

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**



On Cue

THE TORRENTS

Table of Contents

About <i>On Cue</i> and STC	2
Curriculum Connections	3
Cast and Creatives	4
A Note from the Director	5
Synopsis/Context	6
Context & History	7
Modern Rework	8
Style and Form	9
Themes and Ideas	10
Character Analysis	13
Elements of Production	18
Reference List	19

Compiled by Jacqui Cowell.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Jacqui Cowell is the Education Projects Manager for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Jacqui on jcowell@sydneytheatre.com.au.

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About On Cue and STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Education and Community Partnerships has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season.

Each school show will be accompanied by an *On Cue* e-publication which will feature essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences.

For more in-depth digital resources surrounding productions, please visit the STC Education page on our website.

sydneytheatre.com.au/education

Such resources include:

- Director documentaries
- Design sketchbooks
- Previous Education Resources

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

Sydney Theatre Company is at the heart of Australia's cultural landscape, and owes its world-class creative pedigree to a history of ground-breaking productions.

Since 1978, the company has produced work that is – in the words of founding artistic director Richard Wherrett – “grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun”. A paradox as playful as our city.

In the 21st century STC is dedicated to producing Australian works of ambition and scale. These stories provide audiences with opportunities for reflection, revelation and joy, and are shared widely through regional, national and international touring, partnerships and outreach activities.

Our four home venues, ranging in size from 200 to 890 seats, allow us to develop and celebrate theatrical expression of all kinds. We keep classics alive and resonating with the present day, and our resident artist, commissioning and workshop programs ensure we continue to discover and develop the next wave of Australian storytellers.

We are committed to building creative capacity in the community through our partnership with The University of Sydney, School Drama, which delivers theatre-based literacy education in primary schools, adult education centres, refugee groups and juvenile detention facilities around the country.

We are proud that over the years Sydney Theatre Company has produced work with some of Australia's – and the world's – most exciting performers, writers, directors and creative teams; and that we continue to invest in and promote the artistic legends of the future.

sydneytheatre.com.au

Curriculum Connections



SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 7 to 12

SUBJECTS

DRAMA

Stage 6

Links to Topic 1: Dramatic Traditions in Australia

Links to Topic 3: The Voice of Women in Theatre

Stage 5

Dramatic Traditions and Performance

Styles: Realism/Scripted Drama

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

The Torrents

by Oriel Gray

GWYNNE

Emily Rose Brennan

KINGSLEY

Luke Carroll

RUFUS TORRENT

Tony Cogin

BEN TORRENT

Gareth Davies

BERNIE

Rob Johnson

CHRISTY

Geoff Kelso

JOCK McDONALD

Sam Longley

J.G. (JENNY) MILFORD

Celia Pacquola

JOHN MANSON

Steve Rodgers

DIRECTOR

Clare Watson

**SET & COSTUME
DESIGNER**

Renee Mulder

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Lucy Birkinshaw

**COMPOSER &
SOUND DESIGNER**

Joe Paradise Lui

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Emily McLean

VOICE & DIALECT COACH

Luzita Fereday

DRAMATURG

Virginia Gay

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Genevieve Jones

STAGE MANAGER

Minka Stevens

**DEPUTY STAGE
MANAGER**

Katie Hankin

**ASSISTANT STAGE
MANAGER**

Ella Griffin

**WIG, MAKEUP
& WARDROBE
SUPERVISOR**

Toni Paul

COSTUME MAKER

Jennifer Edwards

Nicole Marrington

**COSTUME TECH CO-
ORDINATOR**

Jennifer Edwards

**BACKSTAGE WARDROBE
SUPERVISOR**

Simone Edwards

WIG STYLIST

Toni Paul

HEAD ELECTRICIAN

Cameron Menzies

SOUND SUPERVISOR

Ben Lightowlers

**REHEARSAL
PHOTOGRAPHER**

Philip Gostelow

**PRODUCTION
PHOTOGRAPHER**

Philip Gostelow

**1 HOURS 40 MINUTES,
NO INTERVAL**

CO-PRODUCER



ASSOCIATE PARTNER



A Note from the Director

Clare Watson

Oriel Gray is a great Australian writer whose work deserves an audience today and we are so proud to be bringing *The Torrents* to Perth [and Sydney]. This is only its second professional production (the first and only, until now, was in 1996). The legend of this play is that it was the one that got away; it was joint winner of a prestigious playwriting award in 1955. *The Torrents* and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* shared first prize. Many of you would have seen *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* before and perhaps studied it at school or uni. But have you heard of *The Torrents*? Well that's all about to change. We hope that you'll find it searingly relevant in its themes – workplace gender politics, mining versus sustainable environmental practices and the power of money to corrupt truth in our media.

In the 1940's Oriel spent time in Kalgoorlie, which has inspired the fictional town of Koolgalla, and the character of Kingsley bares some remarkable resemblances to a local Western Australian hero C. Y. O'Connor. The play itself is a period piece, set in the late 1890's. We're thrilled to bring you this local story that we believe should always have been a classic. It's a fabulous melodrama full of big ideas and eccentric characters. As a team, we've approached it with the same fun and playfulness that a group of theatre makers would approach a new work. And thank you to the women who have walked the difficult path before us. This play is dedicated to the memory of Oriel Gray and I'd also like to dedicate it to my own Grandma, Margaret Watson, who is a contemporary of Oriel's, she is one of the smartest, most dynamic and strongest women that I know.

Clare Watson

Artistic Director, Black Swan Theatre Company

Synopsis

It's the 1890's in the gold fields of Australia. J.G. Milford has hopped off the train in Koolgalla to take on a job at the local paper. She's smart, she's savvy, she's incredibly qualified, but nobody knew the J stood for Jenny!

Inspired by the ideas-driven comedies of George Bernard Shaw, Oriel Gray's *The Torrents* is a newsroom drama married to a screwball comedy. On the one hand, debate is raging about whether the town should give up mining for a more sustainable economic future. On the other, newspaper editor Rufus Torrent and his son Ben are vying for Jenny's favour, even as she pulls apart their chauvinistic assumptions.

The Torrents was written in 1955. That year, it was joint winner of the prestigious Playwrights' Advisory Board Competition with *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. In the role of Jenny, award-winning comedian and actor Celia Pacquola (ABC's *Rosehaven*) will put the spotlight back on this rarely seen Aussie classic.

Context & History

Oriel Gray was born into a politically active family in Sydney in 1920. Her mother died when Oriel was just 6 years old; she was mainly raised by her sister Graycie, who was 14 years older. Oriel Gray left school at 16 to be a proofreader and receptionist. She had a strong social conscience from her awareness of Australians growing up during The Great Depression. Oriel began her long association with the communist group, The New Theatre as a comedian and writer. The New Theatre was a communist artistic/theatrical group that started in Australia in the 1930s. Gray joined the New Theatre after seeing one of their productions and developing a crush on one of the actors. The New Theatre group performed outside factory gates and on the back of trucks to groups of workers, delivering theatre with a message: Oriel Gray wrote about this experience in her memoir, *Exit Left*: "Some communist candidate would be running for parliament in some impossible electorate, and we would rock up on a truck in very brief red satin costume. We weren't martyrs to the worker's cause. We had lots of fun" (Laurie, 2019, p. 6).

Oriel started to write revues that were bawdy and satirical. She was paid to write the New Theatre's weekly radio segment on 2KY, which probably made her the first writer-in-residence in Australian Theatre. Her first full-length play in 1943 was *Lawson*, an adaptation of Henry Lawson's short stories. She also wrote a drama about racism in a country town, *Had We But World Enough*. After she served this apprenticeship, Oriel spread her dramatic wings to explore social, moral and political themes in her plays with wit and compassion (Arrow, 2003). In her memoir, Oriel Gray gives us an insight into why she wrote for theatre:

"The plays I wrote... have not proved long-lasting, but I did try to hold a mirror up to my times, and sometimes I think I caught a reflection that no other writer will get because it will never be that way again. I am not ashamed of them." (Gray, 1985, p. 104).

Oriel's greatest achievement was writing *The Torrents*, which won the Playwrights' Advisory Board Competition in 1955. A pioneering feminist play centring on a female journalist who applies for a job in a small-town newspaper in the 1890s. *The Torrents* was inspired by an extended stay in Kalgoorlie, a gold-field town in Western Australia. Gray found the rough, quirky characters, the environmental issues and the dominant masculine pursuit of mining interesting material for a play. *The Torrents* was nearly not submitted for the competition, as Gray's second husband, John Hepworth lost the play on the

Context & History (Cont.)

way to posting it. He luckily found the play in the pub, where the barmaid had put it aside!

Oriel Gray was notified three months later by the Playwrights' Advisory board that she had won the prize, receiving £100. While winning the prize was a great achievement, it also proved unlucky. Gray was a joint winner with Ray Lawler for his play, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which went on to become one of the most famous Australian plays, with international recognition. After the winning plays were announced, the competition promised to produce both works; however, only *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was ever staged (Arrow, 2003). This decision affected Oriel Gray's playwriting career as it took years for her to get *The Torrents* produced. The play had small productions, in 1958 at The New Theatre in Melbourne, then a professional production at The Playhouse in Adelaide in 1996. Gray was never able to reach the heights that Ray Lawler did with *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and her play sank into relative obscurity after not being given a production by the Playwrights Association.

The two iconic plays that won the prize in 1955 marked a new horizon for Australian Theatre. Dennis Carroll in his book *Contemporary Australian Drama*, explains the impact the plays had in Australia: "The best of the 1950s plays open up the themes of wider universality. They often use a family

or domestic setting which puts the local context and social specifics into a more widely applicable human perspective" (Carroll, 1996).

The Torrents is a witty and political play, with themes relating to the role of women in the workplace, the media and environment. Oriel Gray missed out on an important creative step by not having her play produced, including the changes that occur in the rehearsal room with new work when the writer hears the words they have written spoken by the actors on the floor, and the subsequent edits and shifts that occur in this process (Meyrick, 2019).

Summer of the Seventeenth Doll has been produced over 150 times, whereas *The Torrents* has only had 3 productions. In Croggon's article, she cites the theatre critic John McCallum, who argues that *The Doll's* success can be attributed to luck and timing as the play was the first Australian play outside commercial theatre to receive professional support nationally and internationally. Croggon continues to say: "In fact, the judging panel considered *The Torrents* 'the more complete play'" (Croggon, 2013, para, 9). John McCallum describes Gray's portrayal of ruthless exploitation versus sustainable development in *The Torrents* as more topical than *The Doll* (Laurie, 2019).



The cast in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Torrents*.
© Philip Gostelow

Modern Rework of The Torrents

The production of *The Torrents* by Sydney Theatre Company and Black Swan State Theatre Company is a modern reworking of the play, which stays true to the time period in which it was set. The Director Clare Watson's vision was to bring *The Torrents* into the 21st century by removing some of the references from the original play that relied on cultural norms of the 1950s. Clare worked with dramaturg Virginia Gay to adapt *The Torrents*, ensuring the content was relevant to a contemporary audience (Meyrick, 2016).

During the process, Watson realised that the play didn't pass the Bechdel Test. The Bechdel Test examines whether there are conversations and scenes between two or more women in a play, about something other than a man. In the original version of *The Torrents*, there was always a male character in the scene. After this finding, Virginia Gay wrote a scene between the two female characters. In this new scene, Gwynne asks Jenny about her position at the newspaper and why she likes the job if it's difficult, to which Jenny replies "Can you keep a secret?...I'm very good at it" (Gray, 1998, p. 32). The conversation starts a friendship and camaraderie between the two women.

This modern reworking of *The Torrents* gives more of an insight into the ambitions and thoughts of the female characters Jenny and Gwynne.

The Director would have loved to have consulted with Oriel Gray on the rework of the play. However, Oriel Gray died in 2003. Clare Watson and Virginia Gay worked with Oriel Gray's son to ensure the family were satisfied with the modern reworking of the production.

As well as the play being produced in 1996, *The Torrents* was produced as an ABC radio play in 1956. It was filmed for TV in 1969 as part of the ABC anthology Drama series, Australian Plays, consisting of six original Australian dramas. There was also a musical adaptation, *A Bit of Petticoat*, which was produced as an amateur production in 1984 at The Playhouse Theatre in Tasmania.

When Clare Watson read *The Torrents*, she realised it was a brilliantly written, classic play. Watson states: "The play itself is a period piece, set in the late 1890s. We're thrilled to bring you this local story that we believe should always have been a classic" (Arts Review, 2019).

Watson describes Oriel Gray as an accomplished playwright. She believes the decision to produce Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* and not Oriel Gray's play had a lot to do with Oriel being a woman in 1950s Australia:

Between 1943 and 1960, Oriel Gray had more than 14 theatre scripts produced in almost every capital city of Australia. She won many awards, was arguably the first playwright-in-residence in Australia's history and one of only a few Australian playwrights to make a living from her work. She was also a woman and a Communist, which stacked the odds against her. (Watts, 2019, para, 15).

Style and Form

COMEDY

Meyrick (2016) states that *The Torrents* has a place in a certain genus of Australian comedy. The comedy is stylistic, harking back to the kind of comedy in Louis Esson's, *The Time is Not Yet Ripe* and to the contemporary play, Joanna Murray-Smith's *Female of the Species*. The stylistic writing and approach to comedy can be likened to modern TV comedies like *Utopia* and *Upper Middle Bogan* (Meyrick, 2016).

Clare Watson discussed how she has removed some of the comedy in the play which relied on cultural norms of the time. Central to her vision is the casting of Australian comedian Celia Pacquola as Jenny:

We understand Celia as a really smart, really funny feminist contemporary comedian. There's something about having her in this work and in this world that reminds us of women's voices on stage. When I first spoke to Celia about the play, there had been that terrible murder of the comedian Eurydice Dixon in Melbourne and Celia just said to me, 'all we're trying to do is tell jokes and get home safe.' I thought, there's something in her being a comedian that to me highlights some of the themes of the work in and of itself. She just keeps us reminded of it.

(Watson in Nguyen, 2019, para 5).

Watson has confidence that Pacquola in this central role will strike a balance between Jenny's unflappability and vulnerability. The character has to calmly justify her abilities and place at the newspaper and in wider society, putting up with grumbings and discriminatory comments from men. "As a character, I think she's got a marvellous agency and complexity. She's got terrifically witty dialogue, which Celia will absolutely nail, and I like to think that Jenny is based on Oriel herself. To me they're pretty synonymous" (Watson in Nguyen, 2019, para 7).

NATURALISM/FOURTH WALL

The Torrents is written in a traditional three-act structure. The current production honours the playwright Oriel Gray in a classic version, reworked with additional text by Dramaturg, Virginia Gay. Oriel Gray's writing was influenced by George Bernard Shaw who sought to create a new realism in his writing, using his plays to disseminate his religious and political ideas. Similarly, Oriel Gray expressed her social and political ideas through her plays, with *The Torrents* communicating ideas on gender, the media and the environment.

The play *The Torrents* is written and performed in a Naturalistic style with a realistic plot and characters. The fourth wall is present throughout most of the play, with the characters' focus within the newspaper office where the action takes place.

In the opening prologue, the fourth wall is broken with Celia Pacquola speaking directly to the audience, telling the audience they are about to see an undiscovered, under-produced play by a wonderful female playwright:

But chances are you've never seen this play. Written in 1955, set in 1890. So, this is a bit exciting. This is kind of a premiere from the past, of the further past. And we are bringing it to you now. Because, better late than never, right? (Gray, 1998, p. 1)

PLAYWRITING

Meyrick discusses how playwrights, unlike novelists and poets, must have a theatre to write for, as a play isn't complete until it's produced on stage. This fact makes a play script an impure artform, as it becomes the point of focus for other disciplines that together finish the work of the play (Meyrick, 2016).

The fact that *The Torrents* was not produced after winning the playwrights' award made it an incomplete work of art until it was produced. Before the 2019 Black Swan/Sydney Theatre Company co-production there was only a small production at the New Theatre in Melbourne (1958) and a professional production at The Playhouse in Adelaide (1996).

Themes and Ideas



Tony Cugin & Celia Pacquola in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Torrents*.
© Philip Gostelow

GENDER POLITICS IN THE WORKPLACE

Women in the workplace and gender roles are both central themes in Gray's *The Torrents*. Nguyen (2019) states that gender politics, class, race and the environment were challenging ideas in the 1950's that Gray skilfully dealt with in her play.

The main plot centres around the arrival of a new employee, J.G. Milford, at a regional newspaper. Rufus Torrent, the boss of *The Argus*, and his colleagues are expecting a man. When Jenny Milford, a highly capable journalist, turns up at the newspaper, she is nearly fired for being a woman. However, as events in the play unfurl, her intelligence and aptitude for the position become apparent and Rufus Torrent has a change of heart. At first the other men working in the office have a strong reaction to Jenny working at *The Argus*. Rufus tells Jenny of the men's objection to her working in the office and makes a speech about women in the workplace, reflecting the cultural norms of the times.

A printing office of a newspaper is no place for a member of the female sex. It is a place for men of the world - violent and terrible happenings are its very life blood. There is no protection for natural womanly weakness. Sometimes the language - the language is not fit for a lady's ears! (Gray, 1998, p. 17)

Jenny replies to Rufus' speech calmly, saying she has never heard anything said in front of her that might not have been said in a gentleman's presence.

Themes and Ideas (Cont.)

GENDER POLITICS IN THE WORKPLACE (CONT.)

Jenny passionately believes in Kingsley's irrigation scheme and makes an independent decision to put the editorial for the irrigation scheme into an edition of *The Argus*. Ben Torrent wrote the editorial, but knew his father wouldn't print it. Jenny is prepared to resign from her position at the newspaper after making the decision to take a stand and include the editorial.

Oriel Gray mocks gender disparity and the limitations for women throughout the play. In Act 2, when Kingsley suggests to Rufus they go to the bar to be visible to the town, Rufus comments, "It's a sad pity that the ladies can't join us, Kingsley" (Gray, 1998, p. 47). The stage directions are changed in the modern adaptation to make a point about the gender divide and women's limitations at the time:

"They laugh at this preposterous notion/ They laugh and laugh. They laugh a little too long. It is strange, with a slight edge of maniacal"

(Gray, 1998, p. 47)



Themes and Ideas (Cont.)

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE: AGRICULTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

A theme running through the play is agriculture and sustainability. In the play there is a debate about introducing a water scheme to encourage a new agricultural industry as many believe gold is running out in the town. The town is divided about whether to embrace the water scheme, giving up land that has been historically used for mining.

The historical discovery in 1892 by Bayley and Ford of gold in Fly Flat and Hannans (which both later became Coolgardie) led to the development of the Golden Mile, which became world famous. In 1891, the population of Western Australia was just under 50,000: from 1891, gold was found and by 1901, the population had increased to 200,000, with most people prospecting on the goldfields. From the beginning, water was a major problem on the goldfields. Early methods of sourcing water were expensive and unreliable. The only water in the goldfields was groundwater or the little rain that fell (Water Corporation, 2019).

Premier Sir John Forrest had the foresight to hire C. Y. O'Connor as Western Australia's Engineer in Chief. His job was to produce a plan to pump water to the goldfields.

O'Connor mastered it, designing one of the greatest hydraulic engineering works in the world. The design included a 21 cubic metre storage reservoir at Mundaring and a pipeline with eight major steam-driven pump stations and receiving tanks. The design included lifting water from the Helena Reservoir at Mundaring to Coolgardie. In 1903, the scheme was extended to Kalgoorlie (a distance of 560 metres). The scheme went over budget to 2.5 million. While the pipeline was under construction from 1898 to 1903, people came from all over the world to work on this ambitious project (Water Corporation, 2019).

In *The Torrents*, introducing a water scheme would improve the future prospects of the town and provide sustainability and economic stability. Ben Torrents states his case for embracing the water scheme:

Haven't you seen the empty stores in Cresswell? Shovels and billies and panning dishes still shiny under the dust on the wrappings ...the broken office windows in Dalton, the

courthouse falling down ... If gold runs out here too, water will be necessary life blood for a dying town.

(Gray, 1998, p. 26)

Kingsley is the strongest advocate for the irrigation scheme. He tries to influence Rufus and Ben Torrent and Manson, an investor in the newspaper, of the benefits and the need to look ahead to ensure the prosperity of the town. Kingsley hopes Rufus and Ben will promote the water scheme in *The Argus*, to inform people of the benefits of the scheme. Kingsley states; "I want to bring water from the river to the paddocks out there! I want to hold the river against drought and flood! I want to see fruit trees, instead of mine shafts and pot-holes" (Gray, 1998, p. 4). At first, Rufus, Ben and the men in the office refuse to listen and won't support Kingsley's controversial idea. However, Ben writes an article about the benefits of the water scheme in *The Argus*: Jenny edits it and puts it in to be printed without the permission of Rufus Torrent.

Ben urges his father to promote the water scheme for the town's survival:

"Let me urge you to give this thing a chance. Don't pass up the future for the sale of the present that is nearly past. Don't pass up the glorious, impossible, realisable chance" (Gray, 1998, p. 27).

Character Analysis



Celia Pacquola in Sydney Theatre Company's *The Torrents* © Philip Gostelow

JENNY MILFORD

Jenny is a progressive career woman in 1890's Australia. She is described as smart and neat with a cool temperament. Jenny applies for the journalist position at *The Argus* as J. G. Milford, not stating her gender on the application, as she would be discriminated against. Jenny grew up with a progressive father who wanted his daughter to be more than a fashion plate. Ben explains: "Her father was an editor of a paper in Tasmania - a paper very much like *The Argus*. He didn't have a son - and since he had liberal ideas - if either of you can understand that expression" (Gray, 1998, p. 13).

Jenny cleverly impresses Rufus, Ben and the others in the office with her competency and intelligence. Jenny gently manipulates Rufus, saying he'll be admired he'll be for his leadership for being the first man in town to hire a woman. She manipulates him again when she submits the controversial article in *The Argus*, supporting the irrigation scheme. Rufus is furious about the article. However, he changes his thinking when he realises that by supporting the water scheme and distancing himself from Manson, he and his newspaper will be viewed as independent and progressive. At the end of the play, Jenny makes a decision to stay working for Rufus, with the possibility of romance between them in the future.

Jenny grows in confidence towards the end of the play, expressing her thoughts on what they should do for the next morning's editorial after the controversial editorial has been published. She suggests to Rufus that they write a hard-hitting piece with the facts from a different angle to cement the argument. She speaks persuasively, impressing Rufus: "A different angle, not just the fear of the lack of gold, but hope of the growth of the town" (Gray, 1998, p. 52).

Character Analysis (Cont.)



KINGSLEY MYERS

Kingsley is an environmentalist, a man ahead of his time, who is driven about his plan to bring an irrigation scheme to Koolgalla. He rallies Rufus at *The Argus* to get the newspaper to support the scheme by writing an article about his proposal. Kingsley explains his beliefs: "Mr Torrent pointed out to me that he did not believe the town will give up their chance of easy fortune for such a scheme as this. I still think ... I think that people can see their way into the future better than you believe" (Gray, 1998, p. 25).

Kingsley is interested in Gwynne romantically. They are friends and as he is a gentleman, he waits for her to work out her feelings with Ben.

GWYNNE

Gwynne is a sweet and pretty young woman who is engaged to Ben Torrent. Ben is unable to commit to her; he likes his freedom and flirts with other women, unable to settle down. After breaking off her engagement, Gwynne turns her attention to Kingsley as they have a connection based on friendship and respect.

Jenny has a considerable impact on Gwynne as she realises that women can work and lead an independent life that doesn't involve marriage. She states: "The New Woman is so much more independent than the old" (Gray, 1998, p. 45). Gwynne looks up to Jenny and supports Kingsley's scheme. Jenny goes against her family's conservative ideas as they oppose Kingsley's proposal, wanting the town to stay as it is.

Character Analysis (Cont.)

RUFUS TORRENT

Rufus Torrent is a 48-year-old handsome, self-possessed man. He is well-dressed, charming and observant. In the script he is described as follows: "In his deep-set-eyes, curling nostril and deep-cut mouth there is pride, autocracy, exhibitionism (and withdrawal) and a big slice of charm" (Gray, 1998, p. 52). Jenny develops feelings for Rufus, an unlikely match because of his position as her boss and being a lot older "I like him. Because he's proud and stiff-necked and adult - but carries with him a young and desperate boy from ... harder times. You don't know that boy, my comfortable Ben. He suffered so that you should live without making his acquaintance". (Gray, 1998, p. 52)

Rufus Torrent has a soft side. He is surprisingly affected by Jenny, who impresses him and softly manipulates him into letting her stay on at the newspaper. Rufus doesn't want Jenny to think he is easily persuaded:

And, I hope you realise that I saw the trap that you set for me. Saw it a mile away. No doubt you feel you have achieved a victory. No doubt you have. But since you have chosen to un-sex yourself, do not expect any tolerance for feminine weaknesses. One mistake, Miss Milford, and you'll be out on your ear

(Gray, 1998, p. 19).

BEN TORRENT

Ben Torrent is a young, handsome journalist. He is the son of Rufus Torrent, and will inherit the successful newspaper Rufus has built. He is somewhat in awe of his father and a little spoilt. Ben describes himself to Jenny: "I'm Ben Torrent - good position, good prospects, tolerable looks. I inherited my looks from my father, as I inherited everything else - except my lack of private enterprise and public spirit" (Gray, 1998, p. 22).

Ben decides at the end of the play to not accept Manson's offer to be the editor of a new, rival newspaper in town. He explains to Jenny, "If someday I have to match Rufus Torrent, it will be the meeting of equals. I won't be a weapon in another man's hands" (Gray, 1998, p. 52).

At the beginning of the play, Ben is engaged to Gwynne. She calls off the engagement when she realises Ben isn't in love with her and is marrying her out of convenience. Ben expresses how pretty and sweet Gwynne is, but he's not in love with her and flirts



Character Analysis (Cont.)



MANSON

Manson is an arrogant, forceful and ruthless man. He is an investor in *The Argus* and likes to assert his dominance and status throughout the play. He disagrees with Kingsley about the irrigation plan, as his financial interests are in mining. He makes it clear that he will withdraw his financial support from the paper if there are articles that promote the irrigation scheme in *The Argus*.

Manson is jealous of Rufus Torrent's success, including having a son to take over his business, clearly stating that he deserves a son like Ben. He believes that women should be at home not in the workplace and tries to intimidate Jenny. At one point, he takes her hand as a sign of forced intimacy: Jenny quickly withdraws her hand as he states: "I wouldn't allow a woman of mine to work like a man. I'd keep her clean" (Gray, 1998, p. 20).

Manson is a self-made man who's travelled around the world, worked hard and established himself in Koolgalla with land and position. When discussing his attitude to life with Ben, he explains: "You can't give anything away, Ben, until you've got enough for yourself - whether it's money, land or dreams. I'm not so old that I've forgotten what ideas a young man has. But it's a hard world" (Gray, 1998, p. 26).

Manson makes a statement that shows his intelligence and knowledge, he is aware that everything may not be able to stay the same with industry in the town: "We must either attack it bitterly as a dangerous and useless project, or give it our support as a necessity for our future" (Gray, 1998, p. 28).

Character Analysis (Cont.)



JOCK

Jock works in the newspaper office and likes to keep things ship-shape and organised. Like many of the men, he objects at first to a woman working in the office, but changes his mind when he gets to know Jenny: “I don’t object to you myself, my dear. You’re a good worker and a pleasant speaker, and I suppose I could get used to the sight of a bit of petticoat going up the stairs every day” (Gray, 1998, p. 17).

BERNIE

Bernie is a sweet-tempered teenage boy and the office lackey. When Jock puts Bernie’s name forward as objecting to Jenny’s employment, Bernie is outraged and disagrees emphatically when asked if he would like her resignation. He is fond of Jenny and forms a friendship with her.

CHRISTIE

Christy is a traditional, older man who works in the newspaper office. At first, he is verbal about wanting Jenny’s resignation. When Jenny asks why he wishes for her to leave, he states it’s because a woman’s place in the home (Gray, 1998). Christy has traditional values which are challenged when Jenny starts working at The Argus. Christy often interrupts conversations with stories from his past and travels, which some characters treat with humour and some contempt.

The Elements of Production



The cast and crew of Sydney Theatre Company's *The Torrents*.
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COSTUME DESIGN

Renee Mulder has designed traditional 1890's costumes for *The Torrents*. The costumes reflect the characters' class and status. Rufus Torrent, the editor of the newspaper, wears a three piece suit with a dark coat, rich textured waistcoat and a heavy gold fob chain. His son Ben wears a tuxedo covered by a duffel jacket. The lower status costumes are less refined. Jock wears a leather apron and shirt, covered in newspaper ink. The men wear trousers, shirts and waistcoats and accessories including cuff-links, hats and canes.

The costume era is heading from Victorian toward the Edwardian era, from a look known as The Gibson Girl. The actress playing Gwynne, Emily Rose Brennan will be corseted with a full length skirt and a beautifully crafted dress.

In the prologue at the beginning of the play, Celia Pacquola who plays Jenny, will be wearing jeans and a t-shirt with an activist slogan. She will address the audience, then step into the world of the play, changing her costume to an 1890's tailored dress, suitable for working in an office.

[Watch an interview with Renee Mulder about Period Costumes.](#)

SET DESIGN

The show starts with the prologue delivered by Celia Pacquola. The set includes a red velvet drape, a chair, a microphone and a neon sign with the writer's name lit up, "Oriel Gray". After

the prologue, the velvet drape will open to reveal the main set which is the office of the newspaper, The Argus.

There are three environments in the office: the main office where the workers are; a door to the inner workings of the office; and the upper level where Rufus Torrent, the editor of the newspaper, works. The Director, Clare Watson and Designer Renee Mulder decided to have Rufus Torrent's office on the first floor to show his high status. This was based on historical evidence of offices of the time, with managers higher up than workers.

There are stacks of newspapers all over the desks and on the floor, giving the look and feel of a busy, slightly chaotic newspaper office.

[Watch a talk with designer Renee Mulder about the Set and Costume designs](#)

SOUND DESIGN

Changes in the rework of the play include music and sound design, with the song "9-5" by Dolly Parton playing at the beginning of Scene 3. This sound reference alludes to the working woman, a new idea in 1950's regional Australia. The stage directions state "9-5 the Dolly Parton song plays. There is a transition scene of all the blokes cleaning up the office" (Gray, 1998, p. 15).

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