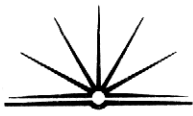
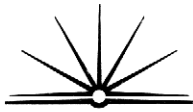


Q1



The federation of Australia in 1901 not only created national unity, but a national cry for its own identity, art, culture and theatre. Two playwrights emerged, Louis Esson in the 1920s and Ray Lawler in the 1950s. Both playwrights attempted to define a uniquely Australian style of theatre which not only entertained audiences, but challenged them by presenting realistic and true images of life in Australia. They took ordinary <sup>characters</sup> ~~people~~ and situations and explored their relationships. Through the use of realism, they brought truth and interest to these issues.

Louis Esson was heavily influenced by Synge and Yeats, two Irish playwrights. In their own country, both Synge and Yeats used realism to develop a drama that truthfully portrayed the Irish character. Esson was obsessed with the idea that Australia was an 'undiscovered country', and with the encouragement of



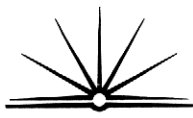
Syngue and Yeats, he attempted to bring the "Australian mystique" alive, onstage.

This is done through realism and characterisation.

The character of Mrs Lind in his play of 1921, "Mother and Son" is a true example of Australian mythology in action. She is a hardened, strong woman, who has courage in the face of adversity and recognises the tasks at hand.

Esson explored the ordinary situation of living in the bush by present<sup>ing</sup> ~~ing~~ <sup>how</sup> ~~was~~ relationships struggle in the bush environment. Emma cannot cope in this setting and runs away to the city with Jim Blake "No... I don't belong here among these cockie-farmers. It's the dullest place I've ever been in".

The relationships between the characters and land is also explored.

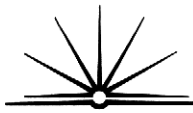


The harshness of the land is reflected by the toughness of the characters who live on it, such as Mrs Lind. Jim

Blake describes this harshness, "Droughts or flood, it's a great country. Last year we only had three inches of rain and now there's a cyclone tearing up the gum-trees." The close relationships the characters have with the land is also demonstrated as a storm rages outside during Peter's death. After he dies there is calm.

To present these ordinary issues and situations in a true and interesting way, Esson uses realism.

This is evident in the stage directions "on the left wall is a large fireplace, with rough shelves above". The characters setting, costuming are real and the play is straight-forward, structured in three Acts. There is also a touch of

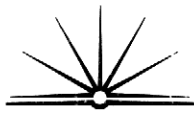


melodrama as Peter is raised to the window in his final moments.

Despite Esson's best efforts, audiences and the theatrical community still felt a need for a uniquely Australian drama. Competitions were held and the talent of Ray Lawler was discovered.

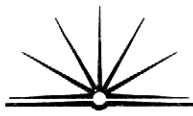
His play, "Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll" (The Doll) was considered a break-through play as it gave a chance for Australian actors and actresses to present true images of life in Australia not only to audiences at home, but around the world. "The Doll" was created during a period in which drama focussed on soul-searching. Lawler uses realism and characterisation to present the soul-searching of his ordinary characters.

The theme of "The Doll" is aging. The land has taken its toll on the aging Roo as he is unable to continue



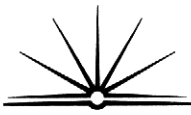
his work on the canefields as a result of aging. He proposes to Olive who rejects him and the expectations placed on a woman of the 1950's to settle down and marry, "I want what I had before. You give it back to me". Olive's blunt refusal to marry challenged the audiences of the 1950's.

Like Esson, Lawler uses realism to present his issues in The Doll. This is evident in the stage directions, costuming, setting, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> characterisation "wearing a crisp green and white summer frock". The archetypal Aussie characterisation Carrikin<sup>1</sup> of Barney is entertaining "Hullo. What's biting Emma?", as well as the humorous lines of Emma. Symbolism is also used as the shattering of the seventeenth doll represents the shattering of Olive's dreams.



Both Esson and Lawler used realism to present these ordinary situations. This is entertaining and challenging because it gives the audience the opportunity to watch real people live right in front of them. Realism gives audiences the opportunity to identify, feel, and relate to the characters.

In workshop activities, the importance of realism as a device to connect the audience to the performers was realised. Scenes were performed without direction from the stage directions. These scenes became ridiculous and the connection between audience and performers was not established. Also in a professional performance, the melodramatic portrayal of Roe in "The Doll" compromised the integrity of the situation.



Both Esson and Lawler recognised the need for the development of a uniquely Australian style of theatre which was not only ~~at~~ entertaining, but insightful. Through the use of realism they were able to achieve this.