

## Griffith University

### Debra Beattie

### John and Jennie

#### Abstract:

This script is dedicated to the memory of all those friendships and loving relationships marred, and often destroyed, by the sectarianism so prevalent in country Queensland in the years before Statehood. *John and Jennie* draws on accounts from *The Gayndah Communes* about this period of Queensland history just before the outbreak of the first world war. The script highlights the continued negation and absence of the history of how sectarianism disrupted the lives of ordinary Queenslanders, particularly in terms of who they could marry. In this the year of commemoration of Australia's involvement in the first world war, it is timely to recall and to reimagine the everyday lives of those who loved and lost in a time of deep prejudices. This script is part of an ongoing research project and creative practice in the area of historical reimagining.

#### Biographical note:

Debra Beattie is an Australian filmmaker, screenwriter, scholar, and teacher. She has produced and directed documentaries in Australia for over thirty years with a diverse group of communities, indigenous, Indonesian, and Melanesian. Most recently she was the associate producer on *Zen and the Art of Dying* (2014) and *Fairweather Man* (2008) an ABC television documentary on the life and times of Ian Fairweather, an artist who lived on Bribie Island in the 1960s. Beattie is a creator, a scholar of new media documentary and social engagement. In 2001, she directed *The Wrong Crowd* a pioneering web-based documentary for ABC Online; and in 2004 developed design best practice for online counselling as Chief Investigator on ARC Discovery with Kidshelpline. Since 2006, she has engaged in delivery of documentary in public places such as galleries, museums and libraries, and published screenplays on historical Australian stories.

#### Keywords:

Creative Writing – Scriptwriting – Sectarianism – Conscription - Queensland History

## John and Jennie

### *The Characters*

BOB – an old man in his eighties, country bred, well read.

JACK JNR – in his 60s and a mourner at TOMAS' Funeral

### **1900s**

TOMAS – 19, Italian migrant, Catholic, sent into country Queensland to teach at the first ever school in the district

JOHN – 18, Irish Catholic, eldest son of the fiery Brigid

BIDELIA – 18, dark-haired Irish Catholic daughter of the owner of Gorroolba Hotel, Patrick Delaney

JENNIE – 18, golden haired daughter of a Northumberland miner

BRIGID – mid 30s, Irish Catholic mother to JOHN her eldest son

### **1914**

TOMAS – 33, married to BIDELIA

JOHN – 32, enlisting in WW1

BIDELIA – 27, with toddler Thomas.

JENNIE – 32, with two sons, the eldest called JACK (and another on the way) as war declared

WILLIAM – 37, pastoralist, Jennie's husband

WILLIAM SNR – JENNIE's father, late 50s

### *Note*

The film's opening credit is a close and textured montage of the details of a beautifully embroidered silk handkerchief with the letters J and J entwined into the shape of a heart, sewn with long strands of thick golden hair. This 'billet doux' was kept in a cigar box for over fifty years.

**JOHN AND JENNIE**

1.EXT. CEMETERY CATHOLIC FUNERAL IN PROGRESS - 1968

BOB

Jack, I found this small box  
amongst Teacher Ped's things. Biddy  
thinks you should be the one to  
keep it now.

Jack Junior looks at the box in Bob's hands

There is a slow cross-fade from BOB's old face to a much  
younger BOB and JOHN in their teens, in a matching  
tableau.

**TITLE PAGE: COUNTRY QUEENSLAND, 1900**

2. EXT. WOOD/BARK HUT/ THE NEW SCHOOL

BOB is 16, a bookish boy, and his best friend, JOHN, a  
year older, a handsome, intelligent, muscular,  
hardworking, eldest son of one of the staunchest Irish  
Catholic families in the District.

JOHN is swinging the hammer with gusto as he finishes the  
verandah railing.

TOMAS is the new teacher, the first ever in the District.  
He is only 19 and has just arrived by horse, carrying his  
saddle with him.

TOMAS

(with Italian accent)

Sir! Good Day!

JOHN

Ah! Mr Pedrazzini!

TOMAS

I left my horse tied to the gate.

JOHN

(calling to BOB)

Bring her up and give her some  
water and feed, Bobby.

TOMAS

(with a long deep whistle)

So *this* is the schoolhouse?

John nods proudly.

TOMAS  
Just in the nick of time, eh?

JOHN  
A long time in the planning though, Mr  
Pedra!

TOMAS  
Tomas, just call me Tomas. And you?

JOHN  
(thrusting out his hand with gusto)  
John Mulooley! From County Cork!

TOMAS  
Ah, Como is the name of my  
hometown. We're both a long way  
from where we came from.

BOB  
(grinning widely)  
Bob Matthews here, Teacher!

BRIGID DELANEY enters with a plate of sandwiches. She is a tall and formidable Irish Catholic mother. The faith is held close by his family, and BRIGID has been a key advocate and driving force in the building of the new school, and is very proud of it.

JOHN  
Ma - come meet the new teacher!

TOMAS  
Pleased to make your acquaintance,  
Mrs Mulooley!

BOB, JOHN, TOMAS and BRIGID all enter the schoolhouse hall.

CUT TO:

2. EXT. SCHOOL HALL, NIGHTLIGHTS, DANCE IN PROGRESS

JOHN and TOMAS are carrying a ladder away after fixing the lights in place, in the midst of an earnest conversation.

TOMAS

When I left Italy, John, the police violence... ah, it was becoming so harsh. Many people had started stealing bread.

JOHN

When I was a kid, the old shearers were always yarnin' about the Shearer's Strike, the riots, the police bashing 'em, sounded real bad.

TOMAS offers to teach JOHN how to read in the evenings after their working day has finished.

CUT TO:

3. INT. THE DANCE

A bush dance is a lively event. There are the beautiful Lutvey girls from Lebanon. There are the boys from the Ping family from China. There are the Irish Catholics, and there are the Wesleyans.

JENNIE arrives with her family, Wesleyan migrants to the District with the promise of land.

TOMAS and JOHN enter, causing a stir as they enter laughing uproariously, full of optimism.

TOMAS is smitten by the lovely BIDELIA (aka BIDDY, daughter of the owner of the Gooroolba Hotel. TOMAS and BIDDY dance happily, comfortable in an easy friendship.

JOHN meets JENNIE and there is a clear mutual and instant attraction.

JENNIE is taken, somewhat forcefully, by her father to meet WILLIAM, the son of the Wesleyan chaplain.

Later in the evening JOHN and JENNIE dance together.

BRIGID, John's mother, is cold and disapproving as they prepare to leave the hall.

BRIGID

Catholics can only marry other Catholics, you know that, don't you John?

CUT TO:

4. EXT. SCHOOL HALL

JENNIE'S FATHER  
(as he escorts her out)  
You will NOT shame our family that  
way again.

JOHN and BRIGID walk by.

BRIGID  
No good will come of it John, just  
let it go.

CUT TO:

5. INT. JENNIE'S BEDROOM - LIT BY KEROSENE LAMPLIGHT

JENNIE is sitting by the lamplight and sewing her long  
golden hair into a handkerchief with two initials  
intertwined - J and J - as a heart.

A montage of memories of the dance swirl around her in  
the dark as she sews.

She remembers JOHN playing with her long golden hair.

JOHN  
You're all I want, Jennie - you -  
and a proud place in this great  
land.

CUT TO:

The following two scenes are static 'mise en scene' of a  
few seconds each.

6a. INT. JENNIE'S drawing room

WILLIAM the chaplain's son has come courting.  
JENNIE's parents are very happy.  
JENNIE is sad but compliant.

6b. EXT. WESLEYAN CHURCH

JENNIE and WILLIAM exit the church as a married couple.

FADE SLOWLY TO THE TREE IN  
THE CHURCHYARD TO SHOW THE  
SEASONS PASS BY.

7. INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

ABC RADIO playing in background.

MENZIES PM

*England is at war and so Australia  
is at war.*

TOMAS is standing at the window as JOHN is packing his swag. There is a small cigar box into which JOHN is gently placing a dried wattle flower and some letters, scented, which he smells nostalgically as he places them, and the delicately embroidered silk handkerchief that JENNIE has sewn for him.

JOHN

(with a wry smile)

A bit of a sorry state of affairs  
eh Tomas? Me, an Irishman, and I am  
off to fight an Englishman's war.  
Hope Mannix can forgive me.

JOHN gives the small cigar box to his friend TOMAS. TOMAS hugs JOHN.

TOMAS

I promise to keep it safe until you  
return.

CUT TO:

8. EXT. ROAD - EARLY LIGHT

JOHN

(To himself, with a sigh)

Bundaberg by tomorrow night, if I'm  
lucky.

JOHN is walking out of town with his swag and is picked up by a horse and dray.

POV JOHN looking back at JENNIE heavily pregnant, on verandah.

POV JENNIE watching JOHN disappearing down the road.

CUT TO:

TITLE UP: THE WAR YEARS DRAG ON

9. EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE VERANDAH - MORNING

JENNIE's eldest boy JACK is now 5 years old, and is about to start school. There is also a toddler at her skirts, a baby in her arms and another one on the way.

BIDELIA's eldest is TOM and he is a toddler still.

JENNIE

You know Biddy, all the Wesleyan lads enlisted. It was only the Catholic boys who hesitated.

BIDELIA

Well, Archbishop Mannix did take a very strong stand against conscription.

TOMAS rings the bell and the children enter the schoolhouse ushered along with BIDDY's help. The door closes

CROSS FADE:

Door Closed with NOTICE: SCHOOL CLOSED. PINNED WITH NEWSPAPER HEADLINE - "FLU EPIDEMIC"

CUT TO:

10. INT. JENNIE and WILLIAM's HOME - EARLY MORNING

TITLE: APRIL 1920 a few days before the first Anzac Day.

JENNIE is sewing celebratory ribbons.

The children are waking up and bustling in to the kitchen, ranging from JACK who is now ten, and three other boys, the youngest a toddler.

WILLIAM is putting on his boots to head off to the paddocks with the men to clear prickly pear. It is already a very humid day. It will be hot and uncomfortable work.

JENNIE walks over to the mantelpiece and sighs as she looks at her wedding photo. It is JENNIE AND WILLIAM'S wedding anniversary.

JENNIE

Thirteen years ...

JENNIE turns to WILLIAM for a kiss. He does not remember the anniversary, and does not kiss her.

CUT TO:

11. EXT. FRONT YARD, JENNIE AND WILLIAM'S -LATE MORNING

The four boys are all busy in the yard outside with various chores. A letter arrives for William and Jennie. It is from William's mother. JENNIE opens the letter and is very teary on reading it.

JACK, Jennie's eldest son, asks about taking lunch to Dad out in the paddock, and JENNIE leaps to her feet and rushes to make WILLIAM a sandwich.

CUT TO:

12. INT. JENNIE and WILLIAM'S DINING TABLE - AFTERNOON

JENNIE is still sitting at the table with the letter. WILLIAM arrives and is very annoyed at missing his lunch.

WILLIAM

Why did you forget about me?

JENNIE

Oh when do I ever forget that I am married to you?

JENNIE rises to make another lunch for William. As WILLIAM eats, she tells him about the letter.

JENNIE

'Tis such a sad letter... You remember the grocer's boy? He wanted so badly to go to war but the father had been so against it? His mother argued the case and the boy enlisted.

WILLIAM

Ah that Irish Catholic coward of a father. Good on the boy!

JENNIE is stung by this response.

JENNIE

The boy worked as a medic on the Western front, and survived! So, so very sad. Then it was he died, William, on the boat home, from that dreadful flu.

JENNIE has tears in her eyes as she relates the tale and it clearly has an effect on her.

The rain is getting heavier, and WILLIAM declares that he needs to get back to the paddock.

JENNIE is left alone. She watches WILLIAM leave.

In her mind, she sees JOHN lying somewhere, left to die alone in the mud and rain.

CUT TO:

13. EXT. COTTAGE YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

A loud clap of thunder and JENNIE has rushed to the verandah. The lightning flashes and the downpour increase unabated. JENNIE is in a state of high anxiety.

JOHN appears at the front gate.

JENNIE walks towards him. She is thinking that this is yet another of her imaginings, that this will be another ghostly presence so often in her mind.

She reaches out to him. He is real. She jumps back in shock.

JOHN

Are you happy, Jennie?

JOHN reaches for her and they embrace. There is more lightning and thunder and it is now JOHN who jumps like a frightened child.

JENNIE feels she needs to conceal her true state in order to protect him. She wants desperately for JOHN to be okay, and not to be worried about her.

JENNIE

Why yes John, perfectly happy.

JOHN, ever the gallant, gives her one long loving look and walks away into the increasing downpour.

CUT TO:

14. INT. JENNIE'S DINING ROOM - DUSK

JENNIE is in an increasingly agitated state and is writing at the kitchen table.

JENNIE

Oh what have I done? I shouldn't  
have let him go... Not again!

Her words ... 'Dear William' ... and then she scratches out and rewrites ...

"Not good enough ...never good enough ... better for you to have a good wife ... tried to be good ..."

The final shot of this scene is the letter finally written, sealed, addressed and placed on the side table by door. JENNIE is at the door, with her wide brimmed hat being placed firmly on her head.

CUT TO:

15. EXT. WILLIAM and JENNIE'S HOUSE - SUNSET

A worker, out cutting prickly pear all day in the heat and dirt, arrives back at the house. All four of the boys, JACK, 12, MATTHEW, 9, MARK, 6, and LUKE, 3, rush to him to say that their mother is not there and they don't know where she is.

CUT TO:

16. INT. WILLIAM and JENNIE'S - HOURS LATER

WILLIAM arrives home at 7pm. He is angry. He is worn out. As he opens the front door, the letter on the side table falls to the floor in a gust of wind.

WILLIAM

Where is your mother?

On hearing that JENNIE is not home, WILLIAM searches the house angrily for any note but finds none.

CUT TO:

17. EXT. YARD

WILLIAM leaves the boys and takes his saddle. He explains to them that he must ride immediately to his father's home (three miles away) to tell him that JENNIE is missing.

18. EXT. WESLEYAN CHAPLAIN'S HOUSE

WILLIAM's mother and father, the Wesleyan chaplain and his wife both tell WILLIAM that he must start searching immediately.

MRS PROUDMAN

I will alert the neighbours,  
William and we will get a search  
party out as soon as we can.

CUT TO:

19. INT. TOMAS HOUSE - FRONT ROOM

JOHN is there, a broken man.

TOMAS is trying to return the cigar box to him.

JOHN

I don't need that anymore.  
There's only stuff in there that  
reminds me of what I have lost,  
lost forever.

There is a loud and urgent knocking at the door. JOHN is startled badly again, reacting fearfully to the loud noise.

CUT TO:

20. EXT. TOMAS' VERANDAH

TOMAS opens the door. The search party is asking TOMAS to join them. Sadly, the group consists of many of the same people who had been at that carefree dance so many years ago.

CUT TO:

21. INT. WILLIAM AND JENNIE'S HOUSE - HOURS LATER

The storm has worsened. Windows are rattling. The rain is pounding on the roof.

WILLIAM enters the house, and sits on the chair by the door. As he takes off his boots, he finds the note that he missed earlier, in his rush and panic. The letter had fallen to the floor with a gust of wind when the door opened.

He reads JENNIE's words and we hear her voice, she writes that her 'constitution is gone and her nerves are broken'. She says that she believed that William 'was always vexed with her of late', and protests that she had been a good and honest loving wife - 'a True wife, and William had nothing to be jealous of'.

The words are spoken in the voice of a deeply distressed woman. She writes 'I have a need for Baptism, a need for the cleansing waters, of the rising waters, to bathe my soul'.

CUT TO:

22. EXT. CREEK BANK - MIDNIGHT

TOMAS and BOB and JOHN are still searching around the creek bank, even though the searching has been called off, as the steadily rainy night hampers their efforts. Feet walk past the very pretty hat, high on the bank, but it is not yet found.

CUT TO:

23. EXT. CREEK BANK - DAWN.

The search resumes. Dawn chorus after the heavy rains. Within a few minutes, and only a hundred yards from where they had camped, TOMAS finds Jennie's pretty hat on the high bank of the creek.

The searchers continue with the search but now are dragging the creek from a boat.

JOHN is at the front of the boat and sees the body first, caught by a deep tree root and submerged in nine feet of water.

JENNIE's body is dragged out by her shoulders and placed on the high bank. Rigor Mortis has set in, but her arms have strangely been positioned neatly and firmly crossed on her chest.

CUT TO:

24. EXT. GAYNDAH CEMETERY -JENNIE'S FUNERAL.

The eulogy is a very sad one, for an only 37year old Wesleyan wife who had been married to one on the District's most upstanding members, a mother to four young boys who now stand around the gravesite, with their father WILLIAM, emotionless.

TOMAS and BIDELIA are there with their three children.

JOHN is there, but very much in the background, a broken man in body and heart and soul.

BOB is there and looks towards JOHN sorrowfully.

Young JACK, JENNIE'S ELDEST SON, walks over to BOB and is comforted by the older man.

There is a crossfade from this BOB to the old BOB as he was in the first scene, and JACK as now a much older man himself.

25. EXT. CEMETERY - TOMAS' FUNERAL in 1968

Old BOB has given JACK the cigar box. JACK decides to open it, and there is the handkerchief with the two entwined initials sewn with JENNIE's long golden hair.

FADE TO BLACK.

*END OF SCRIPT*

## Research statement

### *Research background*

This script draws upon accounts in *The Gayndah Communes* about this period of Queensland history just before the outbreak of the First World War (Metcalf 1998). The narrative structure is also informed by the historical accounts of the conscription issue by noted historian, Raymond Evans (2007). The details of the funeral and the silken handkerchief kept hidden for over eighty years were drawn from a journal written by local resident Robert Matthews, one of Teacher Ped's first students. The script is therefore a blend of 'history from below' or 'alltagsgeschichte' (Ludtke 1995), the history of everyday life, as well as more formal accounts by historians of issues impacting on those lives.

### *Research contribution*

My contribution to research of historical accounts include *Fairweather Man* (2008) and *The Bounty* (2013). Like these earlier works, this work draws on a creative practice methodology that constructs an imagined explanation for the absences in the historical records of everyday life. Both of these earlier works provided accounts of gaps in the historical record of the lives of public figures, painter Ian Fairweather and filmmakers Elsa and Charles Chauvel. This script builds on these earlier works and develops my research and creative practice in the area of historical reimagining.

### *Research significance*

This script *John and Jennie* highlights the continued negation and absence of the tragic stories of sectarianism that dogged the lives of early Queenslanders in the early part of the twentieth century – particularly in terms of who they could marry. In this the year of commemoration of Australia's involvement in WW1, it is timely to recall and to reimagine the everyday lives of those who loved and lost in a time of deep prejudices. This creative and research work is innovative in reimagining this history in script form. It is also a wholly original creative work considered worthy of publication in *TEXT*, a peak journal in the Creative Writing discipline.

## Works cited

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