

summer of the seventeenth doll script

summer of the seventeenth doll script holds a significant place in Australian theatrical history as one of the most renowned plays written by Ray Lawler. This classic drama, first performed in 1955, revolutionized Australian theatre by portraying relatable, authentic characters and domestic themes that resonated with local audiences. The script captures the complexities of friendship, love, and change over time, set against the backdrop of working-class life and seasonal sugar cane cutters. Understanding the nuances of the summer of the seventeenth doll script is essential for actors, directors, and scholars aiming to appreciate its cultural and dramatic impact. This article explores the background, structure, themes, and characters of the script, along with its significance and adaptations, providing a comprehensive guide to this iconic work. The detailed examination also includes insights into the language, setting, and literary devices employed throughout the play.

- Background and Historical Context of the Summer of the Seventeenth Doll Script
- Plot Overview and Structure
- Main Characters and Their Development
- Themes and Symbolism in the Script
- Language, Dialogue, and Style
- Performance and Adaptations

Background and Historical Context of the Summer of the Seventeenth Doll Script

The summer of the seventeenth doll script emerged during a pivotal moment in Australian theatre history, marking a departure from imported British plays and melodramas towards a distinctly Australian voice. Written by Ray Lawler, the play was first staged in 1955 and is credited with helping to establish an authentic Australian theatrical identity. The script reflects post-war Australian society, particularly highlighting the lives of itinerant workers and the changing social landscape. The play's setting in the sugar cane fields of Queensland and Melbourne suburbs brings to life the unique cultural and economic environment of mid-20th-century Australia. This context is crucial to understanding the script's enduring relevance and its impact on national theatre.

Ray Lawler's Contribution

Ray Lawler's contribution through the summer of the seventeenth doll script was groundbreaking. His ability to capture the everyday struggles and aspirations of ordinary Australians provided a fresh perspective in drama. The script's naturalistic dialogue and focus on character-driven storytelling introduced new standards for Australian playwriting, influencing generations of playwrights and

theatre practitioners.

Social and Cultural Influences

The script reflects several social and cultural influences, including the post-war Australian working class and the itinerant lifestyle of cane cutters. It also addresses themes of change, nostalgia, and the passage of time, mirroring broader societal shifts. The use of Australian vernacular in the dialogue further emphasizes the script's cultural authenticity.

Plot Overview and Structure

The summer of the seventeenth doll script is structured in three acts, unfolding over a single summer in the lives of two cane cutters, Roo and Barney, and the women who await them, Olive and Nancy. The narrative centers around the seventeenth consecutive summer that the men spend with Olive, during which they present her with a doll as a symbol of their ongoing relationship. The plot explores the tensions and transformations within these relationships, revealing underlying conflicts and emotional complexities.

Act Breakdown

- **Act One:** Introduction of characters and setting, establishing the annual tradition and relationships.
- **Act Two:** Rising tensions and the revelation of changes in the men's lives and attitudes.
- **Act Three:** Resolution of conflicts, confronting the reality of change and loss.

Key Plot Points

The script's plot revolves around key moments such as the arrival of the men, the presentation of the doll, Olive's struggle with the changing dynamics, and the ultimate confrontation with the impermanence of the past. These moments drive the emotional core of the play and highlight the themes of disillusionment and the passage of time.

Main Characters and Their Development

The summer of the seventeenth doll script features a small but complex cast of characters whose interactions and development form the heart of the drama. Each character embodies distinct traits and perspectives that contribute to the narrative's depth and realism.

Olive

Olive is the central female character, representing loyalty, hope, and the struggle to maintain a fading ideal. Throughout the script, her emotional journey reflects the tension between past traditions and present realities.

Roo and Barney

Roo and Barney are the itinerant cane cutters whose annual visits form the basis of the story. Their characters showcase themes of aging, responsibility, and the challenge of adapting to change. Roo's physical decline and Barney's growing maturity offer contrasting responses to the evolving circumstances.

Nancy

Nancy serves as a foil to Olive, highlighting alternative attitudes towards relationships and independence. Her interactions with the male characters add complexity to the play's exploration of gender roles and social expectations.

Themes and Symbolism in the Script

The summer of the seventeenth doll script is rich with themes and symbolism that enhance its dramatic impact and interpretive possibilities. Understanding these elements provides deeper insight into the play's message and artistic success.

Key Themes

- **Change and Impermanence:** Central to the script is the recognition that time alters relationships and individuals.
- **Nostalgia and Memory:** The doll symbolizes the idealized past and the characters' attachment to tradition.
- **Identity and Masculinity:** The play examines male roles within society and personal identity crises.
- **Social Class and Lifestyle:** The contrast between working-class itinerants and settled urban life is pivotal.

Symbolism of the Doll

The doll, presented each summer by the men to Olive, operates as a potent symbol within the script.

It represents innocence, the passage of time, and the fragile nature of the characters' relationships. The seventeenth doll, in particular, marks a critical juncture, symbolizing the breaking point of old traditions and the inevitability of change.

Language, Dialogue, and Style

The summer of the seventeenth doll script is distinguished by its naturalistic language and authentic dialogue, which contribute significantly to its realism and emotional resonance. The conversational style reflects everyday speech patterns of the time and region, making the characters relatable and believable.

Use of Australian Vernacular

Lawler's incorporation of Australian slang and idiomatic expressions grounds the script in its cultural context. This linguistic choice enhances the authenticity of the characters and setting, providing audiences with an immersive experience of Australian life in the 1950s.

Dramatic Techniques

The script employs various dramatic techniques such as subtext, pauses, and tension-building through dialogue. These elements create depth in character interactions and maintain audience engagement. The balance between humor and pathos is carefully crafted to reflect the complexities of the characters' lives.

Performance and Adaptations

Since its premiere, the summer of the seventeenth doll script has been widely performed and adapted, solidifying its status as a classic of Australian theatre. Its performance history illustrates the script's adaptability and ongoing relevance to contemporary audiences.

Theatrical Productions

The play has been staged by numerous theatre companies across Australia and internationally, often praised for its compelling characters and evocative setting. Directors frequently emphasize the emotional intensity and cultural specificity embedded in the script.

Film and Television Adaptations

In addition to stage productions, the script has been adapted for film and television, bringing the story to broader audiences. These adaptations interpret the script's themes through visual storytelling while maintaining the integrity of Lawler's original work.

Educational Importance

The summer of the seventeenth doll script is a staple in academic curricula, studied extensively for its literary, cultural, and historical significance. It offers valuable material for analysis in areas such as dramatic structure, character development, and Australian cultural identity.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script about?

The script of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' tells the story of two cane cutters, Roo and Barney, who reunite every summer with their partners, Olive and Nancy, in Melbourne. It explores themes of change, aging, and the end of an era, highlighting the struggles of maintaining relationships and traditions.

Who wrote the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script?

The script was written by Australian playwright Ray Lawler, first performed in 1955.

What is the significance of the title 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The title refers to the seventeenth consecutive summer that the two cane cutters have spent with their partners, each woman receiving a special doll as a gift every year, symbolizing the passing of time and the fragility of their tradition.

Where can I find the full script of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The full script can be found in published play anthologies, libraries, or purchased online through bookstores or script publishers specializing in Australian theatre.

What are the main themes presented in the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script?

Major themes include the passage of time, the clash between reality and illusion, the decline of traditional lifestyles, friendship, love, and the inevitability of change.

How is the setting described in the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script?

The play is set primarily in a modest Melbourne terrace house during the summer, reflecting an intimate and domestic atmosphere that contrasts with the outdoor work life of the cane cutters.

Has the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script been adapted into other formats?

Yes, it has been adapted into films, television productions, and radio plays, helping to cement its place as a classic of Australian drama.

What makes the dialogue in the 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' script notable?

The dialogue is noted for its naturalistic style and authentic Australian vernacular, which was groundbreaking at the time of its writing and helped establish a distinct Australian voice in theatre.

Are there any notable productions of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' that used the original script?

Many acclaimed productions have used the original script since its premiere in 1955, including the landmark 1956 professional production in Melbourne and various revivals in Australia and internationally.

Why is 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' considered an important Australian play?

It is considered important because it was one of the first Australian plays to gain international recognition, portraying authentic Australian characters and social issues, and marking a turning point in Australian theatre history.

Additional Resources

1. Summer of the Seventeenth Doll by Ray Lawler

This is the original play that revolutionized Australian theatre. It tells the story of two cane cutters, Roo and Barney, who annually reunite with their partners, Olive and Nancy, in Melbourne for a summer of camaraderie and romance. The play explores themes of change, aging, and the harsh realities behind nostalgic traditions. It is celebrated for its authentic portrayal of Australian working-class life in the 1950s.

2. Australian Drama: A Historical and Critical Survey by Leslie Rees

Leslie Rees provides an extensive overview of Australian drama, including a critical examination of "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." This book places Lawler's work within the broader context of Australian theatre history and cultural identity. It is an essential text for understanding the development and significance of Australian plays in the 20th century.

3. Stages of Life: Australian Drama and Society by Katharine Brisbane

Brisbane explores how Australian plays like "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" reflect and influence social changes. The book discusses the intersection of drama with issues such as class, gender, and national identity. It offers insightful commentary on how theatre has shaped Australian cultural narratives.

4. *Theatre and National Identity in Australia* by Philip Parsons

This book delves into the role of theatre in shaping Australian national identity, with a focus on landmark plays including Lawler's masterpiece. Parsons analyzes how "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" challenged imported theatrical styles and presented authentic Australian voices. It is a valuable resource for understanding the cultural impact of the play.

5. *Performing the Australian Landscape: Drama and Identity* by Jane Woollard

Woollard examines how Australian drama uses the landscape as a powerful symbol of identity, highlighting works such as "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." The book discusses the relationship between setting, character, and theme in Australian theatre. It provides a nuanced look at how place influences storytelling in Lawler's play.

6. *Ray Lawler: A Study of the Playwright and His Work* by Peter Fitzpatrick

This biography and critical study focuses on Ray Lawler's life and major works, with an emphasis on "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." Fitzpatrick explores Lawler's influences, writing process, and the social context of his plays. The book offers a comprehensive understanding of the playwright's contribution to Australian theatre.

7. *Australian Plays for the 21st Century* edited by Michael Gow

This anthology includes contemporary Australian plays alongside classics like "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." It discusses the evolution of themes and styles in Australian drama. The book is useful for readers interested in the continuity and change in Australian theatrical traditions.

8. *Women in Australian Drama: Voices from the Margin* by Brenda Niall

Niall's work focuses on the representation of women in Australian theatre, including characters like Olive and Nancy in "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." The book analyzes gender roles and female agency within the play and beyond. It provides a feminist perspective on Australian dramatic literature.

9. *Memory and Myth in Australian Drama* by Felicity Collins

This book investigates how Australian plays use memory and myth-making to construct cultural narratives. "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" is examined for its portrayal of nostalgia and the tensions between past and present. Collins offers a critical lens for interpreting the symbolic layers in Lawler's work.

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