




Rainbow Bird & MONSTER MAN



IN *RAINBOW BIRD & MONSTER MAN*, TONY LOCK NARRATES HIS EXPERIENCE OF CHILDHOOD ABUSE AND HIS SUBSEQUENT KILLING OF THE ABUSER. TONY PLEADED GUILTY TO MANSLAUGHTER, BUT THE COURT FOUND OVERWHELMING MITIGATED CIRCUMSTANCES AND HE SERVED NO MORE TIME IN PRISON THAN THE 18 MONTHS WAITING FOR TRIAL.

INTRODUCTION



IN THE FILM, THE ABUSER IS revealed to the viewer as a 'family friend' who became the principal provider for the family, and a fellow alcoholic for Tony's unloving father. As a very young child, Tony viewed the abuser as a nurturing figure, and sought from him the paternal affection that was lacking in his own relationship with his father. Tony idolised and loved the abuser, but in the film, we watch as all his trust is betrayed. *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* is both a documentary and a drama, as the viewer sees and hears Tony's story, and watches the stylised re-enactments of the past.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Rainbow Bird & Monster Man will have relevance and interest for senior secondary and tertiary students of Health and Personal development, Psychology, Legal studies, Social Welfare studies and Media studies.

It should be noted that the content of the film, including the focus on child abuse, the language and references to drug use, makes it appropriate for mature secondary and tertiary students only. The film may be disturbing for some students.

EXPLORING THE LEGAL ISSUES

Rainbow Bird & Monster Man will have particular relevance to students

studying the law and in particular, the legal issues of the distinction between manslaughter and murder. At the beginning of the trial, the re-enactment judge asks the prosecution why it has not presented the case as one of murder, since the facts make a prima facie case of premeditation. A further issue to explore is the mitigating circumstances at sentencing. The judge determined that whilst Tony was guilty of manslaughter, any further imprisonment would amount to punishing the victim.

- As a class, discuss the legal principles and practices the judge would have taken into account in reaching his verdict in the case.
- Compare this case with other cases and the various verdicts reached in the courts.

AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

EXPLORING THE START

- What is the intention of the filmmaker in the opening of the film? Traditionally the opening of a documentary or the 'set up' is designed to perform specific tasks. How are these tasks performed and what are the implications for the audience?
- What is the 'mood' of the opening of *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*?
- What do we learn about Tony Lock in the first 3 minutes of the film?

- What do we not learn about Tony in the first 3 minutes of the film that we discover later in the film?
- Within the first five minutes of *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*, a series of visual and sound motifs are established by the film-maker. Though we do not understand them at this stage, these will be used as devices to underpin the narrative of Tony's story. What are these motifs and how are they used or changed as the film progresses?
- Make a list of the motifs used in the film and the emotions or ideas which they help to define.

TONY'S STORY

The abuse Tony suffered was hideous in the extreme. Child abuse is a major problem world wide, affecting large numbers of people. Experts in the field of child abuse say that it is very important for those who have experienced abuse to know that others believe them and allow them to speak about it openly.

- How do you think Tony feels as he is being filmed?
- What emotions may he have experienced during the filming process?
- Do you think that it is important that films exploring controversial issues are made? Why or why not?

From the age of four and a half years until he was fourteen, Tony was raped and subjected to humiliating and perverse sexual abuse by a 'family friend' Gordon Kerr. Tony describes his shifting opinion of Kerr,



PHOTOGRAPHS: Valeriu Campan

When his mother discovered the abuse, Tony was sent to live with relatives he interpreted [that] as an act of punishment for a wrong that he himself had done.



from seeing him as a 'superman', as someone he wanted to be, to that of a monster; the 'Monster man'.

- In what ways did Gordon Kerr become closely involved with Tony's family?
- How did Tony feel when he first left home with Kerr to travel to Melbourne in the big truck?
- How badly was Tony injured physically by the rapes?
- What other forms of abuse did Gordon inflict on Tony?
- How did Tony react to the subsequent abuse of his brother?
- What evidence was there of previous trauma for his mother?

Tony expresses the emotional paradox not uncommon for those who are abused by family; whilst he increasingly viewed Kerr as a monster, and a devil, there was also a part of him that loved the 'monster'. Tony would find himself comforting the man who might weep immediately after raping him, only to be raped again shortly after. Such was the extent of Tony's emotional deprivation and damaged self-worth.

- What explanations can be offered for why victims of abuse sometimes feel like Tony did?

When his mother discovered the abuse, Tony was sent to live with relatives—clearly a beneficial development for Tony, but one that he interpreted as an act of punishment.

- Why do you think Tony reacted in this way?
- Is this a typical reaction from other victims of abuse?

As an adult, there were a few short years when Tony experienced the comfort of friendship with 'functional people'.

- Describe the scenes in the film which depict this period in Tony's life.
- What experiences did he have which made him happy?

In time, however, the effects of Tony's childhood abuse could not be suppressed, and his life became increasingly one of drug abuse, unsuccessful relationships, violence, and mental and physical disorder.

- Is this pattern common to other victims of abuse? Why or why not?
- What can be done to help victims of abuse to avoid this dysfunctional cycle?

Realising that his way of living would probably lead to an early death, Tony describes his attempt to turn his life around by driving to central Australia. In the desert Tony found some peace of mind and soul, a respite from the demons he had been wrestling with for so long. The healing journey into the desert was abruptly terminated, however, when he happened to hear on the radio news about the child abuse perpetrated by members of the Christian Brothers—the mention of the case triggered an emotional regression, paranoia, and eventual mental collapse and hospitalisation.

- How can Tony's reactions be explained?

Again Tony attempted to make forward steps in his life when following the advice of a counsellor, he sought to bring his abuser to justice. But again he suffered setbacks that destroyed his quest for healing. Tony describes the ambivalence of police who said, 'it happened 30 years ago, get over it!'

- What kind of damage do you think this reaction would have done to Tony?
- What reactions might other health professionals and officers of the law have taken after hearing Tony's story?
 - What course of action would have been more appropriate?
 - Suggest reasons why the police were more interested in the criminal history, if any, of Tony and his family?
 - How did Tony feel when the police asked these questions?

The police then asked Tony to investigate the facts of his abuse by revisiting the sites where the abuse occurred. They were unconcerned about the probable effect that would have on his clearly disturbed state of mind. As the re-

Later that day, Tony went to the abuser's hut to confront him himself. He grabbed an axe ... and broke down the door of the hut. Tony was confronted by the monster man who held a gun to his head. He asked the man to shoot, and when he did not, Tony killed the man with his axe.



PHOTOGRAPHS: Valeriu Campan





enactment of his trial makes clear, the police had no intention of prosecuting the offender.

- What should have happened after Tony went to the police?
- Why did the revisiting of the sites have such a negative effect?

It was during Tony's investigation that, by accident, he comes across the offender in the pub where Kerr often drank.

Seeing the man again, Tony leaves the pub immediately, full of torment and rage. Later, and on the night of Kerr's death, Tony assaults a bystander, so that the police would put him in prison.

- Why do you think that Tony reacted in this way?

Tony then approached the police and asked them to 'lock him up', but the police dismissed him with 'not this abuse sh*t again, f*ck off!'

- Suggest a different sequence of events, that may have lead to different outcomes.

Tony then drove to the abuser's hut to confront him himself. He grabbed an axe, 'to protect the four-year-old child in me, not with any intention of doing him harm' and broke down the door of the hut. Tony was confronted by the 'monster man' who held a gun to his head. He asked the man to shoot, and when he did not, Tony killed the man with his axe.

- What explanations can you offer for his behaviour?
- What do you think finally drove Tony to the killing?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RAINBOW BIRD

Rainbow Bird & Monster Man is a very powerful story, fascinating and yet disturbing in its frank account of the circumstances that led to the killing of the abuser. The film provides valuable insights into the pathology of victims of child abuse who later commit acts

of violence. Unlike many victims who become abusers themselves, Tony was only ever really a danger to himself. It was an encounter during his early boyhood with a pathetic injured bird that, he says, saved him from suicide. He was leaving the place of the 'Monster Man' having been violently raped and determined never to return, when he saw the bird. He identified with the bird who became for him the 'Rainbow Bird', that would 'wrap him up in its soft wings', that would take his mind away from the horrors.

- How did the Rainbow Bird help Tony to survive at various times including his period of time in jail?

EXPLORING THE COURT SCENES IN THE FILM

- From where do the court scenes in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* derive their dialogue. How do we know this? It is not stated in the film, but we are expected to comprehend the source of this material. Why? What does this say about an audience's ability to 'read' a film of this type?
- How are the court scenes in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* handled stylistically by the filmmaker? How do these scenes differ stylistically from the rest of the film? What might have dictated this choice?

UNDERSTANDING THE FACTS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE

Through Tony's story in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*, the theme of child abuse is explored through his very personal story. World-wide, the statistics on child abuse are very disturbing. As in Tony's case, the emotional trauma remains long after the external bruises and physical trauma is over. Today, most communities, the courts and law enforcement agencies recognise that the emotional impact is severe and requires both recognition and treatment.

International studies report that children who have been abused may display:

- apocselfimage
- sexualabingut
- inabilitytotrustorloveothers
- aggressive,disruptiveandsometimesillegalbehaviour
- angerandrage
- self-destructiveorself-abusivebehaviour, suicidalthoughts
- passiveorwithdrawnbehaviour
- fearofenteringintonewrelationshipsoractivities
- anxietyandfear
- schoolproblemsorfailure
- feelingsofsadnessorother symptomsofdepression
- flashbacksnightmares
- drugandalcoholabuse

- Which of these characteristics are evidenced in Tony's behaviour and experiences that you see depicted in the film. Explain why these behaviours may or may not have occurred?

FURTHER MEDIA STUDIES QUESTIONS

- How is the central interview presented in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*? How is it shot? What mood is generated by the style in which Tony's interview is handled?
- How is music used by the filmmaker in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*?
- How would you describe the style of the music?
- At some points in Tony's story the music adopts a different tone and tempo. When is this and why is the music used in this way?
- What sort of images are used throughout *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* to suggest elements of Tony's childhood story? How are these images treated?
- What are the design elements in the film and what aesthetic is invoked? How is lighting used to reinforce this aesthetic? Are the images real or surreal? What might this suggest about the mental state that Tony Lock carries into adulthood? Does





this jeopardise the veracity of Tony's story or reinforce it?

- What is the film-maker's possible purpose for including Tony's poetry, his writing and drawings in this film?
- In the documentary genre, what are the implications of asking the subject of the film to re-enact past events within their life? Is this done in *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man*? Why or why not?
- What is meant by 'authorship' when referring to documentary? The central voice of this film is Tony Lock's, but the film-maker also has a 'voice' in the film. How do we perceive this voice and what is its purpose?

THE END OF THE FILM

In the last 10 minutes of the film the judge begins his summary. He appears in the barn.

- Is this a realistic treatment? Why would the film-maker choose to represent the judge in this way? What does it imply about all of the reconstructed elements that go before it? What is the film-maker saying?
- What is meant by 'reflexivity' when referring to documentary?
- In parts of this documentary, the film-maker asks the subject of the film to re-enact past events within their life. In what scenes is this device not

used? What are the moral implications for the film-maker in using the subject in this way?

- What are the moral implications for the audience in seeing the subject of the film used in this way?
- How is the murder speech rendered visually? Do the re-enactments differ from the rest of the film and why?

The film concludes with Tony reflecting on the outcome of the trial. People often ask him how he feels about being 'let off'. Nothing justifies what he did, he says, what he did was wrong, but no jail or mental institution could possibly match the mental and emotional imprisonment he has



suffered since he was a young child.

- Do you agree with Tony's view?
- How does the film close? What is said or suggested in the last three minutes of the film?

CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES

- What can we learn from the credits at the end of the film? How many people were involved in the making of this film? How large is the cast and crew? What are the possible budgetary implications of a cast of this size?
- Why would the Australian Film Commission fund a film of this type? What are the benefits for the general public and what are the benefits for filmmakers? Why do government agencies fund documentary production?

The film has been bought by SBS Television.

- Would the film be likely to be screened on commercial TV, or could *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* be funded by commercial TV networks? Why or why not? ■

FURTHER REFERENCES

Note: Some students watching *Rainbow Bird & Monster Man* may be disturbed by the content. The following organisations may be contacted if students wish to seek advice on these matters or to find further information:

The Australian Department of Family and Community Services
<http://www.facs.gov.au>

AUSTRALIANS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE:
<http://www.aaca.com.aasup1.htm>

THE MALE FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION ASSOCIATION:
 The student welfare section of SOFWEB
<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov/bullying/reslinks.htm>

The Australian Institute of Family Studies, which also provides many useful links to other sites
<http://www.aifs.org.au/institute/links.htm>

THE NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION CLEARING HOUSE:
<http://www.aifs.org.au/nch/issues/issues14.html> and <http://www.aifs.org.au/nch/pubs.html#issues>

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