

The Mirror of Whiteness: Blackface in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*

BENJAMIN MILLER
University of New South Wales

A young and unknown Charles Chauvel, before leaving for the theatre, stares into the mirror in his room and straightens his tie. He winks to himself, just as an American director had winked to him the previous week. Later, he takes his seat among men in suits and women in furs. The Hollywood theatre smells of stale tobacco; smoke hangs in the air. A piano rattles into action as one of the latest Westerns flickers into life. It's the usual story—cowboy chases Indian, cowboy shoots Indian. People will gasp, laugh and leave feeling good. A young and unknown Charles Chauvel, Hollywood stunt-man, stares into the screen and waits for his entrance.

Charles Chauvel travelled to America in 1921. He was hoping to break into the cinema industry. During this time Chauvel experienced Hollywood. He was playing roles in silent films to survive (in dark make-up as Mexicans and Arabs), and also worked as a publicity agent for the incredibly popular Douglas Fairbanks Snr, famed for his role (in dark make-up) as an Arab in *The Thief of Baghdad* (Chauvel Carlsson 29, 30). This article posits that Chauvel's early experience in and with "blackface" was a significant influence for his own films. Michael Pate—an actor Chauvel later discovered, and who went on to star in the hit Australian TV show, *Homicide*—recalls of Chauvel's time in Hollywood:

[he], of course, handled himself like a true Australian bushie, in one shot galloping right-to-left as a Red Indian, the next hurtling by in the same direction, even on the same horse, as a cowboy chasing the same Red Indian (himself). (x)

This image of Chauvel, "like a true Australian bushie", chasing his own racial creations across the screen can be read as a potent comment on the Australian social imaginary's construction of race. Reading Chauvel in blackface reflects his fictions of race back onto himself—he is "cowboy" and "Indian". This article recounts a history of blackface performances, as well as ways of reading blackface, to fill some critical gaps in an iconic Australian film—Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955). My reading of *Jedda* will turn the film back onto itself to reflect not just Chauvel, but also a long

history of racial representation, spanning many continents and over 100 years, which was always radical and racist, benevolent and violent. When Chauvel wore and directed blackface he was, perhaps quite unconsciously, reiterating racial fictions that had justified violent colonialism and slavery since the eighteenth century. To understand this, Chauvel's work must be read within a history of blackface.

There is little doubt that blackface was used on the Elizabethan stage—*Othello* being an obvious example; however, just where and how it became blackface *minstrelsy*—the most popular form of nineteenth century entertainment—is not so clear. Mikko Tuhkanen has argued that in early “minstrel theory” (c.1920s-1960s) “blackface representations were assumed to be the transparent results of simple cultural borrowing” (16). According to these critics blackface was used by white performers in conjunction with an “authentic” cultural and racial mimicry of African people who had been transported to America as slaves. However, it is just as likely that those early white minstrels were actually indirectly mimicking themselves. The stiff dance-steps may have been African parodies of European dances.¹ Blackface is not even strictly an American phenomenon, as is often assumed. The American blackface was influenced by local conditions as well as by the various forms of blackface being performed around the world, including, of course, in Australia.

Richard Waterhouse's *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville* provides the most complete account to date of the history of blackface entertainment in Australia. Waterhouse provides an excellent account of, to use his phrase, “negro impersonations” (26) in Australia. However, despite his passing reference to “Aboriginal” acts, his history of the Australian blackface does not chart the emergence of an Aboriginal character played by white actors in blackface during the nineteenth century in Australia. Waterhouse convincingly argues for a complex world-influenced history of the Australian blackface minstrel. Blackface had been acted in both America and Britain by the late eighteenth century. Waterhouse argues that these “early characterisations of blacks” were “English in origin and based on Caribbean stereotypes”; they “portrayed them either in sentimental terms as romantic noble savages . . . or in comic terms, as ludicrous characters” (1). After the American “War of 1812”, a blackface character appeared on the American stage, singing patriotic American songs in a supposedly Afro-American dialect. It was an emerging success.

At first these comic minstrels, forged in the name of American patriotism and influenced by Caribbean stereotypes, were generally only found in “bit-

parts” or as comic relief during a show. However, over the next decade the minstrel show became an international sensation. The British were entertained by an American performer, T.D Rice, in 1836. Then, seven years later, the Americans were entertained by the Virginia Minstrels in what is generally regarded as the first formal full evening of blackface minstrelsy. The Virginia Minstrels were also popular in Britain during the 1840s. Helen Gilbert argues that minstrelsy was not an isolated British/American phenomenon, but that “the transnational flows of minstrelsy were complex and extensive” (683). Gilbert states that, as well as being popular in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, “minstrel shows also found a colonial audience in India, Jamaica, Nigeria, and South Africa” (683). The blackface minstrels, circulating across the globe, had moved from between the scenes to become an entire show; a worldwide touchstone for popular opinions on race at the time. Minstrelsy’s popularity and form could not be attributed solely to the Caribbean, Britain or America, but relied on worldwide circulation.

Given the worldwide popularity of minstrelsy during the nineteenth century it is hardly surprising that the first locally produced Australian plays incorporated “black” characters (see Burn, A.B.C, McLaughlin, Cooper, and Benbow). White actors would no doubt, have played these characters in blackface. In what is commonly regarded as the first play written and performed in Australia,² Henry Melville’s *The Bushrangers* (1834), an Aboriginal character makes an appearance:

NATIVE. — Me want baccy and bredly—me had none long time—
me got very old blanket.

ELLEN. — Well blackey, you shall have both, if you will dance a
corroboree!

NATIVE. — He, he! corroboree?

ELLEN. — Yes! corroboree.[³] No baccy without corroboree.

[NATIVE *sings and dances the corroboree*]

ELLEN. — Well now, blackey, I’ll sing you a song.

[ELLEN *sings a song*] . . .

ELLEN. — There now, will you promise not to send begging here,
any of your gins and piccaninies, if I give you what you want . . . I
don’t know which is worst, the bushrangers or you natives.

. . .

NATIVE. — Bushranger rob, steal, kill, murder—little make them
savage—black native love white man, till murder wife, piccaniny.

ELLEN. — Come be off . . . (18-19)

The song and dance was most likely improvised, with little or no authentic mimicry of an indigenous ceremony. For an impression of what such a dance may have entailed, a dance by Aboriginal characters is described in a play by David Burn (who had lived in Tasmania, like Melville, but returned to his native Scotland where his play was first performed in 1829). In that play, also titled *The Bushrangers*:

(. . . PEGGY returns with bread, tea, sugar and tobacco. The BLACKS pull the kangaroos from the fire, tear them with their teeth, munch the bread and keep up a great gabbling. When they have done, they all exclaim, 'Corobborra — Corobborra!' They then start up and perform a rude dance in which they go spinning round and round and throwing their arms about in an extravagant manner and singing.)

TOM [the Aboriginal 'chief']: Well, matta [as in "master"], how you like black fello corrobora? (30)

These dances may well have incorporated minstrelsy dance-steps ("rude"-ness was certainly a feature of a minstrel skit). Given that American and British blackface performances are recorded by Waterhouse as taking place at Australian race-meets throughout the 1820s and 1830s (27), Melville and Burn would most probably have witnessed an early form of minstrelsy. In regards to language, Fotheringham notes of Melville's scene that the words "corroboree" and "gin" were poor approximations from the language of Sydney's Dharuk clan (the latter's usage pre-dating the word's inception into dictionaries of the time) (xlix). The term "piccaniny" [sic], however, is originally a term for children from the Caribbean (Fotheringham fn19). The transnational language of minstrelsy had travelled from the Caribbean, via Britain and the US (where "pickaninnies" were minstrelsy show regulars), to Australia.

Melville's play also provides some interesting insights into inter-racial encounters in the nineteenth century. There is a fascinating cultural exchange of songs; the play *almost* functions as a space where cultural artefacts intertwine and are exchanged at will. However, the power differentials cannot be escaped as the "Native" sings for basic rations and blankets (it is a system he is addicted to via "baccy"/tobacco, much to the benefit of white settlers). Further, the Aboriginal song is improvised and not included in the script whereas Ellen's song is transcribed. This displays an assumption of white superiority through the authentic transcription of an Irish song. This is particularly telling in contrast to the indigenous "culture", which is presented as a spontaneous, comic, mimicry. Even as a comic act, such a performance also enacted an epistemological role. As it would have been, for many in the audience, their only "encounter" with something "Aboriginal",

it is not surprising that Australians then, as now, struggle to comprehend the significant religious, legal and social importance of traditional Indigenous songs and dance. A “corrobora”, such as those popular on the Australian stage in the nineteenth century, no doubt, contributed to a perpetuation of myths of *terra nullius*—a land without religion, law or society. That this racism is played out alongside potentially subversive comments—such as the Aboriginal character’s complaint about the murder of his wife and children by a white man—provides an example of the complications of blackface; it is always a radical performance contained by its inherent racism.

With just one full-length book on the Australian blackface, and that not extending past 1914 or investigating the portrayal of Aboriginal characters in blackface, there is little to piece together the history and evolution of the Australian blackface into the twentieth century. It is also difficult given that so few plays still survive. Aboriginal characters, or at least blackface entertainers, certainly figure in the plays that do survive. With minstrelsy replaced with vaudeville, and that replaced by film, the Australian blackface still persisted. How did it change with the decline of minstrelsy and vaudeville? For answers we can turn back to Charles Chauvel.



Figure 1. Charles Chauvel [left], as an Aboriginal stockmen, sitting next to the “suitably blackened”, according to Susanne Chauvel Carlsson, Billy Stokes [right] for *The Moth of Moonbi*. (Photo taken from Chauvel Carlsson 47)

Chauvel returned from Hollywood in 1923 and had directed his first silent film by 1925. Late in the 30-odd minutes of surviving footage from his first film, *The Moth of Moonbi*, which can be seen at the National Screen and Sound Archives, Charles Chauvel appears in a cameo role—as the Aboriginal stockman (Figure 1). His performance, and especially that of his on-screen wife, falls within the genre of an Australian blackface minstrelsy. The silent film is vaudevillian in nature and the blackface is performed in an exaggerated slapstick manner. The female Aboriginal is a drunken, blundering fool while Chauvel's character is no more than a plot device to inform the film's hero of his love-interest's abduction. It would, most likely, have been accompanied by live instrumentation; probably with an “ad-lib” piano score. The story is spliced between long landscape shots, particularly of station life. Chauvel, from the outset, was interested in balancing entertainment with a serious documentation of the Australian landscape.

Chauvel made one other silent film, *Greenhide*, before moving into the “talkies” phenomenon in 1933. His next film, *In the Wake of the Bounty*, was the debut for a young Errol Flynn—whom Chauvel would always claim to have discovered. By 1936 Chauvel was pioneering another kind of blackface. *Uncivilised* is the story of a white female journalist captured by a white Aboriginal chief (who had been a lost white boy, raised by an Aboriginal tribe). At the conclusion of the film, after a bone has been pointed by an Aboriginal witch doctor (performed in blackface), an Arabic drug-smuggler is revealed to be a presumed-murdered British superstar sleuth. The British sleuth had created his Arabic persona with make-up, a turban and a fake beard in order to infiltrate a drug cartel. Chauvel's blackface had shifted from minstrelsy, with its slapstick and song, to an assumption that race can be authentically replicated (that is, the white actor, with make-up, can actually pass as Arab, Indian or Aboriginal). This “passing” blackface is also potentially subversive, with its insistence that colour (or biology) is not the defining characteristic of race. Race, as evidenced through the numerous examples of “passing” in this text, is a socio-cultural construct: something acted. The Aboriginal chief is white, though perhaps he is the chief because of his whiteness. The British sleuth can pass; though it is questionable whether an Arab could pass as white. Arguably, white privilege assumes the right to an infinite performativity of otherness. Again, like Melville's *The Busbrangers*, a potentially subversive blackface is always tethered to a performative racism and assumption of white superiority.

After *Uncivilised*, Chauvel produced a series of popular films—*Forty Thousand Horsemen*, *The Rats of Tobruk*, and *The Sons of Matthew*. According to Elsa

Chauvel, Charles felt he had “won his spurs” with these films; he could now form his own company and return to his passion: “the idea of the Northern Territory and its Stone Age men [which] was always playing hide and seek enticingly in Charles’s mind” (*My Life* 116). His next and last film was “the film only Australia could give the world” (Cunningham 26)—*Jedda*. *Jedda* is the story of a young Aboriginal girl (played by Rosalie Kunoth-Monks), who is raised by a white woman, Mrs McMahon. Jedda is destined to marry the McMahon’s head stockman, Joe, who was played in blackface by Paul Clarke.⁴ However, when a “tribal” Aboriginal, Marbuck (played by Robert Tudawali) comes to work on the property, Jedda is lured away, and eventually dragged away by him. This leads to a long chase by Joe, ending in the finale only Chauvel could give the world, where Joe pleads with a crazed Marbuck, who, clasping Jedda, slowly backs towards the precipice of a high cliff-top. Sure enough, Marbuck falls along with Jedda, whilst Joe is left to ponder the pitfalls of the failed assimilation of his would-be bride.

What is striking about commentaries on the film is that they barely examine Joe (see, for example, Cunningham, Johnson, Langton, or Jennings, all of whom provide little or no discussion of Joe). Joe is the narrator—it is his story. So it is peculiar that he hardly features in the film’s critical heritage. Perhaps, I would like to suggest, it is due to the complete absence of a reading method for the Australian blackface. Such a reading method can illuminate the role of Joe in this iconic film, and also the role of the film in a long heritage of representations of Indigeneity. Just as the Australian blackface has its origins in the minstrelsy circulating between the US, Britain, and the colonies, reading the Australian blackface must take its lead firstly from the American minstrel theorists—many of whom concentrate on nineteenth century antebellum blackface minstrelsy.

Mikko Tuhkanen, in an excellent recap of “minstrel theory”, argues for three generations of blackface criticism. I have already noted how early “minstrel theorists” (1920s-1960s) read blackface as an authentic cultural borrowing. After Ralph Ellison’s “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke” (1964), Tuhkanen suggests there has been a major re-thinking of blackface minstrelsy. Tuhkanen concludes that minstrel theory has progressed through two more major “generations”; though I argue that blackface needs to be understood using the reading methods of *both* these generations and with a more thorough articulation of whiteness. Tuhkanen argues that during the second stage of minstrel theory (1960s–1990s), blackface is seen as “function[ing] as a reflecting surface in which the image of white audiences is projected according to social, political, and psychological exigencies” (16).

Blackface is a reflection of the values of its audience. The authors Tuhkanen is relying on here include, for example, Hans Nathan, Nathan Huggins and Robert Toll. Tuhkanen states that the final and most recent stage in minstrel theory is a “third generation . . . characterized by its hesitance to attribute blackface dynamics to one social group or another, or to argue that minstrelsy constituted a controlled, strategic program” (16). For this third generation, blackface is read as a both racist and radical cultural production. For example, it has been suggested that the on-stage satirical criticisms by some blackface performers led to wide spread attitudinal changes that contributed to the abolition of slavery in the US, whilst still presenting demeaning stereotypes of black people. Other critics who could be placed in this third generation have read blackface as the result of curiosity and willingness for intercultural dialogue and exchange, though acknowledging that blackface performances are contained by demeaning representations as well (see, for example, Lhamon). This third generation, though reading minstrelsy as revolutionary at times, is always anxious about the corresponding racist representation in minstrelsy. My reading of blackface cannot be aligned solely with any of Tuhkanen’s three generations of minstrel theory. Blackface (not necessarily minstrelsy) reflects white values, as Tuhkanen’s second generation argue. Blackface (not necessarily minstrelsy) is radical and racist (we have already seen this in *The Bushrangers* and *Uncivilised*), as Tuhkanen’s third generation argue. The second-generation authors were clearly forerunners for the whiteness critics who revised “minstrel theory” in the third generation. The readings of these critics can, however, benefit from a (re)articulation of their use of “whiteness”.

Among the revisionary whiteness critics cited by Tuhkanen is David Roediger. Roediger is concerned with antebellum blackface. He argues that, in what he calls “blackface whiteness”, “a new sense of whiteness” was created through “a new sense of blackness” (115). For Roediger, blackface minstrels provided the universal other that could unite the various ethnicities of an American working class. A new sense of whiteness, in which the Irish became white amongst other newly whitened ethnicities, was created with the aid of blackface. Roediger’s discussion of whiteness, at least in his chapter “White Skins Black Masks”, displays some terminology problems within whiteness theory. Often Roediger’s use of the word “whiteness” slips so that it refers just to being white, whereas at other times whiteness refers to much more. I would argue that there is white-ness—as in being of white appearance—and whiteness—the system of material and discursive privileges that are often inherited unearned by those with white skin. Critics of whiteness must be careful to distinguish which kind of white(-)ness they

are referring to. Whiteness is more than a colour or identity (though it is those things too); *whiteness is a system of epistemological and institutional privilege with continuing violent consequences* for those it excludes. Whiteness privileges its own values (including the assumed superiority of white people and knowledge of the other) and protects the privileges of “white” people (from something as materialistic as higher wages, to the psychological privileges of being able to enter and leave at will the anxious debates and discussions of belonging in a world constructed by whiteness).

Roediger is, at least, useful for showing the fluidity of “white” identity—it can exclude and include, not necessarily due to colour, at will. Whiteness defines and excludes others based on knowledge and (racial) definitions it creates, often under pretences of curiosity or benevolence. It encompasses resistances because it is, in a sense, indefinable and built on policing relationships between itself (placed at the top of a hierarchy of power and privilege) and others.⁵ Blackface is most certainly a reflection of white audiences and their ideals, but it is more. Blackface is a fantasy that the other is complicit with white superiority and privilege. *Blackface is a mirror of whiteness*, a mirror of epistemological and institutional violence, a mirror for the history that has instilled white privilege and black disadvantage throughout the colonial world. Through blackface, whiteness can even encompass its own resistances. Though blackface is a guise that confirms whiteness, it is also a space to contest and challenge whiteness. That is precisely the power of whiteness; that it can incorporate criticisms to present an anti-racist whiteness that is still assumed to be superior to its other. Blackface, then, especially when it claims to pass as authentic, reflects whiteness; radical whiteness *and* racist whiteness, as whiteness itself is radical *and* racist, well-intentioned *and* violent. This blackface is only too apparent in *Jedda*.

Joe is a central character in *Jedda*. He is Jedda’s love-interest, and the narrator. *Jedda* is, quite literally, his story. His is a story of assimilation, his attempt to “win” Jedda, and assimilate her too. This assimilation narrative, though, is bracketed with an authentic Australian landscape from the film’s opening lines:

JOE: (*voiceover*) This is part of the oldest land in the world, the Northern Territory of Australia. It is my land, and the land of Jedda, the girl I love. My name is Joe. I am the half-caste son of an Afghan teamster and an Australian Aborigine woman. I was reared by a white woman and her husband, who educated me and made me their head stockman. This is a land . . . (DVD Ch1)

Again, as with Melville's play, this blackface narration is potentially subversive. The second sentence of the film claims the land as an indigenous possession. However, I will argue that the film is built on a type of (blackface) presentation that vacates the land of indigenous occupation, even as it purports to do the opposite. That *Jedda* would be a story about race and landscape is not surprising for two reasons. Firstly, Chauvel's racial ideals involved a belief in assimilation through interracial marriages (Elsa Chauvel Interview). He believed that assimilation (read "absorption") would benefit Indigenous people. Secondly, it is typical of a commitment to landscape which Stuart Cunningham has termed "locationism". Cunningham describes locationism as "Chauvel's intense commitment, despite the massive technical and financial obstacles, to shooting the 'true' country" (26). I do not read these aspects of the film—racial politics and "locationism"—as separate entities, or as "strengths" and "weaknesses", as Cunningham does, concluding that: "The weaknesses of *Jedda* are indissolubly linked to its strengths" (164). I read Chauvel's locationism as a *reflection* of his assimilationist ideals that, perhaps unconsciously, render "authentic" indigeneity as a dangerous, violent, but ultimately fading (or falling) presence. This dangerous and inevitably dying indigeneity leaves both the land and Indigeneity open for occupation. It is Chauvel's compounding of race and landscape (indeed, that an "essentialised" indigeneity is *part* of the landscape) that clears the space for blackface to operate as securing the fiction of *terra nullius*. That Joe controls the story in blackface is a telling indication of how whiteness constructs potentially subversive stories that support its own power. The fictional (or made up) aspects of the story do not end with Joe's make up. His blackface is reflected in the narrative and landscape as a whole.

Considering his centrality to an iconic film, it is strange that Paul Clarke, who played Joe, never acted again. So, when Gino Moliterno "accidentally" met Clarke at a family Christmas party in 2004, he and Ken Berryman quickly organised an Oral History interview (AFC). In that interview Clarke revealed some of the technical aspects of the production of the film. These technical aspects show just how the blackface of Joe is reflected in the narrative as a whole. Included in the details provided by Clarke is the fact that the film was dubbed. This dubbing is hardly surprising given the BBC accent of Joe's voiceover. However, the film was dubbed in England and not by the original actors. An English actor dubbed Joe because the producers weren't happy with the Australian accent (Clarke CD1 Track69). Ironically Clarke, who acted in blackface, is angered at the dubbing of his Australian accent (CD2 Track3-4). The character of *Jedda* was dubbed

by a South African actress (CD1 Track70), whilst it appears as if the two Aboriginal housekeepers who dote over the newly arrived baby Jedda have been dubbed with a Caribbean accent (Jedda DVD Ch2). The rolling of these house maids' "r's" in a Caribbean accent harks back not only to the travelling minstrel language of *The Busbrangers*, but to the blackface minstrels of 1850s America, their language still influenced by the British stereotypes of Caribbean plantation workers.

Blackface moves further still into the narrative. Joe remarks of Mrs McMahon, the white adoptive mother bathing her baby Jedda:

JOE: (*voiceover*) She would have laughed if anyone had suggested that she was growing fond of baby Jedda, but somehow Jedda remained [with Mrs McMahon] and, like Topsy, "just growed". (DVD Ch3)

"Just grow'd" is a colloquialism that originates from Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous American novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The original line comes from the character of a black servant named Topsy who is asked about her parents:

"Do you know who made you?"

"Nobody, as I knows on," said the child [Topsy] with a short laugh.

The idea appeared to amuse her considerably; for her eyes twinkled, and she added,

"I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me." (277)

Joe's analogy between Jedda and Topsy is a potentially subversive comment that Jedda is being raised as a slave. This drastically undercuts the benevolence of Mrs McMahon, who states, "I want you to go on living like a white girl, like my own daughter" (DVD Ch4). However, like the potentially subversive space of blackface, there is more to this reference upon further investigation. Stowe's novel was serialised before publication. Even whilst still being serialised, and not yet printed in its entirety, a phenomenon emerged on the American stage known as "Tom Shows", where characters from Stowe's abolitionist novel were adapted and performed by blackface minstrels (Waterhouse 70-74, Lott 211-33). This went on for the rest of the century, and Stowe's characters were entangled, if they weren't already, in demeaning stereotypes and the racism inherent in blackface. It has even been suggested that the fact that the colloquialism has become "just growed", with the addition of "just", shows that the colloquialism is derived from adapted film and stage versions (in blackface) of Stowe's novel (see "Topsy"). In any case, Joe's narrative is directly referenced to either an inspiration for minstrel shows

or the minstrel shows themselves. The violence of blackface, it seems, doesn't go away when you look away. The narrative of Joe actually reflects the blackface he was wearing.

The effects of this blackface narrative have violent consequences for the real indigenous bodies in the film. Jedda is a character full of potential. She is possibly intended as a site of intercultural dialogue, fluent in white culture as well as learning something of Aboriginal culture as well. This vision of Jedda as a space where cultures meet on an equal footing is constantly undermined. Instead of translating the "tribal songs" that she hears in her head into a piano score, she breaks down in frustrated tears. This is, according to Joe "the ghost of your tribe chasing you with a big stick" (DVD Ch4). Any attempt by Jedda to associate with her "tribe" has violent consequences (like being beaten with a stick). Further, in Joe's view Jedda's tribe is a ghost, already perished. Jedda, too, is figured in the narrative as destined to perish. Laughing at one moment in the film Mr McMahon states of Jedda "Well, that Jezebel, not satisfied with claiming my wife, she claims my head stockman too" (DVD Ch3).

Aligning Jedda with Jezebel is not only a biblical reference—to the woman commonly referred to as the most evil woman in the Old Testament, who is killed by being thrown from an upper-story window—but it is a popular culture reference as well. *Jezebel* is a 1938 Bette Davis film about a Southern American woman who threatens her relationship to assume the abolitionist ideals of the North. Jedda is not simply marked as destined to die after a great fall, but she embodies debates over Aboriginal *slavery* (read assimilation) in 1950s Australia. In conjunction with Joe's blacking-up of Jedda through his reference to Topsy (a slave), and which serves as a reminder of her backward naïveté, Jedda's inherent weakness is to blame for her inability to function as an ideal site of cultural exchange. Seemingly paradoxically, a blackface narrator provides this biologically essentialised representation of "race". Not only does this fictionalise the "facts" of race (inherent weaknesses and naïveté, for example), but also it is a telling example of a whiteness constructing its own self-supporting narratives of otherness. That Jedda might be to blame (or fate might be to blame) for her tortured existence, and her eventual death, alleviates to some extent any guilt that might be felt by her white foster-parents or assimilated fiancé. The blackface of Joe's narrative, and the blackface reference to Jedda, is a reflection of whiteness that might talk about a well-intentioned assimilation, but that is concurrently debating the pros and cons of slavery and figures the other as doomed to perish.

The figure of the doomed Aboriginal intersects tellingly with Chauvel's concept of locationism. In the Oral History Interview with Paul Clarke, his interviewers were hoping to shed light on, amongst other things, the disappearance of Clarke from Australia's film and theatre scene. When asked why Chauvel cast Joe with a non-Aboriginal actor, Clarke justifies the use of blackface: "Actors", he states:

weren't incredibly important to Chauvel. When I say that, he didn't disrespect them, but they were secondary to the background, the scenery, the magnificence and the majesty of the Australian background and bushland . . . his main object, I think, was to present Australia, virtually as a travelogue to the world with an indigenous presentation. (CD1 Track18-20)

Essentially Clarke argues that the use of blackface doesn't matter because it wasn't the main point to the film; the main point was a documentation of the landscape. In a sense, Clarke gives the reason for his own casting as Chauvel's locationism; the authenticity of the actor didn't matter so long as Chauvel captured the "true" landscape. However, Chauvel and his wife travelled far and wide to find the two indigenous actors—their authenticity is vital to Chauvel (see Chauvel, *My Life* 127-36). If actors weren't important, why would Chauvel search so far to find Ngarla Kunoth and Robert Tudawali? The authenticity of these two actors was perhaps the most important aspect of the film. Implicit in Clarke's justification for blackface is the assumption that Kunoth and Tudawali were not actors, but part of Chauvel's locationism. This relegation of real indigeneity (as opposed to blackface) to the landscape, or to the "true country", empties Australia of any human presence and re-enacts the fictions of *terra nullius*. Both the (empty) landscape and (doomed) indigeneity are free for occupation.

It is, then, not just Joe's narrative that reflects blackface, but also Chauvel's beloved "authentic" landscape. With filming completed in 1954, Chauvel travelled back to Sydney. When the plane carrying the last reels of film to London for post-production crashed in Jakarta, Chauvel had neither time nor money to return to the red-centre to re-shoot the ending (Clarke CD2 Track7, and Chauvel Carlsson 150). Instead, he shot the footage in the Blue Mountains (see Figure 2). Paul Clarke remarks of this moment:

Chauvel got permission, there were no greenies around in those days apparently, he got permission to spray the rocks a reddish-ochre colour, and he shot the scene there (CD2 Track8-9).

Chauvel's landscape is painted-up. Far from locationism, we are closer now to what Mudrooroo Narogin has called Chauvel's "ideological authenticity"

(n.p). Locationism is not about the real places, just the most real looking places that suit Chauvel's idea of the "true" Australia. This painted-up landscape, this blackface landscape, is rife with danger for the indigenous characters. It assimilates them, absorbs them and kills them, leaving the land available (thanks to blackface) for white occupation. Both the landscape and narrative of Chauvel's *Jedda* are mirrors of whiteness.



Figure 2. Chauvel re-shooting the iconic finale to *Jedda*. Paul Clarke [far left] is still in his make-up and costume for the role of "Joe". He is holding a rope that allows the camera, via a pulley, to roll forward, thus creating a "zoom in" effect. (Photo taken from Carlsson Chauvel 150)

Charles Chauvel, now a well-known director, reaches out to capture his landscape. Paul Clarke, still in make up for "Joe", is helping with a rough pulley-system Chauvel devised as a "zoom button". Chauvel turns to his left and winks to Clarke, who creeps forward, his boots crushing shale painted orange. The camera rolls in. In the film: Marbuck and Jedda cover as the shot zooms in, as Joe walks forward pleading for Jedda's release. Every one of Joe's steps forward pushes Marbuck and Jedda further back. Inevitably, Marbuck and Jedda fall. Was Joe trying to save them, or did he drive them off the edge? Did his desire for Jedda drive them off the edge? Did his love kill? Did Chauvel's benevolence have violent consequences? Did his well-intentioned fiction kill? What were the violent consequences of Joe's and Chauvel's blackface?

NOTES

- ¹ Thanks to Lars Eckstein for bringing this point to my attention.
- ² David Burn's *The Bushrangers* was performed in Scotland in 1829.
- ³ I will not attempt to standardise spelling, but, instead, follow that of the editor, Fotheringham.
- ⁴ In the credits Clarke is re-named by Chauvel, who had re-named Chips Rafferty, as Paul Reynall. The Chauvels (Charles' wife Elsa co-wrote the script) also renamed Rosalie Kunoth as "Ngarla" and Bobby Wilson as "Robert Tudawali" for the credits—Elsa refers to Wilson's renaming as "[giving] him his tribal name" (*My Life* 123). Rosalie Kunoth has stated her anger at being forced to change her name to her mother's totem/skin name because Elsa Chauvel did not like the sound of Rosalie's real totem/skin name (<http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/kunothmonks/video3.html>).
- ⁵ The length of this article does not permit me to provide a thorough literature review of whiteness. For an example of the authors who have influenced my understanding of whiteness, please see the work of Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll, who each work to uncover the epistemological violences of whiteness—particularly in regards to Indigenous sovereignties. Sara Ahmed, arguing along similar lines to Ghassan Hage, provides a scathing account of how white anti-racists can act out of benevolence and good-will, but fail to alter the privilege and power of whiteness. Also, George Lipsitz provides a shocking account of the institutional privileges of whiteness.

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