story from boyhood'²³ so he was very keen to film it. In 1948 Harry Watt, whose success with *The Overlanders* (1946) led to several other films being made in Australia under the general supervision of Michael Balcon of Ealing Studios, was invited to direct a film version of *Robbery Under Arms* for Ealing. Watt's difficulties with *Eureka Stockade* (1949), however, resulted in his deciding to leave film-making in Australia in favour of Africa.

The screenplay for the 1957 film is credited to Alexander Baron and W. P. Lipscomb. Among Balcon's papers, now in the British Film Institute Library, is an Author's Engagement with Lipscomb dated 5 August 1949, in which he was to be paid £1,150 for twelve weeks' work 'in addition to 3 weeks already worked in Australia'. Another contract indicated that from 21 November 1949 he was to be employed as a 'temporary Scenario Editor for 3 months at £75 weekly'. Elsewhere in the papers, however, is another set of agreements with a Don Sharp, who on 21 June 1955 was offered a mere £150 'to write a treatment of not less than 50 foolscap pages based on the book *Robbery Under Arms*' and then, on 19 July 1955, a further £600 to write 'a screenplay, complete with dialogue, by 28 December 1955'. Ken Hall was clearly not the only one to have difficulties in creating a successful script out of this 'long, rambling novel'.

Like the script in the Chauvel papers, the 1957 film differs from all earlier and later adaptations of the novel in choosing to kill off the narrator, Dick Marston, in favour of his younger brother Jim. For the Australian audiences for whom Boldrewood was originally writing, it was important that Dick, as the novel's strongest embodiment of a distinctive Australian identity, was the one who survived. Equally, however, his distinctive Australianness rendered Dick dispensable in a film primarily aimed at an English audience and made during the 1950s, a time when family values were perceived as more significant than those of mateship and male adventure highlighted in the novel. In contrast to Dick's brashness, overt sexuality and rebellion against authority, his brother Jim is portrayed as closer to a 1950s audience's, perhaps especially a 1950s English audience's, presumed ideal: he

²³ Hall, *Directed by Ken G. Hall*, p. 183.

is a good domestic man, devoted to his wife and family, and merely led astray by his elder brother and father.

One of the crucial episodes in the 1957 film has no equivalent in the novel, nor in the 1950 draft script in the Chauvel papers, though in all three versions of the story Jim and Dick determine to try to mend their ways by becoming gold diggers instead of bushrangers. At the diggings they meet the two Morrison sisters with whom they had previously been involved in Melbourne: Dick had a fling with Kate Morrison, while Jim fell in love with her younger sister Jeannie. Jim and Jeannie get married and Dick tries to remain on good terms with Kate, by now married to someone else, to stop her giving them away to the police. In an episode invented for the film, old Ben Marston, Dan Moran, Warrigal and Starlight hold up the goldfields bank. Moran shoots a bank teller and a woman is also accidentally killed. Dick, who has been saying his goodbyes to Kate before leaving for safety in America with Jim and Jeannie, rushes off to warn them. On the way, he is met by his true love, Gracey Storefield. Kate, enraged to see them together after Dick had sworn he loved no one but her, reveals that Dick and Jim are the notorious Marston brothers. As members of Starlight's gang, they are believed responsible for the deaths at the bank, and a crowd of vigilantes rushes off to Jim and Jeannie's hut. Jim is found with a lot of money, actually earned through his work on the diggings, but believed by his accusers to have been part of the proceeds of the robbery. A rope is produced and Jim is bound, ready for a proposed lynching. At the last moment, two policemen arrive and assert their rights to the body of the prisoner. By now a large and angry crowd has gathered outside the hut, and Jim doubts that he will be able to get through it alive. But the senior policeman assures him that the diggers will never dare attack the sanctity of the 'Queen's uniform', and, when the police emerge from the hut with their prisoner, the crowd parts to let them safely through. Interestingly, this very scene was the example put forward in a letter to the *Bulletin* complaining that the film was too unAustralian:

The Rank Organisation, like many English observers and critics in the past, had a preconceived notion of what Australia was like. This led them to portray Australians as completely subservient to the Queen's representatives. For example, Jim Marston is rescued from a lynch-mob by Sergeant Goring's daring the

crowd to defile the uniform of the Queen. It is inconceivable that the people of these former penal colonies would react as instantaneously to this plea, like a bunch of sheep answering the summons of a shepherd, unless the actors were portraying law-abiding Englishmen and not less legally-minded Australians.²⁴

One of the leading Australian literary critics of the time, Vance Palmer, also attacked the film, though for being too American rather than too English, calling it: 'a crude Western, with the usual brutal bashing scene and all human motives twisted beyond recognition'.²⁵ The opportunity to make English Westerns to try to compete with those from Hollywood, then proving so attractive to British audiences, was one of the things that attracted British filmmakers to Australia in the years after the Second World War. The sets, costumes and other visual codes of the 1957 film were very much Westernised. Starlight, the English aristocrat of the novel, becomes an American Lone Gun, dressed entirely in black and without a hint of romance with Aileen. In the scene on the goldfields described above, Jim and Jeannie's hut looks authentic enough from the outside but is nothing like an old bark hut inside, and is far roomier than it should be. The attempted lynching is a plot device of numerous American Westerns, but not typical of Australian history and not to be found in Boldrewood's novel.

In marked contrast, the 1985 Australian film (also released as a television mini-series) has strong post-colonial elements: all the authority figures have English accents. So does Sam Neill as Captain Starlight, but he displays strongly anti-Imperialist views, in contrast to the respect for the Queen's uniform displayed in the 1957 film. For example, after Starlight and Dick have been sentenced to Berrima Gaol for their role in the great cattle robbery, a young English trooper advises Starlight not to be a bad loser: 'This Empire was built on good sportsmanship.' Starlight responds: 'On the contrary, me boy, it was built with the lash, the bayonet, and signin' fraudulent treaties with damn savages.'

²⁴ M. D. Schmaier and T. F. Simms, 'Robbery Under Arms', *Bulletin*, 8 January 1958, Red Page. The authors were American Fulbright students studying Australian literature.

²⁵ Vance Palmer, Letter to the Editor, *Age*, 15 March 1958.

Boldrewood, a staunch Anglo-Australian as Paul de Serville's biography of him emphasises, would no doubt have been horrified to hear his aristocratic English hero attacking the British Empire in this way. This scene, along with the multiple images of Queen Victoria that figure in the earlier trial, indicates that we are seeing a 1980s Republican version of Boldrewood's novel, where even Starlight has been Australianised in attitude if not in accent. This had in fact already been done by Dampier and Walch in their 1890 melodrama version, where the famous opening lines of the novel are applied not to Dick but to Starlight, during an early exchange between the Marston brothers:

DICK: A man that can ride anything; anything that was ever lapped in horsehide.

JIM: Swims like a musk-duck.

DICK: Tracks like a myall blackfellow.

JIM: Jumps like a red kangaroo.²⁶

Appropriately, this Australianised Starlight is allowed to live and to marry Aileen Marston. In contrast, Aileen is almost entirely missing from the 1957 film, which is even less interested in currency lasses than in currency lads, with her name even misspelt in the cast list as Eileen. (The Irish elements of the novel are omitted, as in the earlier Ealing Studios film of *Eureka Stockade* where Peter Lalor is played by Chips Rafferty as Australian rather than Irish.)

Boldrewood's decision to have three male protagonists has proved productive, allowing adaptors of his tale to vary the ending according to what they perceive as the main values and interests of their respective audiences. Boldrewood's use of what are, in effect, three heroes relates to the fact that the narrative operates on three different levels, which is also a large part of its appeal. Most obviously, there are the traditional gothic and romance elements, particularly associated with the exotic and mysterious figure of Starlight, who inherits the aura of earlier robber heroes like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. But then there are the realistic, historical and local elements, particularly associated with Dick, and especially his vernacular narrative. And

²⁶ *Robbery Under Arms*, ed. Fotheringham, pp. 14–15.

finally there are the moral elements, especially associated with Jim, the innocent who suffers for the guilty. As already noted, Boldrewood was very concerned to stress the moral of his story, so in his novel it is necessary for Jim to die, as well as Starlight, whose mysterious origins must always remain unknown.

For the 1890s melodrama audiences, too, Jim is expendable. His death allows the moral still to be made: breaking the law must be seen to have some unfortunate consequences. But the loss of Jim does not detract very much from the conventional happy ending where the already Australianised Starlight is allowed to marry the currency lass. By the first decades of the twentieth century, authorities were becoming greatly concerned about the bad influence the many highly popular bushranging plays and films might be having on the young. So the publicity for the 1907 film is concerned to stress Boldrewood's moral vision and the 1920 Brampton version of *Robbery Under Arms* has a heavy emphasis on the moral lesson at its beginning and end. Here, however, it is the woman who suffers; the film ends with Aileen as a nun, teaching all the little children not to be bad. Starlight has earlier died in Warrigal's arms but both Marston brothers are allowed to go on to forge a new life. In 1957, it seems to have been sexual morality that was most on the adaptors' minds, so the good domestic man Jim is allowed to live while the coarse colonial Dick is shot, in addition to the Lone Gun Starlight.

For most of the English reviewers the main problem with the 1957 adaptation was that Starlight, as played by Peter Finch, was not sufficiently emphasised. While Boldrewood had been able to get away with a novel with three heroes, the constraints of adaptation meant that the focus needed to fall more clearly on one of them. In the 1890 melodrama and the 1920 silent film, Starlight was definitely the hero, even though he was allowed to live in the first but was killed off in the second. But the English 1957 film was made very much within the conventions of the Hollywood Western, with Starlight played as a Lone Gun rather than an aristocratic Englishman. Since the novel's narrator, Dick Marston, appears to have been seen as too Australian to become the alternative hero, as he clearly is in the nationalist 1985 adaptation, that role went by default to Jim Marston. The result is a very odd beast indeed: a film with Australian scenery, American genre conventions and English moral values.

In contrast, the 1985 adaptation of *Robbery Under Arms* was very much an all-Australian affair, produced under the auspices of the South Australian Film Corporation and with half of its \$7.3 million budget funded by the Perth magnate Robert Holmes à Court. Nevertheless, the producer, Jock Blair, revealed considerable foreign influence on the approach to adapting the novel, especially in the greater emphasis on wit and humour. In the publicity material for the film he commented: ‘In the end I think we’ve come up with something of the flair that marked films like “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid” and “Raiders of the Lost Ark”.’²⁷ The model then was still the Hollywood western-adventure story, but now the more playful contemporary version which stressed jokes and japes rather than the tough-guy violence of the 1950s. One interesting consequence was that the adaptation made in the mid-1980s ended up being much more like the 1890 melodrama than the 1957 film, in its mix of comedy and action as well as in its more direct address to an Australian audience. Unlike the much performed melodrama, however, neither the film nor the mini-series was a great success.

²⁷ National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, item 340511.