Three Films by Tracey Moffatt: *Nice Coloured Girls, Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy,* and *Bedevil.* Distributed by Women Make Movies (462 Broadway, New York, NY 10013; 212–925–0606).

Reviewed by Jane C. Goodale, Bryn Mawr College

These three films are powerful examples of contemporary filmmaking. As illustrations of the filmmaker's Australian Aboriginal cultural identity, they illuminate the world that contemporary indigenous Australians share with the non-indigenous. Each film, in its own way and with extraordinary subtlety, demonstrates the residual depth of certain aspects of the precontact culture—with the most striking being the concept of time. For the indigenous Australian past events persist into the present. With skillful use of flashbacks, disembodied sound and images, multicultural narrators and readers of texts, Moffat presents stories with overlapping and overlaid time markers that leave the viewer impressed with and always stimulated by the underlying messages, but also sometimes mentally exhausted. The films require repeat viewings to fully appreciate the subtle filming, acting and editing.

In her film *Nice Coloured Girls* (1987, 16 min., color), Moffatt shows us a fragment of contemporary urban life seen through the eyes of young female

Aborigines walking the streets in search of men whom they can exploit for money. Much of the action takes place in a pub where the sound is natural and the narration by subtitles. These images are alternated by reference to a lithograph of (I presume) Botany Bay, where the First Fleet landed in 1788. The modern young women (through subtitles) narrate the contemporary pub scenes, commenting on and showing the physical characteristics of various men they victimize (and call "captains" because their mothers called them that), how they pick them up, and how they eventually render them powerless and easily separated from their wallets. The past is narrated by non-indigenous male voices reading from accounts (and lithographs) of first contact between the male seamen/settlers and the ancestral indigenous women whom they describe. That the past is part of the present in the lives of the young prostitutes is an obvious theme of this film.

Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy (1990, 19 min., color) is the second short film made by Moffatt. In my opinion this is the most outstanding of the three because of its simplicity and universality. With no narration (but with a male gospel singer, Jimmy Little, as intermittent background sound) we peer into scenes between a middle-aged daughter and her elderly and feeble mother, set in a rural outback home that is as stark (hot, dry, and windy) as the women's emotions: the frustrations of the old and infirm (mother) and the drudgery of elemental care-taking (daughter). The scenes include the daughter feeding her mother, wheelchair trips to the outhouse, waiting outside to make the return trip, and listening to the mother's breathing and waiting. For the daughter the present scene is repeatedly interrupted by other scenes—of the gospel singer, a mother caring for a young daughter, a child playing on rocks who is terrorized at being tangled in wet seaweed and is finally comforted in the arms of her mother. The film ends with the daughter's overwhelming grief following the mother's death. The powerful images of this film have burned indelibly into my memory. It is above all one of the most human films I ever have seen. The mother is acted by Agnes Hardwick and the daughter by Marcia Langton. Both performances are superb.

The longest film, *Bedevil* (1993, 90 min., color), is really three short stories with the only underlying connection being the illustration of the concept of the ever-present past in the present.

The first part (titled "Mr. Chuck") takes place on an island with a locally famous swamp into which, during the time of World War II, an American soldier drove his tank and disappeared. This event is narrated by a number of the island's inhabitants—a white shopkeeper and a white woman, and white children and a young aboriginal boy and his siblings. The legend of Mr. Chuck is a part of the charm of the island for the whites and eventually

the island is developed into a resort and a cinema is built over the swamp. The boy (who once fell or was pulled off a log and into the swamp) hates the island but finds the cinema a source of stolen candy and a challenge due to the ever-present Mr. Chuck. This film, while illustrating differing understandings of the environment, also starkly shows the division between aboriginals and whites.

The second part (titled "Choo Choo Choo Choo") begins with the sound of a train, a crying babe, a running figure in white, and an old but modern truck loaded with Aborigines singing as they return to their central Australian desert home beside the railroad track for a "gourmet" picnic. The story here is of a mystery surrounding the place. What happened in the past at this place is slowly revealed but significantly in no ordered sequence of time from past to present. The film is rich with symbols of belief of the ever-present past and of the importance of things unseen and of other worlds. The filmmaker, Tracey Moffatt, is one of the actors.

The last part of this film (titled "Lovin' the Spin I'm In") is set as if on a stage. On the viewers' left is a building with a shop at the corner over which there is an apartment. Across the street and on the viewers' right is a large warehouse. The featured characters are a husband, wife, and teen-aged son, who live in the apartment, and an elderly woman, a Torres Strait Islander, who inhabits the warehouse. Urban developers have bought the warehouse and are surprised to see it still standing and its inhabitant still unevicted, but the husband (previous owner) insists that tomorrow she will be. The action switches between the present—the night before the eventual eviction—and the past, when the Islander woman, Imelda, moved into the warehouse with a young couple, also Torres Strait Islanders. In both times there is a spirited and colorful dance that involves the husband and is seen by the teen-aged son. There is a colorfully costumed dancer (clown/jester), a fire, a roller-bladed skater, and a clockwise spinning car surrounded by people running counter. Several viewings are necessary to make out any coherent story, but the underlying sense of the timelessness of events is made clear.

Moffatt is a skilled teller of tales through strong visual and auditory images. The images she transmits in film are powerful accounts of culture's persistence, complexity/simplicity, and flexibility. While Moffatt has not intended to present an ethnographic view of her world, she does tell us a great deal about the everyday lives of contemporary Aborigines in a multicultural society, as well as their interpretations of shared events with others. The films should appeal to anyone interested in filmmaking, the multicultural Australian society, and contemporary indigenous Aborigines. As films about women and made by a woman, they should also strongly appeal to anyone concerned with women's worldviews.