



Susie Porter

Photo: Michael Corridore

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll

By Ray Lawler

Directed by Neil Armfield

Teacher's Notes

Belvoir presents:

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll

By **RAY LAWLER**

Director **NEIL ARMFIELD**

Set Designer **RALPH MYERS**

Costume Designer **DALE FERGUSON**

Lighting Designer **DAMIEN COOPER**

Composer **ALAN JOHN**

Sound Designer **PAUL CHARLIER**

Assistant Director **SUSANNA DOWLING**

Fight Choreographer **SCOTT WITT**

Stage Manager **LUKE McGETTIGAN**

Assistant Stage Manager **SUZANNE LARGE**

With

Johnnie Dowd **T J POWER**

Roo Webber **STEVE LE MARQUAND**

Emma Leech **ROBYN NEVIN**

Olive Leech **SUSIE PORTER**

Bubba Ryan **Yael Stone**

Pearl Cunningham **HELEN THOMSON**

Barney Ibbot **DAN WYLLIE**

PHOTOGRAPHY Heidrun Löhr

Belvoir's production of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll opened at Belvoir St Theatre on Wednesday 28 September 2011.

INTRODUCTION: A Brief History of the *Doll*

- *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* premiered on 28th November 1955 at the Russell Street Theatre in Melbourne
- Before the 1950s, very little Australian work was produced on Australian stages and often a whole year would go by without a single work by an Australian reaching the commercial stage.
- The *Doll* was a success in part because it gave its audiences unmistakably Australian characters in a familiar setting, speaking with their own accents, and telling their own stories.
- After a successful season in Melbourne, and with backing from the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, the play opened in Sydney, and then toured around Australia, playing in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart and Launceston, as well as throughout country areas.
- Demand for the play was so strong, that in 1956, several additional companies of actors were formed, who toured the play concurrently.
- A huge popular success, “it was reported that people drove hundreds of kilometres and a man swam a flooded river to see it in the Northern Territory” [Philip Parsons [ed.], *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Currency Press, 1995, p565].
- The play then travelled to the UK (where it was co-produced by Laurence Olivier), with brief seasons in Nottingham and Edinburgh, before it’s opening in London at the New Theatre on 30th April 1957.
- Audience and critical reception here was almost universally glowing, and the *Doll* subsequently won the 1957 Evening Standard Award for the best new play.
- After London, it transferred to New York (opening on 22nd January 1958) but here the reception was not quite as positive, and the season ended after only 5 weeks.
- The *Doll* has been widely translated and performed in many countries.
- It has also inspired several adaptations – including the much-criticised film version of 1959, a chamber opera (1996) and *Doll Seventeen* (2003), a ‘stylised version’ of the play, which replaced the majority of the dialogue in the play with movement and music.
- In 1977, the Melbourne Theatre Company revived the play as part of *The Doll Trilogy*, performing it alongside two prequels written by Ray Lawler, *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times*.



A scene from the original production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Melbourne, 1955

CHARACTER LIST

Olive Leech, a 37-year-old barmaid, daughter to Emma and in a relationship with Roo

Emma Leech, Olive's mother, the owner of the house they spend their summers

Bubba Ryan 22-year-old neighbor of Olive & Emma

Barney Ibbot 40-year-old sugarcane farmer, Roo's best mate

Roo Webber a 38-year-old sugarcane farmer, in long-standing relationship with Olive

Pearl Cunningham a widow with an 18-year-old daughter who works with Olive

Johnnie Dowd 25 year old sugarcane farmer, in Roo & Barney's team of cutters



Helen Thomson, Susie Porter in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE THE SHOW

1.

In the script for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, the playwright Ray Lawler provides detailed opening descriptions of his characters. Working in groups, choose one of the characters below, and read Lawler's description of them, using a dictionary for any words that you don't understand.

- What does the description tell us about the character?
- In what ways would the description help the actors, director and designers to prepare for the production?

Pearl

PEARL is a widow in her forties, driven back to earning a living by the one job she knows well, that of barmaid. Given the choice, she would prefer something of a more classy nature – head saleswoman in a dress salon, for instance. The pub game, she feels, is rather crude. She is wearing what she refers to as her 'good black', with a double string of artificial pearls. Very discreet.

[Act One, Scene One] 2011

Barney

... has an overwhelming weakness for women, and makes them recognize it. Previous mention of him as a little man is not quite correct. He is short certainly, but not much below medium height, and solidly built. Probably his constant association with the bigger ROO emphasizes his lack of inches. His manner is assertive, confident and impudently bright, perhaps a little overdone as a defiance to his forty years and the beginning of a pot belly.

[Act One, Scene One] 1957

Olive

She comes downstairs, wearing a crisp green and white summer frock. Moves with a trace of excitement into room, showing herself off... She postures, waiting for their comments. Despite a surface cynicism and thirty-seven years of age, there is something curiously unfinished about OLIVE, an eagerness that properly belongs to extreme youth. This is intensified at the moment by her nervous anticipation. She is a barmaid at the same city hotel as PEARL, but, unlike the latter, she enjoys the job.

[Act One, Scene One] 1957

Emma

Almost seventy now, Emma's awareness of events is as keen as ever, but she is reconciled these days to her place in the back seat, and her tidiness and rectitude have become slipshod.

[Act One, Scene One] 2011

Roo

He is a man's man with a streak of gentleness, a mixture that invites confidence. Tall, thirty-eight years of age, fair hair tinged with grey, a rather battered face with a well-cut mouth. Recent experiences have etched a faint line of bewilderment between his eyes, a sign of the first serious mental struggle he has ever had in his life, but his manner seems free and easy going. Both men are deeply tanned, a strong contrast to the white fleshiness of the women.

[Act One, Scene One] 1957

SYNOPSIS

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll is an Australian play written by Ray Lawler, first performed in 1955 and then first published in 1957. The play is set in an old house in Carlton, Melbourne, in early December of 1953.

Olive, Bubba and Pearl are awaiting the arrival of Roo and Barney who are coming down from Queensland to spend their layoff season with the women. Emma is at community singing, Olive is nervously getting ready, and Bubba is telling Pearl about Nancy, who used to spend every summer with them but was married earlier this year. When Roo and Barney arrive they bring with them their usual pile of presents including the doll that Roo brings Olive each layoff season – this year's doll is the seventeenth doll.

Barney reveals to Olive that Roo had a bad season as he has hurt his back and had trouble in the sugar cane fields. Barney explains that Roo had gained a rival - Johnnie Dowd, a young man who'd grown up on the fields and proved to be an excellent cane-cutter. A competition had started up between the two men, but in the end Roo's strained back gave way and he collapsed. Roo lost the competition, his pride and subsequently left the fields broke, meaning that for the first time in seventeen summers he arrives at Olive's place without much cash to his name.

The day after his arrival Roo decides to get a job despite Barney's dismay and Olive's protests. This is the second major change from the previous sixteen summers, the first being Nancy's absence and the presence of Pearl. We hear Barney and Pearl talk about Barney's past. Barney reveals that he has illegitimate children in three different states. This shocks Pearl who strongly believes in family and disapproves of Barney's disregard of how 'decent' families work. In the end Barney makes Pearl come round using his charm and explaining to her that "he's not after all the lov'in he can get but that he has a lot of lov'in he can give" [Act One, Scene Two]. After this chat Pearl decides to stay for the rest of the summer.

Act Two opens on New Year's Eve. Olive and Roo are playing cards, Pearl is knitting, Barney is writing a letter, Emma is in her room and Bubba is going out to a party. Once Bubba has gone the remaining five realise that they have nothing to do: it's New Year's Eve and they are at home doing nothing of substance. Pearl begins talking with amusement about how, while Olive had implied that summer with Barney and Roo was constantly fun and exciting, here the five of them were, at home doing nothing on New Year's Eve. When the clock strikes twelve Olive breaks down in tears mourning the loss of her fun filled summers as their end draws ever closer.

The following Friday Roo is in his work clothes (he is now working as a painter) sleeping on the lounge. He is woken as Barney arrives home after a big night out with some other sugar cane farmers who are down in Melbourne during the layoff like Barney and Roo. Barney has bought home Johnnie Dowd, Roo's rival during the sugar cane season. Barney is insistent that Roo and Johnnie make a truce and Roo agrees so as to not look scared. Barney organises for the three of them to go to the races and decides that the ladies should come too. Barney asks Pearl if she would bring her daughter along as company for Dowd, which Pearl is very upset by. Barney then asks Bubba instead. Bubba agrees – she has seen Barney and Roo come down every summer since she was five and seeks a life like the one she has lived next door to for the past seventeen years. She also responds to that fact that Dowd treats her like an adult, not like a little girl.

Once Dowd leaves, Roo and Barney have a huge fight. Roo is humiliated at having to face Dowd in his painter's clothes and at having to have a triple date to the races set

up behind his back. He accuses Barney of simply pandering to Dowd because he is now the best sugar cane harvester. Barney says he was trying to get Roo back in with the others in their team, who felt betrayed when Roo walked out. Roo reveals to Olive that he never hurt his back on the sugar cane fields. He says Dowd was just a better man than him and he couldn't take it, that's why he left.

The next day when Roo wakes up and comes downstairs all seventeen dolls and the other gifts that he and Barney have brought down during the layoff over the years have been removed. The room is bare. Olive is there and Pearl is in the doorway with her bags waiting for a taxi. Olive says that once she had started cleaning she couldn't stop and that most of the decorations were breaking and she decided to put them away.

While Olive is upstairs, Roo asks for Emma's advice, and she helps Roo to see the situation for how it really is. Barney returns, and tells Roo that a group of them are heading up the Murray region to pick grapes. Roo flatly refuses saying he could never leave Olive before the end of the layoff season.

Roo tells Olive that he has decided to stay down in Melbourne all year, and asks her to marry him. This greatly upsets her, and she demands from Roo that he give her back what he's taken, the perfect past sixteen summers. Olive leaves the house in a state.

The play concludes with Emma deciding there will be no more summers like the past ones and telling Roo and Barney to move on as they are no longer welcome. The pair decides to try a new tack as they have had the same routine for so long. They decide to go to new places and try new things, Bubba goes after Johnnie Dowd, saying she'll work out a way to keep the magical way of life she's hankered after for so long while Olive is left to rebuild her life, with her yearly routine shattered, and no layoff season to look forward to.

IMAGINING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Life in 1950s Australia

The 1950s is usually depicted as a conservative, static yet prosperous period, during which Australia enjoyed economic and political stability after the upheavals of two World Wars and the Great Depression.

While this picture holds some truth, it prevents us from seeing the decade for how it really was: a period of complexity, transition and change, particularly in the first half of the decade. People hoped for better times ahead, but continued to live with a degree of anxiety and fear. This was fuelled by the politically intense beginnings of the Cold War (up to 1954), and the uncertainty surrounding economic recovery after World War Two. The government promised economic prosperity, and this did come by the end of the decade, but in the early part of the 1950s Australia continued to struggle with post-war shortages and inflation.

Nonetheless, looking back we can see that this period marked the beginning of two decades of uninterrupted growth for Australia. With a growing population, helped along by an influx of 'New Australians' (migrants from war-torn Europe), the government confidently embarked upon a series of large infrastructure projects, among them the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme. This increased prosperity was also reflected on an everyday and domestic level, as households welcomed their first refrigerators and washing machines. Small electrical appliances (such as toasters, kettles, mixmasters and vacuums) also began to be manufactured and sold in large quantities during the 1950s. These new home appliances revolutionised the Australian home, and became a symbol of success, so much so that they were often displayed in living rooms for guests to admire.

However, while advertising images of the time show bright, happy housewives using their new household appliances, not all Australians initially benefited from this growing prosperity. Life didn't changed radically for the working classes of Australia. In 1956, about a quarter of homes in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane still had no refrigerator, two-thirds had no hot running water in the bathroom, and three-quarters had no hot



The archetypal 1950s family, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 16th September 1953

running water in the laundry [John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p6]. To add to this, as a result of housing shortages after World War Two, many working-class households were made up of more than one family, and this was often not by choice, as households took in boarders to bring in extra income. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* takes place in “Carlton, a now scruffy but once fashionable suburb of Melbourne” [Act One, Scene One]. Carlton in the 1950s was primarily a working class suburb, and a destination for many post-war migrants, particularly Italian and Greek migrants.

In a broad sense, the 1950s was a “crucial period in the development of the Australian identity” [Katharine Brisbane, ‘Growing Up in Australia’, introduction to Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Currency Press, 1978, ix]. On a political level, there were the beginnings of a shift away from Britain, while on a social and cultural level Australia became ever more complex and diverse.

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE THE SHOW

1.

Work in groups to create a mind-map of the 1950s. What were the key features of the decade?

2.

The 1950s was a decade of transition and change. Work in pairs to write a list of the key changes that were happening to Australian society in this period.

3. Choose one of the following sources. What does it show us about life in the 1950s?

SOURCE A:

The Argus, Monday 2nd January, 1950

New Year start was perfect

EVERYONE WENT OUT IN THE

SUNSHINE

THOUSANDS of holiday makers flocked to the beaches and hills yesterday in Melbourne's largest Sunday exodus for many years.

Without a single death from mishap, it was the State's "whitest" Sunday for nearly 12 months.

A steady flow of traffic on all main roads from the city began soon after dawn and continued well into the afternoon.

Trains to bayside beaches and the hills were packed, almost to overflowing, and furniture and picnic vans were crammed to the fullest.

Many people who made a late start after New Year's Eve celebrations hired taxis and made for the nearer beaches.

Big crowds

Brilliant sunshine and perfect swimming weather enticed record crowds of bathers to St Kilda, Elwood, and Brighton beaches.

More than 50,000 people visited popular beach spots between Port Melbourne and Brighton.

The outstanding feature of the "perfect weekend" was the comparative freedom from road accidents and other mishaps. Only a few minor road accidents were reported to the police, and hos-

pitals treated very few people for other injuries.

Beaches crammed

At St Kilda 15,000 bathers jostled for space on the beach, while many others sunbaked on the lawns along the waterfront.

Popular resorts at Sorrento, Portsea, Dromana, Point Lonsdale, and Queenscliff were crowded, and campers in caravans and trucks crammed the foreshore.

Mordialloc and Frankston — half-way spots—were the haven for motorists with limited petrol, and Sandringham had its largest Sunday crowd for many years.

Hikers made for the hills from early in the morning, and many with ground sheets, blankets, and light provisions chose to spend the mild night under the stars.

SOURCE B:
 Sovereign refrigerator advertisement,
The Australian Women's Weekly, 26th October 1955

PUT A *sovereign* cold pantry IN YOUR KITCHEN

— AND SEE THE HAPPY SMILES!

A new **SOVEREIGN Cold Pantry** brightens any kitchen . . . lightens the housewife's burden . . . brings smiles to the faces of all the family.

Beautiful **SOVEREIGN** refrigerators set high standards of beauty and efficiency—at a low price!

Making up the happy family group shows is the 10 cu. ft. **SOVEREIGN Cold Pantry**—a grand family refrigerator. It has the largest-of-any freezer locker, glass-rod shelves, giant storage cabinets and a marvelous "bonus" door. As well, **SOVEREIGN** gives you a full-width freshhold tray, removable half-shelves for bottle storage, a place for cheese and butter—everything designed and placed so that it's easy to get at, easy to reach.

See your **SOVEREIGN** retailer to-day.

Available on low deposit and easy weekly terms.

YOU WILL BE AMAZED AT THE KEEN PRICE AND IN-BUILT BEAUTY OF BOTH 7½ CUBIC FEET AND 10 CUBIC FEET MODELS.

sovereign THE KING OF REFRIGERATORS

SOVEREIGN APPLIANCES PTY. LTD. 100 PARRAMATTA RD., STANMORE, SYDNEY. LA 5025 • MELBOURNE: 478 Church St., Melbourne. JB 4224 • BRISBANE: 10 Helen St., Fortitude Valley. LA 6278

SOURCE C:
 Masonite advertisement,
The Australian Women's Weekly, 16th September 1953

A Slide for the Kids
 All kiddies love a slippery slide... Build it on old doors with a sturdy hardwood frame. No fear of splinters from Masonite's smooth-surface action.

B Door linings for the "Bomb"
 When the door linings on the old car begin to go, replace them with shaped Masonite panels. Easy—and smart!

C Under Tub Cupboards
 A light wooden frame-work plus some Masonite—and that waste space in the laundry is converted into a storage cupboard for soaps, starch buckets, etc.

D Swedish Table
 Make this modern, decorative coffee table for your lounge. The smooth Masonite top can be polished or lacquered to perfection.

E Drink Tray
 ... A convenient and attractive means of serving drinks to your guests. You'll find it's easily made from Masonite.

F Draught Board
 What better than a game of draughts in the evening? Use the hollow panels from the Masonite sheet to make the board... Paint alternate squares white, leaving the others in natural Masonite.

Things will be looking better, better, never around your place when you start building and creating with versatile Masonite! Masonite's smooth hard-wearing surface—painted, or used in its natural colour—forms an admirable finish. Start your own-idea home thinking in terms of Masonite... you'll find the only tools he'll need are a hammer and a saw. Because Masonite is so easy to use, Masonite is economical too; three big 12' x 4' sheets go a long way, as the illustrations show. There are just a few ideas of what you can do with a sheet of TEMPERED Preswood.

MASONITE PRODUCTS
 PRESWOOD
 TEMPERED PRESWOOD
 LEATHERBOARD
 PRISMOCOTE
 TEMPTUL
 MASONITE IS A REGISTERED TRADE MARK

MASONITE CORPORATION (AUSTRALIA) LIMITED
 PRINCIPAL SALES OFFICE: 111 Collins Street, Melbourne

STATE SALES OFFICES:
 144 Pitt Street, Sydney
 292 Queen Street, Brisbane
 31 Colson Street, Adelaide

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES – BEFORE THE SHOW

1.

“The fifties works as a contemporary metaphor for monoculturalism, for ‘traditional’ roles of women and men, and for philistine intolerance. This fifties has become more than a decade; it is an adjective”

John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*,
UNSW Press, 2000, p2

- In groups, use a dictionary to find the meaning of the terms ‘contemporary metaphor’, ‘monoculturalism’ and ‘philistine intolerance’?
- What does John Murphy mean when he says that the term ‘fifties’ has become ‘an adjective’?

2.

- The word ‘dream’ was often used in 1950s advertising to sell products or services. What do you think people of the 1950s hoped for and aspired towards?



The 1950s – a timeline

1950

- February** Petrol rationing ends
- April** Prime Minister Robert Menzies introduces legislation to outlaw the Communist Party
- June** Butter rationing ends
- July** The government announces that Australian troops will be sent to the Korean War
- October** Commonwealth police raid Communist Party headquarters in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Hobart & Darwin
A Town Like Alice by Nevil Shute published

1951

- March** Communist Party ban declared unconstitutional
- June** The latest women's fashions are short dresses with full skirts over stiff petticoats
- August** Start of National Service
- September** ANZUS Treaty signed
Prime Minister Menzies gives report to cabinet on known and suspected communists in the public service

1952

- November** Iron ore discovered in the Hamersley Range of the Pilbara region

1953

- July** Korean War end after 3 years.
- October** Britain explodes the first of 2 atomic bombs at Woomera in South Australia
- December** Oil is discovered in the Exmouth Gulf off the coast of WA

1954

- February** Queen Elizabeth II arrives with Prince Philip for Royal Tour
The Australian flag is raised at the new Mawson base in Princess Elizabeth Land in Antarctica, making it the world's most southern human settlement
- April** Soviet diplomat, Vladimir Petrov, is granted asylum. On April 20 his wife Evdokia also accepts asylum after being dragged away from Darwin Airport en route to the Soviet Union

1955

- February** NSW hotels stay open until 10pm. NSW is the 4th Australian state to adopt extended hours.
- November** Arrival of Australia's one-millionth post-war migrant – Barbara Porritt of Yorkshire.
Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, by Ray Lawler, opens at the Union Theatre in Melbourne
- December** Barry Humphries' character Edna Everage makes her stage debut

1956

- January** Malaya: Australian troops take part in their first action against communist guerillas
The Circular Quay loop of the underground railway opens in Sydney
- September** Sydney: First television broadcast from TCN-9
Melbourne: GTV9 and HSV7 in Melbourne open
Maralinga: Britain explodes first of the Operation Buffalo series of 4 atomic tests
- November** Melbourne: The Duke of Edinburgh opens the 16th Olympic Games
- December** Sydney's first drive-in cinemas open at French's Forest and Chullora

1957

- January** Joern Utzon wins Sydney Opera House design competition
- March** Australia's union movement steps up campaign for equal pay for women workers,
- May** Melbourne: 1,300 Hungarian refugees arrive
- September** Maralinga: Britain conducts first of three "Operation Antler" nuclear weapons tests

1958

- January** QANTAS international services commence
- February** Brisbane: 200,000 turn out to greet the Queen Mother
- March** Sydney: 2UE publishes first Australian Top 40 chart
- May** NSW: Australia's biggest reservoir, Lake Eucumbene, is completed
- November** The Menzies Government wins a fifth term

1959

- January** Darwin becomes a city
- March** Australia's population reaches 10 million
- April** The Reserve Bank is formed to take over the central banking function of the Commonwealth Bank
- May** The Snowy Mountain Hydro Electric Scheme's first big power station, Tumut 1, begins operation

Timeline adapted from:
ABC Online – Archives and Library Services -
<http://www.abc.net.au/archives/timeline/1950s.htm>

Entertainment in the 1950s

Going out...

OLIVE: *Chance for you to go and book some seats. There's some good shows on I've been holdin' off on...*

[Act One, Scene Two]

In the 1950s Australians mostly went out for entertainment, taking a trip on a tram, bus or train to:

- 'the pictures' – most suburbs had a cinema of some kind, but the grand 'picture palaces' were in the city, giant cinemas that could seat up to 2,000 people – in the late 1950s, drive-in theatres began
- dances
- live theatre – vaudeville was still very popular in the 1950s, as were big musicals, ballet and opera
- other outdoor activities – walks, and picnics at the beach or in the park



A crowd gathers outside the State Theatre in Sydney in the 1950s –
The Sydney Morning Herald, 26th March 2011

Staying in...

BARNEY: ...We'll make it a party. We'll get Emma in and have a sing-song...
[Act Two, Scene One]

When Australians stayed in, they spent their free time:

- listening to radio serial dramas
- playing board and card games
- having sing-songs
- reading the newspaper or magazines such as the Australian Women's Weekly or the Reader's Digest
- knitting and other crafts
- (in the later part of the decade) watching television. Television was introduced into Australia in 1956, although it was the mid 1960s before it was in most Australian homes.



A 1950s family gathered around listening to the radio –
'The History Notes', <http://the-history-notes.blogspot.com>

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE THE SHOW

1.
How do people entertain themselves today? Work in pairs or groups to write a list.
2.
Can you see any similarities with how people entertained themselves in the 1950s? What are the differences?

Gender roles in the 1950s

The 1950s was a time of transition and change in the way Australian men and women saw themselves, and the ways in which they related to each other. This is a major theme of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, and throughout the play, we see the main characters struggling with their identity – with who they are, and with how others see them. Much of this struggle relates to ideas of what it means to be either a ‘woman’ or a ‘man’.

Although again the picture is not quite as simple as it first seems. While Roo, Barney, Olive and Pearl are very much men and women of their time, they also reject many of the expectations that society places upon them.



A young couple at a formal dance in the 1950s from I. Bereson, *Australia in the 1950s*, Echidna Books, 2000

Men in the 1950s

What did it mean to be a man in the 1950s? Images of Australian manhood in the first half of the 20th century were based around ideas of individualism, self-confidence, physical strength and mateship. These qualities were often linked in the popular imagination to the physical landscape of Australia, and with



An advertisement from the *Sun Herald*, 19th September 1954

images of the Australian outback. In the World War Two novel *We Were the Rats* by Lawson Glassop (first published in 1944 and popular throughout the early 1950s) the central character Mick discusses why Australians make good soldiers: *“it’s because we’re a young and virile country, because we play so much sport and get so much sunshine we’re always fit and because we’ve got the initiative and spirit that helped the pioneers fight drought, fire and flood”* [quoted in David Walker, ‘The Getting of Manhood’ in P. Spearritt and D. Walker [eds.], *Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, 1979, p129]. Roo and Barney, the cane-cutters of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* seem to embody many of these qualities, and

it is in part this that makes them so attractive to Olive, who describes them as *“two eagles flyin’ down out of the sun”*

[Act Two, Scene One].

However, over the course of the play, Ray Lawler questions these images of manhood, and we quickly begin to see that both men are struggling with challenges to their masculinity. Roo’s physical strength is diminishing as he gets older, and Barney’s charms with women are no longer what they once were.

Similarly, the idea of mateship is placed under scrutiny, as it is revealed that Barney didn't follow Roo off the canefields, deciding instead to stay and work out the rest of the season. It's the first time the two men haven't stayed together.

The identity crisis that Roo and Barney struggle with throughout the Doll reflects the broader transitions and changes that were happening in the early 1950s. Popular images of manhood in the 1950s were moving away from a traditional picture of men as physically and mentally strong, with a pioneering and independent spirit, and instead towards an image that was more domestic –connected with family and home life. A man's duty and responsibility was to work, to earn money and to be a provider for his family.

The 1950s domesticated man – a Tecmco Mower advertisement from 1950



CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

1.

“The mature Australian man [is] a person who finds most of his satisfactions within the home circle. His great ambition is typically to marry, to have a family, to purchase a house, to own a car and then to settle down to enjoy life”

Morven Brown, 1956,
quoted in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*,
UNSW Press, 2000, p35

- Where does the ‘mature Australian man’ find satisfaction?
- What are his ambitions in life?

2.

OLIVE: ...These are men – not the sort we see go rolling home to their wives every night, but men.

PEARL: I know, you keep tellin' me. I never knew there was any difference.

OLIVE: You never knew! *[There is a pause, and then she speaks in a voice of defiant pride]* Nancy used to say it was how they'd walk into the pub as if they owned it – even just in the way they walked you could spot it. All round would be the regulars – soft city blokes having their drinks and their little arguments, and then in would come Roo and Barney. They wouldn't say anything – they didn't have to – there'd just be the two of them walkin' in, then a kind of wait for a second or two, and quiet. After that, without a word, the regulars'd stand aside to let 'em through, just as if they was a – a coupla kings. She always reckoned they made the rest of the mob look like a bunch of skinned rabbits.

[Act One, Scene One]

- **How does Olive describe the men who regularly drink in the pub?**
- **How does she describe Roo and Barney?**
- **In her eyes, what is it that makes them different from the 'regular' city blokes?**
- **How does her picture of them differ from the 'mature Australian man' that Morven Brown describes above?**

EXTENSION ACTIVITY – BEFORE THE SHOW

1.

‘What kind of man are you?’ – A quiz from *Man* magazine, 1952

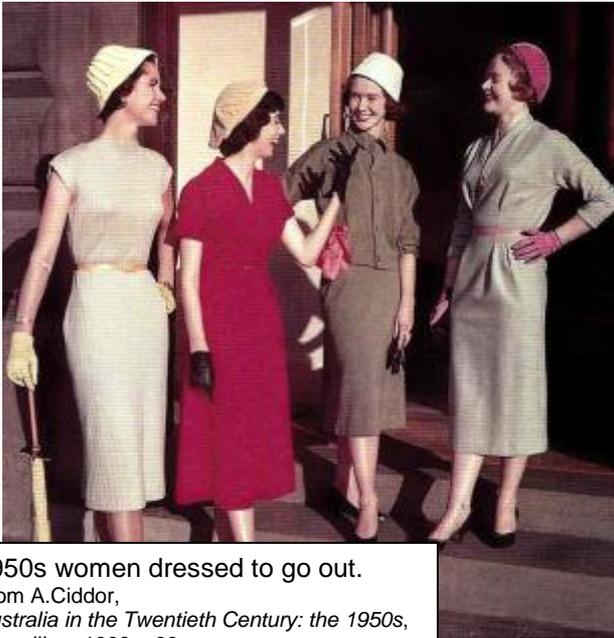
In 1952 *Man* magazine published the sort of quiz common in the pop-psychology genre of the period. A test of ‘what kind of man are you?’, it mostly consisted of trick questions, for example, ‘Which officer you served under during World War II – or which official you worked under in a war plant – would you definitely get even with now?’ To have nominated anyone showed an abnormal capacity to bear grudges; seven years after the war ‘a more mature personality’ would have left behind such memories. A man prepared to volunteer for a dangerous mission was ‘foolhardy’; to refuse would show ‘a good sense of responsibility towards those who love you and are dependent on you’. The ‘emotionally mature’ answer to the question ‘if your wife and mother fell out of a boat, and neither could swim, which would you rescue first?’ was to save the wife. To save the mother indicated a man who had not ‘cut his apron strings’. Presented with a choice between marrying a ‘physically unattractive girl with nasty character’ but with great wealth, or ‘a beautiful girl . . . to whom you are physically attracted’ but in the certain knowledge of living on a low income, the mature choice was between the two extremes, indicating a ‘normal sex drive and good common sense’. A man who chose a guarantee of present income rather than ‘taking your chances on whatever the future holds’ was timid, lacking ‘the normal male courage to tackle life boldly’; yet to prefer one’s current job indicated being ‘happy and well-adjusted in your work . . . you have made the effort to do just what you want to do. For normal masculine aggressiveness, 10 points.’

Taken from John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p34

Read the extract above:

- Make a list of the qualities that a man in the 1950s should have.
- What does the quiz put forward as negative qualities?
- What does this tell us about images of manhood in the 1950s.

Women in the 1950s



1950s women dressed to go out.
From A.Ciddor,
Australia in the Twentieth Century: the 1950s,
Macmillan, 1998, p33

Women in the 1950s were expected to follow a fairly conventional path through their lives – to find a husband, have children, and then stay at home, devoting their energy solely towards being a good wife and mother. This expectation had been temporarily put to one side during World War Two, when women were actively encouraged to work in order to help fill vacancies left by men who had gone off to fight, but with the start of the 1950s came a push to return women to a domestic role.

Those women who did work didn't have equal pay. In 1950 the basic wage for women was set at three quarters of the basic wage for men, and in 1953 there was a proposal put forward to further decrease it to only 60% of men's basic wage.

Furthermore, women in the public service were expected to leave their jobs once they got married. Even so, the numbers of married women in paid work in fact increased over the course of the 1950s – from 8.6% in 1947 to 13.6% in 1954 to 18.7% in 1961 [John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p48].

This increase was part of broader changes that were happening in the way that women saw themselves, and the expectations that society had for them. The 1950s

Advertisement from
The Australian Women's Weekly,
26th October 1955

saw the beginnings of the Women's Movement in Australia, which would consolidate and become more active during the 1960s and into the 1970s. Nan Hutton, a women's activist and strong advocate for equal pay expressed the spirit of these changes in one of her regular columns for *Woman's Day* magazine in 1954: "today's woman can often support herself as well as a man, and divorce carries little stigma. She faces her husband on an equal footing,

and if he is too unreasonable, she can pack up and leave” [Nan Hutton, as quoted in Murphy, p28].

Nonetheless, at the time of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Nan Hutton’s views were not those of the majority of Australians, and the widely held view was that a woman’s place should be in the home, and that her role should be largely confined to that of a wife and mother.

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

1.

“You may have told yourself that you want a career, that you want to express yourself, that you never want to degenerate into a dowdy housewife... [but] For a true fulfillment of yourself, you want permanence in your relationship, the security of a home and the protection of one man. No substitute for marriage exists to establish a girl’s position in the cosmic scheme of things”

Cora Carlisle, Woman’s Day, 1950
from John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p43

- **What does Cora Carlisle think that some women might want for themselves?**
- **What does she put forward instead as the way for women to get ‘true fulfillment’?**

2.

Examine the following three sources:

- **What roles were women in the 1950s expected to take on?**
- **Write a list of adjectives to describe the women that you see in these 1950s sources.**
- **Write a paragraph description of the ‘ideal woman’ in the 1950s.**



WITH SO MANY THINGS TO DO IN OUR SPARE TIME, IT'S WONDERFUL TO HAVE AN EFFICIENT WORK-SAVER LIKE RINSO. IT GETS DISHES SPARKLING AND KEEPS MY HANDS NICE, TOO!

SOURCE A:
Detergent advertisement
The Australian Women's Weekly,
7th March 1956

FAR MORE SUDS FOR YOUR MONEY

With Rinso's
thicker, richer suds
grease vanishes . . .
yet hands stay lovely

Instead of the old-fashioned soap shaker, you'll find in the modern kitchen a clean, fresh packet of Rinso for the washing-up. For Rinso means dishes well done in half the time. Only a tablespoonful of Rinso for the biggest family wash-up gives a froth of long-lasting suds that dissolve grease fast. Plates, glasses and cutlery come out of those thicker, richer suds thoroughly clean, sparkling like sunbeams.

From a banker's diary

Thursday: Opened a cheque account for newlywed Mrs. [redacted] who wishes to simplify her house-keeping and keep a record of expenses.



SOURCE B:
A banking advertisement from *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 23rd September 1953

The business of running a home

Starting a new life, this young housewife was rightly determined to carry the tried and proven principles of business into her home. Paying butcher, baker, milkman, and grocer, insurance, and all other expenses will be so much easier by cheque. Cheque books and bank statements will provide a permanent record of expenditure.

I know she will find her cheque account very useful, not only now, but right through her married life.

You can bank on the Wales

You, too, should consult and use—



INCORPORATED IN NEW SOUTH WALES WITH LIMITED LIABILITY

A5397C

SOURCE C:

Rinso advertisement from *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 9th March 1955

Step into the back garden of nearly every Australian home any Monday morning and you'll see a line full of white washing and gay coloureds dancing in the sunshine. And the happy, capable housewives who hung them out speak with one voice. No matter how they do the wash... whether they boil or use a washing machine, they all say: "We couldn't manage without Rinso."

Like seven out of every 10 modern homemakers, these women have proved that Rinso's thicker, richer suds are best for everything – whites, coloureds, dishes...

Meet the women who speak for millions!



ABOVE: Married at 15! Wouldn't change places with anyone. At 23, Mrs. Stan Highfield (Glen Iris, Victoria) has six children—four boys, two girls. Housekeeping schedule is worked out to last minute. She gives two mornings a week to washing. Says, "Rinso's the best work-saver I know."



ABOVE RIGHT: Seven to care for! Washday comes not just once a week but every day for Mrs. Newlands (Campsie, N.S.W.). Thanks to Rinso, she's all through in no time, still has enough energy to accompany husband and five under-twelve-year-old youngsters for a day at the beach.

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- 3.
- How do the characters of Olive and Pearl compare with the images of 1950s womanhood on the previous pages?
 - In what ways do Olive and Pearl conform to society's expectations of them?
 - In what ways do they reject these expectations?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY – BEFORE THE SHOW

Write and perform a short dialogue between Olive and Pearl in which they discuss one of the magazine advertisements pictured above.

CLASS TALKING POINT

***HOW HAVE MENS AND WOMEN'S ROLES CHANGED SINCE
THE 1950s?
ARE THERE WAYS IN WHICH THEY HAVE REMAINED THE
SAME?***

Social mores of the 1950s

'mores' (pronounced *maw-rayz*):

The traditional customs and ways of behaving that are typical of a particular (part of) society

Cambridge online dictionary - <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

World War Two brought enormous change to Australian society and to social mores – that is, the way that men and women were expected to behave, and the moral framework within which they were expected to live their lives. During the war, social and moral conventions had in some respects loosened. As men went off to fight, women found themselves in paid employment, with greater independence. An important factor too, was the presence of American soldiers in Australia during the war. They were famously described as 'over-sexed, over-paid and over here', and concerns were frequently voiced about the bad influence they were having on Australian women. In 1943, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommended 'stricter control by the public authorities of laxity of conduct, especially by young women, in public places' [as quoted in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p56]. Broadly speaking, during the war there was a tendency for people to live in the moment, and to take opportunities as they came.

IT is a wise woman who realises the true value of modesty, be it false or otherwise, especially in these days of the bare look and the cheese-cake cuties. A man likes his woman reasonably covered. Not so long ago men showed more interest in the swing of a skirt over a well-turned ankle than they do nowadays at the blatantly exposed female form. After all, a man likes to use his imagination.

10/6 to "G.A." (name supplied), Inxistail, Qld.

A reader's letter to
The Australian Women's Weekly,
26th October 1955

once again – to accept some of the changes that the War had brought, but at the same time, to try and keep those changes contained within a more acceptable moral

framework.

However, immediately following the war and continuing into the 1950s, there was concerted effort by governments and community authorities to tighten social mores again, to bring everybody back into line.

The idea was to 'contain' society

Duty and responsibility were key aspects of this 1950s moral framework. Men were expected to work to support their family, and women were expected to devote themselves to the task of looking after the needs of their husband and children. Family life was the central image of the 1950s, and the post-war period – from the late 1940s to the early 1970s – saw a marriage boom in Australia. The age at first marriage for both men and women dropped, and the overall marriage rate rose. By the end of the 1950s, only 1 in 8 women in their late twenties had never been married. For women in their late thirties, this

figure dropped further to only 1 in 15. Comparative figures for men were 1 in 3 (late twenties) and 1 in 8 (late thirties) [Murphy, pp19-21].

Divorce was difficult in the 1950s. Laws differed from state to state, but generally speaking, a husband or wife had to prove adultery, insanity, habitual violence or desertion in order to have a divorce granted. This didn't change until the introduction of 'no-fault' divorces in 1959, after which a divorce could be granted following a separation of 5 years or more, with no other reason necessary. This reform was highly controversial, and it provoked a lot of opposition, particularly from church authorities. In the 1950s, religion continued to have a strong influence on Australians. In the 1954 census, around 90% of Australians identified themselves as Christian.

More modern ideas of marriage, family and sexuality were beginning to emerge, but there was still a long way to go before the sexual revolution of the late 1960s. Australians did not sweep sexuality under the carpet in the 1950s, but it was always discussed within the framework of marriage. Similarly, women's enjoyment of sex was discussed, but the questions were always centered around a healthy sex life that could and should be part of a marriage.

Women were still encouraged to 'save themselves' for their future husbands. But this was clearly more an ideal than a reality for most young Australian women. The number of births outside marriage rose during the 1950s and there was a rise in the number of brides who were pregnant at the time of their marriage. By the end of the 1950s, this figure stood at almost 24% of brides.

Snapshots

- *In Victoria, pubs closed at 6 o'clock. The 'six o'clock swill' was a slang term for last minute rush to buy drinks at the bar before it closed. Closing time was extended to 10pm in 1966.*
 - *On Sundays, Australian cities were very quiet places. Pubs, cinemas and theatres were closed and commercial sporting activities were banned*
 - *The Australian Customs Department could ban books, and did so frequently during the 1950s*
 - *Between 1953 and 1955, all states except Western Australia tightened their obscenity laws*
 - *Women could be asked to leave, fined and even arrested for wearing a bikini on the beach*
-

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

1.

“... ‘the girl who loses her virginity before she is married... is inevitably storing up psychological trouble such as the risk of pregnancy, deception of family and friends, and never knowing whether her husband married her out of duty alone. If the marriage did not go ahead and she later married someone else she would be ‘duty bound to tell him of her ‘past’”

Ruth Martin in *Woman’s Day* magazine, 1954
in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, UNSW Press, 2000, p62

- **What is the ‘psychological trouble’ that a girl who loses her virginity before she is married will suffer?**
- **How do Ruth Martin’s comments compare with today’s attitudes to sex and marriage? What are the similarities and differences?**

2.

Working in pairs or groups, draw up a table with two columns.

In one column, using information from above, make a list of social mores (conventions and ways of behaving) from the 1950s. In the other, create a list of today’s social mores.

How are the two lists different?

Are there any common points?

3.

PEARL: Nobody would say it was a decent way of living.

OLIVE: Wouldn't they? I would! I've knocked about with all sorts from the time I was fourteen, and I've never come across anything more decent in my life. Decency is – it depends on the people. And don't you say it doesn't!

PEARL: I mean decent like marriage. That's different, you said yourself it was.

OLIVE [*with a slight shudder*]:
It's different all right. Compared to all the marriages I know, what I got is – [she gropes for depth of expression] is five months of heaven every year. And it's the same for them. Seven months they spend up there killin' themselves in the cane season, and then they come down here to live a little. That's what the lay-off is. Not just playing around and spending a lot of money, but a time for livin'. You think I haven't sized that up against what other women have? I laugh at them every time they try to tell me. Even waiting for Roo to come back is more exciting than anything they've got.

[Act One, Scene One]

- **What does Pearl think is a 'decent way of living'?**
- **How does Olive define 'decency'?**
- **Why does Olive think her arrangement with Roo is better than 'what other women have'?**

4.

PEARL: Yes. [*Girding herself*] Like I say, it's really no business of mine, but until last Saturday I didn't know you had any . . . de facto wives.

BARNEY: But I haven't! Ooh, what you mean is my kids? [*As she nods stiffly*] I tipped it'd be like that. Yes, kids I got all right. In three States.

PEARL: [*swallowing hard*] Well, that's it. I didn't want to have to talk to you about it, but Olive said I couldn't walk out without tellin' you, so . . .

[*She makes a move as if to rise, he checks her.*]

BARNEY: Hold on a bit . . . did she tell you the rest of it? That I paid maintenance on every one of them till they got old enough to work—that I'm still payin' for the youngest girl?

PEARL: [*bursting in*] Maintenance? Do you reckon that's the only claim they've got on you? Honest, when I think what their mothers must have gone through! I'm a mother myself, I can . . . [*Words fail her.*]

BARNEY: You're real mad at me, aren't yer?

PEARL: Yes, I am. There's no excuse for that sort of thing, you're just a no-hoper. You must be!

[Act One, Scene Two]

- Why does Pearl describe Barney as a 'no-hoper'?
- What arguments does Barney put forward to defend himself?

5.

- What did society expect of Olive, Pearl, Roo and Barney?
- In what ways was each of these characters breaking social mores?

The language of the play – 1950s slang

Slang: Very informal language that is usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people.

Cambridge online dictionary – <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll is rich with 1950s Australian slang, and initial commentary and reviews praised the play for its use of everyday speech and colloquialisms. Below is a brief glossary – while you're watching the Belvoir Street production, you can look out for some of these words and phrases.

hang on to your hats	Get ready for what's coming	OLIVE: Hang on to your hats and mittens, kids, here I come again [Act One, Scene One]
a wag	Someone who is fond of making jokes	OLIVE: God you're a wag [Act One, Scene One]
to cotton on	To come to understand or realise something	PEARL: If she cottons on to me doing anything wrong, she's likely to break out the same way [Act One, Scene One]
a skinned rabbit	a very thin person	OLIVE: Nancy... always reckoned [Roo and Barney] made the rest of the mob look like a bunch of skinned rabbits . [Act One, Scene One]
to lam into	to hit out or give a thrashing	BARNEY [cupping his hands and yelling] Buubbaa – what are yer hiding for? Reckon we're gunna lam into you with a walkin' stick or something? [Act One, Scene One]
larrikin	a trouble-making youth, usually a male	EMMA: ...you oughta be damned glad I did go, or these larrikins wouldn't be here. [Act One, Scene One]
the johns	the police	EMMA: Yez'll be laughing the other side your face once the johns git after yer! [Act One, Scene One]
she'll be jake	it'll be ok, alright	BARNEY:... Righto, I'll have a word with her after. She'll be jake . [Act One, Scene One]
a razoo	very little money	BARNEY: ... He went off and I stayed. Then, like I said, I picked him up in Brisbane a week ago. By then he hardly had a razoo [Act One, Scene One]

bottling	excellent or outstanding	BARNEY: And of course I had to put me foot in it all over again by tellin' him how they made Dowdie ganger in his place, and what a bottling job he done [Act One, Scene One]
Up there, Cazaly	come on	OLIVE [calling upstairs] Up there, Cazaly – come on down – the party's on [Act One, Scene One]
to loll around	to laze around and do nothing	EMMA: ... 'Course it doesn't matter to you, all youse have to do is make a pigsty of the joint and then go off and loll around bars all day [Act One, Scene Two]
to get a snout on someone	to hold a grudge against someone	BARNEY: Oh yes, you are. You got a snout on that kid the first day you saw him working [Act One, Scene Two]
to smooge around someone	to chat someone up	OLIVE tells BARNEY to "smooge round" Pearl [Act One, Scene Two]
to poke mullock	to ridicule or make fun of	EMMA: Oh, so that's what you got me in for, is it – to poke mullock? [Act Two, Scene One]

CLASS ACTIVITIES – BEFORE AND AFTER THE SHOW

1.

In groups write and perform a short scene for the rest of your class, using as many words and phrases as you can from the glossary above

2.

As a class, build up a list of contemporary 'slang'. Then work in groups, using words from the list to create a contemporary scene. Perform it for your class.

KEY THEMES IN THE *DOLL* – CLASS ACTIVITIES

Transition and change

“It is a play about growing up and growing old and failing to grow up”

Katharine Brisbane, ‘Growing Up in Australia’,
introduction to Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*,
Currency Press, 1978, ix

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll depicts a group of people in a period of immense transition. It is the seventeenth summer that three of them have spent together, and from the outset things are different. Nancy has been replaced in the group by Pearl, who casts a questioning and often critical eye over their arrangement. However, the changes prove to be deeper and more significant than this, as each of the characters comes to realize over the course of the play.

ACTIVITIES

1.

“...with the help of Emma, Roo finally solves the puzzle of what has gone wrong with their enchanted world. He sees himself as he really is, and from this moment on he sees his world differently too. Roo sees in the mirror... not the flattering image of the rugged outback hero, but the real, ‘ordinary’ man, ‘the hell of a lot worse for wear”

Jane Cousins, ‘Gender and Genre: The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll’,
Continuum, Vol. 1 No. 1 (1987)

Roo is not the only character in the *Doll* that goes through a process of questioning their identity, or redefining themselves.

Choose one of the following characters and write a brief description of the internal changes that they go through throughout the play:

- Olive
- Pearl
- Barney
- Bubba

2.

Divide the class into five groups, each take the perspective of Olive, Pearl, Bubba, Roo or Barney. Argue why the change your character faces is greater than any of the others.

3.

ROO: [*crossing to the window, pointing into the night*] Hey, someone's letting off crackers—there's a rocket—put the lights off.

[*This is done, and they are now lit by the fitful firework explosions offstage.*]

OLIVE: Gee, look at 'em! [*With spontaneous decision, turning back to ROO*] Y'know, I'm glad we didn't go out now—let the Morriszes look after themselves, we're much better off on our own. Just the four of us here, and a few drinks to happy days.

BARNEY: [*half gay, half defiant*] That's it. Happy days 'n [*lifting his glass to the window*] glamorous nights!

[*PEARL who has been sneaking a sip of her beer, gives a whoop of mirth, choking herself on the swallow.*]

PEARL: [*gasping*] Ooh—oh, you fool, Barney, don't say things like that.

OLIVE: What?

PEARL: D-didn't you hear him?

BARNEY: All I said was. . .

PEARL: [*topping him*] Glamorous nights! I mean—look at us.

[*She tries to catch her breath with another drink of beer, oblivious to the effect her words have had on the other three. BARNEY turns slowly to look at ROO and OLIVE in puzzled bewilderment, then OLIVE's resolve breaks and she crumples down onto the piano stool, ROO crouching beside her, trying wordlessly to comfort her. BARNEY turns his gaze from their naked misery and stares shamefacedly into his beer. Offstage, and far off, twelve great strokes announcing the New Year can be heard through the other celebration noises, which include a nearby house-party singing "Auld Lang Syne" and distant cheering.*]

[Act Two, Scene One]

- What does Pearl mean when she says 'Glamorous nights! I mean – look at us'
- Why do her words have such a negative effect on Olive?

4.

'Growing up' means in some respects giving up the past. Olive has a particularly difficult time doing this. She clings to her version of the past - remaining nostalgic about previous summers, despite Pearl's criticism.

PEARL: All the time you talk about years—how long you've been doing this—how long you've been going there—and what does it prove? Nothin'. There's not one thing I've found here been anything like what you told me.

OLIVE: [*tiredly*] Oh Pearl.

PEARL: No oh Pearl about it. Last night, when I couldn't sleep, I figured out what's the matter with you. You're blind to everything outside this house and the lay-off season.

OLIVE: I'm blind to what I want to be.

PEARL: All right. But the least you can do is to see what you've got as it really is. Take a look at this place now you've pulled down the decorations. What's so wonderful about it? Nothing! It's just an ordinary little room that's a hell of a lot the worse for wear. And if you'd only come out of your day-dream long enough to take a grown-up look at the lay-off, that's what you'd find with the rest of it.

OLIVE: [*steely-voiced*] Listen, I'm gunna say this just once. All I told you about Roo and Barney and their time here was Gospel true—I'll swear it—for every year up until now. And if it hasn't been true for this year, maybe you're the last should be squealing about it.

PEARL: [*her eyes widening*] You're blamin' me, aren't you? Because I was here instead of Nancy.

OLIVE: Yes.

[*BARNEY enters and crosses the front verandah.*]

PEARL: I'm wasting my breath, then. If you can't see further than that, I'm just wasting my breath.

[Act Three, Scene One]

- What is it that Pearl thinks Olive is 'blind' towards?
- Why does Olive reject Pearl's criticisms?
- Why is Olive so determined to hang on to her view of the past, in spite of the difficulties of this seventeenth summer?

Generational conflict in the 1950s

The *Doll* depicts three generations, and the interactions and points of conflict between these generations.

Emma represents the older generation in the play, but her status is far from straightforward. At times she offers advice to the central characters, and she provides a wisdom and perspective that comes from her age. But frequently she is instead the butt of jokes, and she often lacks the authority that she might be expected to have over Olive and her friends. While she owns the house in which the action of the play takes place, it is Olive who runs the house.

EMMA:	... Who's been at my vinegar?
OLIVE:	I took a tiny little skerrick to put in a salad –
EMMA [<i>fiercely</i>]:	A whole half-bottle, that's how much a skerrick it was. Robbing your own mother. Whose house do you think this is anyway?
OLIVE:	I pay the rates and taxes –
EMMA:	Never mind that, I own it, and things in it is private. I've told you before to keep away from my cupboard.
	[Act One, Scene One]

Significant too, is the conflict between Olive, Pearl, Barney and Roo, and the younger generation, represented by Bubba and Dowd, but also indirectly by the absent Vera, Pearl's daughter. The *Doll* deals with the transfer of power to this younger generation. At the end of the play, Dowd is set to become the head ganger, taking over Roo's role, while Bubba steps into Olive and Nancy's shoes, going off to meet Dowd but insisting that this time it will be different.

1.

DOWD: [*summing up her reaction, and asking her directly one of the big questions of his life*] Tell me somethin', will yer? Why is it every time I come across anything connected with Roo, I'm supposed to act like I was too young to live up to it?

BUBBA: [*withdrawn, all of a sudden touched by the coincidence of their youthful insecurity*] I don't know. Maybe it's like the walking-sticks.

DOWD: The what?

BUBBA: The lolly walking-sticks. They're a sort of present—a joke we have every year when they come down.

DOWD: Beats me. [*Abandoning the puzzle*] Anyway, what's it matter, tomorrow's the thing. That is, if you'll still come with me after the cracks I've made. Will you?

BUBBA: Yes. I'd—like to.

DOWD: What did he say your name was again?

BUBBA: Bubba Ryan.

DOWD: Bubba? Is that what they call you? [*As she nods*] Seems to me they're keeping you in the cradle, too.
 [*They look at one another in a moment of perfect understanding.*]
 What's your real name?

BUBBA: [*softly*] Kathie.

DOWD: Kathie? Well, that's what I'll call you. Okay?

[Act Two, Scene Two]

- **What is 'one of the big questions' of Dowd's life?**
- **What does he mean when he says to Bubba "they're keeping you in the cradle, too"?**
- **Why does Dowd insist on calling Bubba by her real name?**

2.

BUBBA: He asked me! And he didn't call me B-bubba or kid, he wanted to know what my real name was, and when I told him, that's what he called me. Kathie. [*Turning away to ROO*] He might have been drinking, and this morning he might have forgotten like you said, but this is the only chance I've ever had of comin' close to – I dunno – whatever it is I've been watching all these years. You think I'll give that up?

[Act Three, Scene One]

- **Why is it important to Bubba that Dowd called her by her 'real name'?**
- **Why does she choose to go and meet Dowd?**

City and country in the 1950s

One of the many changes evident in Australia during the 1950s was the continuing shift from rural to urban industry, with urbanization ever increasing.

In that sense, Barney and Roo are representative of an older, more traditional image of Australia, one that was rapidly diminishing.

“What does the ‘average Australian’ look like?... Old habits die hard, but few people today think of the so-called ‘average’ Australian as a lean, sunburnt, slow-moving, purple-tongued fellow who rides a horse”

From a General Motors Holden car advertisement
in *Woman’s Day and Home Magazine*, 30th May 1955,
quoted in John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*,
UNSW Press, 2000, p69

“The difference between the cane-cutter and his city brother is his aggressive manliness, his closeness to the earth, his coating of tan. He has the earth to go back to until he is too old. The city dweller has his chromium plating, his suburban garden, his espresso bar”

Wal Cherry, 1956
quoted in Peter Holloway,
Contemporary Australian Drama,
Currency Press, 1981, p186

- **How do these two sources from the 1950s describe the older, more traditional image of the ‘average’ Australian?**
- **In what ways are Barney and Roo representative of this more traditional image?**

The ending of the play

ROO: Olive, I'm staying here with you.
 OLIVE: [*staring at him now*] Well—how will you meet up together for the season?
 ROO: Say we don't? Barney'll get along, he doesn't need me any more, he knows plenty of fellows. And this young Dowd, it looks like they're gonna team up together.
 OLIVE: But you, Roo—what'll happen to you?
 ROO: Notin'. I'm not goin' back, Olive. Not for this season or—or any other. [*Moving in to take her stiffened, bearded body into his arms*] Let me get rid of this for a moment. . . .
[He takes the handbag from her unresisting fingers and drops it aside on the table.]
 OLIVE: [*almost whispering*] You're not going back?
 ROO: [*tenderly*] Look, I know this is seventeen years too late, and what I'm offering is not much chop, but—I want to marry you, Ol.
[There is a moment of frozen horror and then she pushes herself away from him, almost screaming with quivering intensity.]
 OLIVE: No!
 ROO: Olive. . . .
 OLIVE: You can't get out of it like that—I won't let you. . . .
 ROO: [*appalled*] Olive, what the hell's wrong?
 OLIVE: You've got to go back. It's the only hope we've got.
 ROO: Stop that screamin', will yer. . . .?
 OLIVE: You think I'll let it all end up in marriage—every

day—a paint factory—you think I'll marry you?
 ROO: [*grabbing her and shouting back*] What else can we do? You gone mad or something? First you tell me I've made you low, and now look—you dunno what you want!
 OLIVE: [*breaking away, possessed*] I do—I want what I had before. [*Rushing at him and pummeling his chest*] You give it back to me—give me back what you've taken.
 ROO: [*grabbing her wrists and holding them tight*] Olive, it's gone—can't you understand? Every last little scrap of it—gone!
[He throws her away from him, and she falls to the floor, grief-stricken, almost an animal in her sense of loss.]
 OLIVE: I won't let you. I'll kill you first!
 ROO: [*laughing at her, hurting himself at the same time*] Kill me, then. But there's no more flyin' down out of the sun—no more eagles. [*Going down on one knee beside her and striking the floor with his hand*] This is the dust we're in and we're gonna walk through it like everyone else for the rest of our lives!
[She gives a rasping cry and doubles over herself on the floor as if cradling an awful inner pain. ROO kneels watching her, his breath coming in gasps. EMMA comes quickly in from kitchen as BARNEY'S voice is heard calling in apprehension from upstairs.]
 BARNEY: [*off*] What's going on down there?
[He comes hastily downstairs and into the room. EMMA means while has come to crouch beside OLIVE.]
 EMMA: Olive. . . .
 ROO: [*backing away, choked*] Give it back to me, she says. As if I'd taken it away from her—me.
 EMMA: Oily, what's the matter? Tell me.
[But OLIVE shakes her head dumbly, not looking up. She draws away from her mother and rises, swaying. Lifts her head to stare at ROO, his whole bearing one of uncompromising rejection. There is an unbelieveing moment, then she stumbles forward to pick up her bag and move from the house. It is the progress of a drunk woman, her head hangs down, her hair is tumbled about her face, and she lurches as she walks. The only sound is a rhythmic gagging catch in her throat, too elemental to be defined as sobbing. On the verandah, she steadies herself for a moment against a post, clinging for support before relinquishing her grip

to plunge off front veranda and wander out of sight. After a pause EMMA rises and moves up to the archway. She speaks with love, grim determination.]

There's nothin' you can do for her now—except to clear out and never come back. The lay-offs in this house are finished—for all of you.

[She turns and exits to the kitchen, suddenly seeming a worn-out, old, shambling woman. BARNEY starts after her for a second, then looks at ROO, standing immobile by the table. BARNEY makes a decision and begins quietly, but with tremendous purpose:]

BARNEY: To hell with Dowd! To hell with all the boys! They can pick grapes or do anythin' they want to, I won't even get in touch with them. We'll go off on our own, Roo, we'll make a fresh start. There's plenty of places we can go to—that bloke up in Warwick, he always said he'd give us a job any time we ever wanted one.

[ROO moves towards the window to look after OLIVE.]

Or even—look, we don't have to go any place we've ever been before, even. How about that, Roo? We've been goin' to the same places for so long and doin' the same things that we've started to run ourselves into the ground. That's what's wrong with us! *(Moving behind Roo)* And there's a whole bloody country out there—wide open before us.

[ROO's gaze fixes on the seventeenth doll on top of the piano.] There's all the West—we can hit Perth, and then work our way right through up to Broome there. Or even—

[ROO, breathing heavily, picks up the doll. BARNEY, knowing he has failed, carries on in a desperate rising tone, but backing away from the scrath he senses is to come.]

Look, Roo, this is even better. That Run Jungle you hear so much about! There's a packet in it, they reckon. I bet fellers like us could really clean up there—and we wouldn't have to give a Continental for—

[He breaks off as ROO, in a baffled, insensate rage, begins to beat the doll down and down again on the piano, smashing and tearing at it until it is nothing but a litter of broken cane, tinseel and celluloid. Only when it is in this state does it drop from his hands, leaving one torn shred of silk caught between his fingers.]

His body sags as the tremendous energy sustaining him through this last effort starts to drain away. Swooping a little on his feet like a beaten bull, he slowly folds down on to the piano stool and buries his face in his hands. Something breaks deep down within him, but there is no movement in his body, he is far too inertial for the release of tears. After a pause, BARNEY, with a wisdom that momentarily transcends his usual shallow self, comes in slowly to put his hands on the big man's shoulders.]
Come on, Roo. Come on, boy.

[He pats the shoulder under his hand once, comfortingly, then moves up to collect his coat, sling it over his back, and stand waiting. ROO comes out of his collapse and the shred of silk between his fingers takes his attention. He rises, staring at it in a helpless sort of anguished misery, then opens his fingers to let it flutter down to the rest of the mess on the floor. He looks across at BARNEY, and in this brief meeting of eyes there is no bravado or quelling hope, it is a completely open acknowledgment of what they have lost. BARNEY jerks his head indicating the open front door. ROO joins him, and they move out on to the front veranda, and leave the house.]

THE END

“Perhaps the most contentious scene has been the last one between Olive and Roo. If the feelings of the past have been so deep, if the ritual of the past sixteen summers has been a warm and enriching one... why... does Olive reject the idea of marriage? Is this a profound rejection of suburbia and all its conventions? A magnificently unrealistic commitment to her unconventional dream?... A scornful rejection of an offer which she recognizes as Roo’s face-saving option to returning to the canefields? An initial refusal which will, or should properly, be succeeded by a more sensible acceptance of the gold band and the one suburban roof? Responses to the [ending]... have been nothing if not varied. Praised as powerful, logical, tough or tragic, the scene has been criticized as tear-jerking, manipulative, sentimental, pathetic and melodramatic”

Joy Hooton, 1986,
quoted in Peter Holloway,
Contemporary Australian Drama,
Currency Press, 1981, p246

CLASS ACTIVITIES – AFTER THE SHOW

1.

As a class read and discuss the ending of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and Joy Hooton’s comments:

- Why does Lawler have Olive reject Roo’s proposal?
- What effect does this ending have on an audience?
- What message is Lawler leaving his audiences with?
- In what ways is the ending:
 - powerful
 - logical
 - tough
 - tragic
 - tear-jerking
 - manipulative
 - sentimental
 - pathetic
 - melodramatic?

2.

Work in pairs or groups to devise an alternative ending for the play. Present your ending to the rest of the class, and discuss what message you are trying to convey and what affect you hope your ending would have on an audience.

Production elements – Set and Costume Design

Costume Design

"Today they showed me the costume design," he [Ray Lawler] says, finishing off the sandwiches. They were saying all the costumes are going to be period. When we did it, it was of the period. In those days, if you performed a modern play you had to supply your own clothes. *The Doll* was described as 'stark realism' back then. Now it has a nostalgia to it."

The Sydney Morning Herald, 1st September 2011



Ray Lawler, Ethel Gabriel and June Jago
in the London production of the *Doll*, 1957

- What is a 'period' play?
- What does Ray Lawler mean when he says 'when we did it, it was of the period'?
- Imagine you are a costume designer in 2071, working on a period piece set in Sydney in 2011. Design costumes for your characters.

Set Design

1. Read Ray Lawler's detailed set description for the *Doll* below.

SETTING

Charming and fast-vanishing relics of Victorian architecture in Australia are the double-storied brick cottages with elaborately patterned ironwork decorating their verandahs—hanging in fringes from above, and forming pale, intricate barriers down below.

These are almost invariably found in the older section of the city, and the house of the play is situated in Carlton, a now scruffy but once fashionable suburb of Melbourne.

The setting is a composite study of a ground-floor front room, with adjacent hallway, staircase, and a passage leading to kitchen, held between a front and a back verandah. It should be noted that, although the main scene of the action is the interior of the house, the front verandah, with a section of overgrown, palmy garden before it should be visible either through a scrim wall or a cut-away section. This is not an essential point with the back verandah, however, which exists mainly to provide a connection with Bubba's place next door.

Narrow-leaf French windows give entrance to the room from the back verandah, and a front door lets on to the other; both verandahs are profusely decorated with green shrubbery and ferns. These, together with the wildness of garden, should make an enshrouding contrast to the interior of the house, which has a dominant note of cheerfully faded pink in its colour scheme.

There is little pattern or taste evident in the furniture, ranging as it does from the heavy upright piano bought second-hand by Emma in 1919, to the chromium smoker's stand won by Olive in a pub raffle last month. The main decorative features are the souvenirs brought down by Roo on past visits.

The most notable of these are sixteen kewpie dolls, wearing tinsel headdresses and elaborately fuzzy skirts, attached to thin black canes shaped like walking-sticks. These peep coyly from behind pictures, flower in twos and threes from vases, and are crossed over the mantel-piece. They have as their companions a flight of brilliantly plumaged stuffed Northern Queensland birds, a variety of tinted coral pieces and shells from the Great Barrier Reef, and two picture frames backed with black velvet to which cling a crowd of shimmering-winged tropical butterflies.

The entire effect should be a glowing interior luminosity protected from the drabness outside by a light-filtered, shifting curtain of greenery.

The play opens in early December, 1953.

- How is it similar to the set that you saw at Belvoir Street?
- What differences can you see?
- What effect might these differences have?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO THE PLAY

1.

Read the sources below:

- What reasons do each of these commentators and reviewers give for the success of the *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*?
- Compare the Australian reviews with the British reviews – Are there common points? In what ways do they differ?

2.

In groups, design a piece of advertising for the play, either in a smaller format (for a newspaper or magazine) or in a larger format (a poster or billboard). Your advertising must include 3 short quotes, taken from the commentary and reviews below.

3.

Extended response:

Why was *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* such a success in both Australia and Britain? Use the commentary and reviews provided to substantiate your argument.

AUSTRALIAN RESPONSES TO THE DOLL

SOURCE A:

"In Melbourne, audiences (myself among them) warmed to the freshness and the sheer Australianness of the play. For all of us, but particularly those who had lived in student digs in Carlton, Anne Fraser's scruffy, brown-toned and scrupulously detailed terrace setting was an added pleasure. Houses just like it could be found by the dozen only a few blocks away"

Leonard Radic, *The State of Play*, Penguin Books, 1991, p21

SOURCE B:

"A stunning success... He has written a play so superbly true to Australian thought and to the Australian scene that theatrical conventions disappear"

Biddy Allen, *The Argus*, 29th November 1955, as quoted in Katharine Brisbane, 'Growing Up in Australia', introduction to Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Currency Press, 1978, xiii

SOURCE C:

“This was real and exciting Australiana, with Australian spirit springing from the deep heart of the characters, and never merely pretending that Australianism is a few well-placed bonzers, too-rights, strike-me-luckies and good-Os... One hardly knows what to applaud most in Mr Lawler’s work – the tension he holds till the last curtain, the dramatic strength of situation after situation as his people bicker and brawl and have ‘a bit of a laugh’ or ‘a bit of a beer up’... or the full-bloodedness, variety and shrewd knowledge of people in his characterisations”

Lindsay Browne, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11th
January 1956,
quoted in Brisbane, xxvii

SOURCE D:

“It has happened at last – someone has written a genuine Australian play without kangaroos or stock whips, but an indigenous play about city-dwellers”

J Griffen-Foley,
‘True Australian Play at Last’,
in *The Daily Telegraph*,
quoted in Brisbane, xxvii

SOURCE E:

“The play is as ‘fair dinkum’ Australian as the Diggers of two world wars, the Blue Mountains or the Murray River... He has one quality of the true artist: the power of observation – little happiness, little sorrows; hopes and desires; vanity, remorse, suspicion and sentimentality”

John Kardoss, ‘Fair Dinkum Play a Success’, *The Sun*,
quoted in Brisbane, xxvii

SOURCE F:

“a significant night, not merely because the Elizabethan Trust was staging its first Australian play but because the heartfelt applause meant the death of the old and stupid notion that Australians could never create a worthwhile play”

Frank Harris, *The Daily Mirror*,
quoted in Brisbane, xxvii

BRITISH RESPONSES TO THE *DOLL*

SOURCE A:

“It’s a damn good play. It’s as simple as that. Good plays are not easy to find.”

Laurence Olivier,
quoted in Brisbane, xxx

SOURCE B:

“Mr Lawler has one of the qualities of a first-rate dramatist: that of being able... to put his finger on the exact point at which the fortunes of his characters reach their climax and begin to decline”

Harold Hobson,
The Sunday Times, 5th May 1957
quoted in Brisbane, xxxii

SOURCE C:

“...one of Her Majesty’s subjects [has] turned up with a play about working people... presented as human beings in their own right, exulting in universal pleasures and nagged by universal griefs... [Lawler was] born with something that most English playwrights acquire only after a struggle and express only with the utmost embarrassment – respect for ordinary people ...he has composed a story as gripping in the theatre as it would be in life. It has to do with the reluctance of people to grow up; to prepare for age, to exchange immaturity for responsibility... When the curtain falls, reality has demolished the romantic myth of the past... In short, we have found ourselves a playwright, and it is time to rejoice”

Kenneth Tynan, *The Observer*, 5th May 1957
quoted in Brisbane, xxxiii-xxxiv

SOURCE D:

“Nothing could be fuller-blooded than the way this company brings [the characters] to life. I found the early scenes rather trying, but once attuned to the accents and the slang, I lost myself in the raw humanity of these people – a humanity that reduces our own anaemic drawing-room plays to still life”

Cecil Wilson, *The Daily Mail*,
quoted in Brisbane, xxxvi

RESOURCES

Ray Lawler, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* & Australian Theatre History

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- Peter Fitzpatrick, *After 'The Doll': Australian Drama since 1955*, Edward Arnold, Melbourne, 1979
- Peter Holloway [ed.], *Contemporary Australian Drama*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1981
- Joy Hooton, 'Lawler's Demythologising of the Doll: Kid Stakes and Other Times', *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1986)
- Leonard Radic, *The State of Play: The Revolution in the Australian Theatre since the 1960s*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1991

DVD

- *What I Wrote: Ray Lawler*, directed by Catherine Gough-Brady, Ronin Films, 2010

Websites

- Notes from the *What I Wrote* series - <http://www.snodger.com.au/whatiwrote/notes/WIWNNotesLawler.pdf>
- Notes on the play from Dr Tracey Sanders of the Australian Catholic University: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/trsanders/units/aust_drama/sevendoll.html
- Notes on *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*: <http://lardcave.net/hsc/english.2ug.lawler.17thdoll.html>
- Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer_of_the_Seventeenth_Doll

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Books

- John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000
- John Murphy and Judith Smart [eds.], *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, Australian Historical Studies, No. 109, 1997
- Eric Partridge and Paul Beale [eds.], *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8th edition, Routledge, London, 2002
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- Skwirk.com.au – 1950s: a decade in context http://www.skwirk.com/p-c_s-14_u-189_t-506_c-1870/1950s-decade-in-context