



Acting in Film

Transcript

- J: Darren? Darren, what happened?
- Darren: Go to sleep.
- Molly: As soon as she's able, I'll see to it she finishes what she started, because Teddy was wrong. You can't be left to yourselves, or to fate. You're the curse. You've got to be stopped.
- Narrator: Acting is the production element we often take most notice of. The way an actor performs a character through appearance, action, delivery of lines, and even their demeanour, establishes the connection between us and the character.
- So let's compare the acting styles in two Australian films, *The Dressmaker* and *Animal Kingdom*.
- Animal Kingdom*, produced in 2010, is set in Melbourne's criminal underworld.
- Liz Watts: Pope is the inner psycho, darker role, and I always thought that Ben has that strength and that power behind his gaze. When you look at Ben on screen, you kind of read his face so beautifully when he's doing absolutely nothing.
- Smurf: If my boys go down, that's it. I got no one left.
- Narrator: And as the matriarch of the family, Jackie Weaver plays the character in a way that contradicts our expectations for a crime drama.
- Smurf: ... I want to set up a meeting. Is your office safe?
- Randall: So if you've called me in here to see if there's some strings I can pull, then you're way off course. Is that what this is about?
- Smurf: Hey Randall. Before you go on, this boy, who's currently being looked after ... Tell me if you agree with this – this boy who's being looked after, he knows who you are, and you know how these things go. They're going to ask him all sorts of questions about everything he's ever seen or done. Everyone he's ever met.
- David Michôd: I knew I didn't want that character to be in any way like a kind of grizzled, hardened, old battleaxe of a lady.
- Smurf: I want this part to be clear. This is not about you doing me a favour, or me blackmailing you, anything like that. It's just a bad situation for everyone.





Acting in Film

Transcript

- David Michôd: You know, the scenes that are written that would, in some ways, on the surface appear to require a much sterner, kind of villainous performance ...
- Smurf: Hi. I just want you to know I don't bear you any ill will, Mr Leckie. I really don't. You were just doin' your job. I hope you catch the people who did that terrible thing.
- David Michôd: I always found it much more chilling when they were played with a kind of, almost a faux-naïveté, you know? A delightful little lady who would have you believe that she didn't really know what was going on, but actually, she knew exactly what was going on.
- Narrator: This is also true for actors playing the detectives. The director's cinematic style recreates the ordinary world, avoiding the over-the-top crime action dramas we are so familiar with.
- David Michôd: I was so happy that Guy said yes, because I always knew that I wanted to find an actor who could play that emotional disguise, play that almost emotional blankness in a way that was still totally compelling to watch.
- Detective Leckie: You know what the bush is about? It's about massive truths that have been standing there for thousands of years and bugs that'll be dead before the minute's out. It's big trees and pissy little bugs. Everything knows it's place in the scheme of things, everything sits in the order, somewhere. Things survive because they're strong and everything reaches an understanding.
- Guy Pearce: It's not like TV cop stuff, where you've got somebody interrogating somebody, saying, "I know that you did this, admit it!" You know? It's just very mundane. They're going through questions, and, "You were there then, what time was that? How long do you reckon you were there for? Okay, thanks very much," end of the interview. Bang, bang, bang, and there's something, to me, far more powerful, as there is to David, about the mundane, just the daily, sort of functional quality of that, as opposed to feeling like you've got to amp it up.
- Detective Leckie: You might think that because of the circles that you move in, or whatever, that you're one of the strong creatures, but you're not. You're one of the weak ones. That's nothing against you, you're just weak because you're young, but you've survived because you've been protected by the strong. But they're not strong anymore. They're certainly not able to protect you.
- Narrator: *The Dressmaker*, as a comedy-drama, walks a fine line, balancing the needs of the two genres. This comes out in the way the actors play the character.





Acting in Film

Transcript

Woman 1: Marigold!

Woman 2: Stunning...

Woman 3: She got Tilly Dunnage to make the dress.

Woman 4: Lovely.

Tilly: Not invited to the wedding, Miss Harriadiene? Were you in love with Evan Pettyman?

Miss Harriadiene: You are trespassing.

Tilly: 'Cause otherwise, there's no explaining this: 'I was in the schoolyard, watching Stewart Pettyman playing after school. Myrtle Dunnage came up to talk to him. I saw her strike Stewart Pettyman on the head with a brick.'

Miss Harriadiene: That file is police property! How'd you get that?

Tilly: Perhaps I subdued Sergeant Farrat with a brick.

Sue Maslin: It was clear to me that if you just played it for the comedy, you could very, very quickly get into caricature, and that's something I was never interested in, and it could only work that, at all times, sitting under the comedy, that you had an equal measure of pathos, that you actually appreciated what was emotionally driving those characters at any given time, and that Tilly, herself, really was the kind of emotional ground stone for the film.

Narrator: Judy Davis, who plays Mad Molly, draws on her acting experience and understanding of how the different elements of character need to work together.

Molly: I don't know why you've come to this hole. There's nothing here.

Tilly: I came because I need you to remember me, mum.

Molly: Mum?!

Tilly: I need you to remember, so...

Judy Davis: It's an interesting role, because it encompasses comedy. Sometimes high comedy, or what I would call high comedy, and really quite weighty, emotional weight. So the role requires both.

Teddy: G'day.

Tilly: Oh.





Acting in Film

Transcript

- Teddy: Your getup's distracting my players.
- Tilly: Well, I do have an unusual talent for bias cutting.
- Teddy: Yeah, listen, Myrtle...
- Tilly: I prefer Tilly.
- Teddy: Tilly...
- Jocelyn: Liam has a fabulous, laidback quality. He's very much the sort of laconic charmer that Teddy had to be. He's got a very relaxed, masculine, very Australian quality that I wanted for Teddy. He's also incredibly good looking, which helps.
- Pope: What do you think we should do?
- Darren: I think we should be there for Cath and the family, and that.
- Ben Mendelsohn: Character is really what character does, and says, and reacts to. You find it, in a lot of ways, with that. If you're unfamiliar with vernaculars, or the way people hold themselves, or the way they might talk, or this or that or the other, if you don't have that there, then you need to check some different stuff out and get some feelings, and then off you go. That's my kind of school of thought on it.
- Andrew Cody: You know, if Baz was still here right now, and we'd just been to your funeral, we wouldn't be having this conversation, 'cause he'd have already done something about it. If you don't want to do anything because you're scared... Is it because you're scared? It's all right if you are. I just want you to tell me about it. Just talk to me.

