

Australian concepts: the merry go round in the sea

[Parts of the World](#), [Australia](#)



Australia during the wartime. The concept of Australia from the viewpoint of six year old Rob Coral at the start of 'The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea', is not actually about the country itself, but one that is solely based upon his immediate surroundings. The security of his family and of the land that is his home, are the things that provide him with safety and identity. 'He thought, often, of himself, of who he was, and why. He would think: I am Australian, and wonder why. How had he come to be Rob Coral, living in this town? This quote is taken from the beginning of the book. Here Rob is lost and often struggles to define his own identity. The continual presence of the large Nameplates clan that he belongs to is very important, as it signifies, what Rob comes to believe, is his place in the world. This quote is an example of the shelter and protection Rob feels with family. 'After that, the boy stopped listening to his mother's warnings of doom. But because no catastrophe was possible which she would not have foreseen, he felt secure with her, he felt that she could thwart any danger, except the one danger he really feared, which was made up of time and change and fragmentary talk of war.

Rob is engrossed in Geraldine, his home. The single connection with the outside world he has is of the war, which links to him simply because of his cousin and idol, Rick, and having to move homes every now and then. The importance and value of close family bonds is a fundamental Australian belief that is still held today. Family is where we draw our base set of values and beliefs, and the frequent visits and gatherings Rob shares with his tens of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins is one of the elements that define his world.

Australia is depicted in hundreds of literary texts by images of the 'bush' and outback. The landscape portrayed in most of the novel is set in more rural areas of Australia. Randolph Stow, the author, goes into a large amount of detail describing the scenery with its sights, smells and sounds, as demonstrated by the following quote: 'In the summersets along the dry creek that wound almost to the river at Install, cockatoos swirled like torn paper, catching the light. Rising from one tree, they flashed and screeched across the tiger striped sky to another, a quarter of a mile away.

They Infested the tree like migratory fruit-blossom, flapping, tearing, and relining. ' Almost all of the descriptions are positive, planting the land in a beautiful and attractive light. The frequent mention of native animals and plants, FIFO together with ascriptions of vastness and emptiness at ten eternal is unled Australian. Rob's life throughout the novel revolves around school, the beach and most importantly, his cousin Rick. It is the relationship between the two that supports the entire novel.

The effect of Rick's character is complicated, as we see him largely through Rob's point of view. Being absent for half the book, his character can be difficult to grasp. While Rob adores and idolizes Rick, the adults in the family are continually criticizing him after his return from the war. 'Rick was immature. He was lazy. He was a narcissist. He used dirty language. He had stayed at the very bottom of the army. He refused to be a farmer. He talked like Hitler about the Bomb. He looked bored and miserable when he was with people Rob liked... Before leaving for War, Rick had been a golden boy, but he never lived up to the family's expectations in the end. Although the war

had a shattering effect on Rick, both physically and psychologically, it was this that led to the development of his character; his loss of innocence and carefree attitude. He came home a changed man. While Rick's best friend Huge, whom he meets in the War, has managed to put the impressions of the War and its impact behind him and move on with life, memories of War continue to haunt Rick long after he returns home.

Although this change in Rick's character is obvious to young Rob, he continues to admire his cousin. Quotes from the end of the book justify this. 'Rob's love for Rick was like an ache in his body,' and 'He (Rob) seems to be trying to turn himself into a carbon copy of Rick,' Margaret Coral said. "Towards the end of the novel, Rob's perception of the world, his concept of Australia, has changed. 'The world the boy had believed in did not, after all, exist. The world and the clan and Australia had been a myth of his mind, and he had been, all the time, an individual. In Rick's words, 'Families and countries are biological accidents.' Rob is forced to question the idea that although everyone comes from a family and country, it doesn't provide us with any identity, and everyone is an individual. As the novel progresses, Rob starts to doubt the beliefs of his family, beliefs that he had never challenged before, mainly due to Rick's actions and reactions after experiencing life so close to death, and his decision to leave Australia forever. 'Look, kid,' Rick said, 'I've outgrown you. I don't want a family, I don't want a country.

I've grown up, and I'm on my own.' Rick was turning his back on his home and as Rob's idol, forcing Rob to consider a life outside of what he had

always known. While a great deal of 'The Merry- Go- Round in the Sea' goes into detail featuring and ascribing the landscape, 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll', another popular Australian story, does the opposite. Being a play, the dialogue is the main thing that drives the plot, but with the novel, a variety of different scenes and settings is easier to portray. Setting in the play consists of only two locations, both indoors.

The time periods of both stories are different, with 'The Merry- Go- Round in the Sea' set during the wartime and depression, while 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll', a few years after. This contributes to the different behaviors and way of life of the characters in the stories. The main similarity between the two texts is the symbols of the kepi doll and merry-go-round. Both are recurring motifs in their own stories. The kepi doll is a representation of the relationship between Olive and ROR, two main characters in the play.

Unmarried, and taking the chance to see each other for only Twelve months every year, there is never any progress in their relations and the doll signifies the fragility and artificial bond between them. Olive wants to keep their relationship the way it is, like a teenage romance. The doll is flawless, but its reflection is fake. The merry-go-round has similar significance. It too, is a symbol of perfection, of Rob's ideal world. At the beginning, it is one of Rob's greatest desires to learn how to swim to what he believes is the 'merry-go-round in the sea', which is really the mast of a sunken shipwreck.

When Rob asks his mother, 'Why? Why can't we go there?' , she answers with, 'Oh- because of the war. ' This leads him to dislike the war, in addition

to it also taking Rick away and causing change in Rob's life and home. He imagines that when the war is over, he will swim to the merry-go-round, Rick will return, he'll move home, and things will be perfect. However, this is not the case. The last sentence of the novel reflects the change from start to end of the story, and Rob's growth towards maturity. He thought of a windmill that had become a merry-go-round in a backyard, a merry-go-round that had been a substitute for another, now ruined merry-go-round, which had been itself a crude promise of another merry-go-round most perilously rooted in the sea. ' The major themes of time and change are shared in both stories. 'The world would revolve around him (Rob), ND nothing would ever change. He would bring Rick to the merry-go-round, and Aunt Kay, and they would stay there always, spinning and diving and dangling their feet in the water, and it would be today forever. This quote demonstrates Rob's aversion to change and time's unceasing forward momentum. He wants everything to be the way it was before Rick went to war, and this is also symbolized by the merry-go-round in the sea. This fear of change is identical to Olive's feelings in 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'. Even after seventeen years of no change and progress, Olive is stuck in a time warp, wants to keep things the way they are and continue acting like a young adult.

She is afraid of commitment and not feeling youthful anymore, causing her to cling on to her young and innocent kepi dolls for security and comfort.

'Olive (to ROR): 'I want what I had before. You give it back to me; give me back what you've taken. ' When things start to change in the seventeenth summer, Olive doesn't react well and by the end of the play, she is left with

nothing. The tradition of metathesis, although frequent in other countries as well, is a very rare part of Australia and the bond between its men.

The 'outback man' is a famous Australian icon that is incorporated into thousands of movies, poems, novels and songs. The strong, very masculine impressions they exude of power, pride and being 'one' with the land is a famous and commonly used Australian stereotype. Both Rick and ROR in the texts radiate the 'outback man' persona. They are strong, much more physically than mentally and both are very tough. The metathesis between Rick and Huge is very deep, largely because of what they shared through the war.

When in a life and death situation, the trust and loyalty between the men had to be strong, and the experiences they went through together is something neither will forget easily. 'The skeleton of Hugh McKay lay on the floor. 'Rick,' Hugh said, breathing painfully. 'I drank your water. ' 'That's all right. ' 'No, no- bastard of a thing to do. ' 'Don't be stupid,' Rick said. What's a mate for? ' This quote reveals how meaningful are on the verge of death. This metathesis is similar to that of ROR and Barney's in 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'.

Although their bond may not have been as deep, they still relied on each other a lot during the cane season up North where they worked as cutters. ROR and Barney have the same loyal and 'got your back attitude, which, even though it comes into question, proves to be strong by the end of the story. While 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' is similar to 'The Merry Go Round in the Sea's' themes, symbols and characters, the poem, 'My Country

by Throated Mackerel is comparable to the novel through images of Australia's landscape. Depictions of its beauty and magnificence are plentiful in both texts.

The book concentrates on a small area of Australia because it is where the action takes place, whilst the poem gives a picture of Australia as a whole. Mackerel's attitude in 'My Country' is enthusiastic and positive, while Stow's is more restrained. There is similar imagery between the two texts in some descriptions. 'I love a sunburnt country; a land of sweeping plains' refers to Australia's vast, brownish-red land, and its sun-drenched weather. A vision like this is also expressed in the novel. 'The hills and soils were red-brown and stony, brownish purple in the distance. Australia is often represented by TTS landscape and so it is not common to find that different texts have described the country in comparable ways. Stow has masterfully captured the atmosphere of growing up in Australia in the 1950s. The concept of Australia explored by the novel has reinforced my perceptions of the land. Its conception of the landscape, what it means to be Australian and whether it is possible to outgrow your country has broadened my outlook and even questioned a few of my own values. It raises profound issues that cause readers to stop and consider what it really means to be Australian.