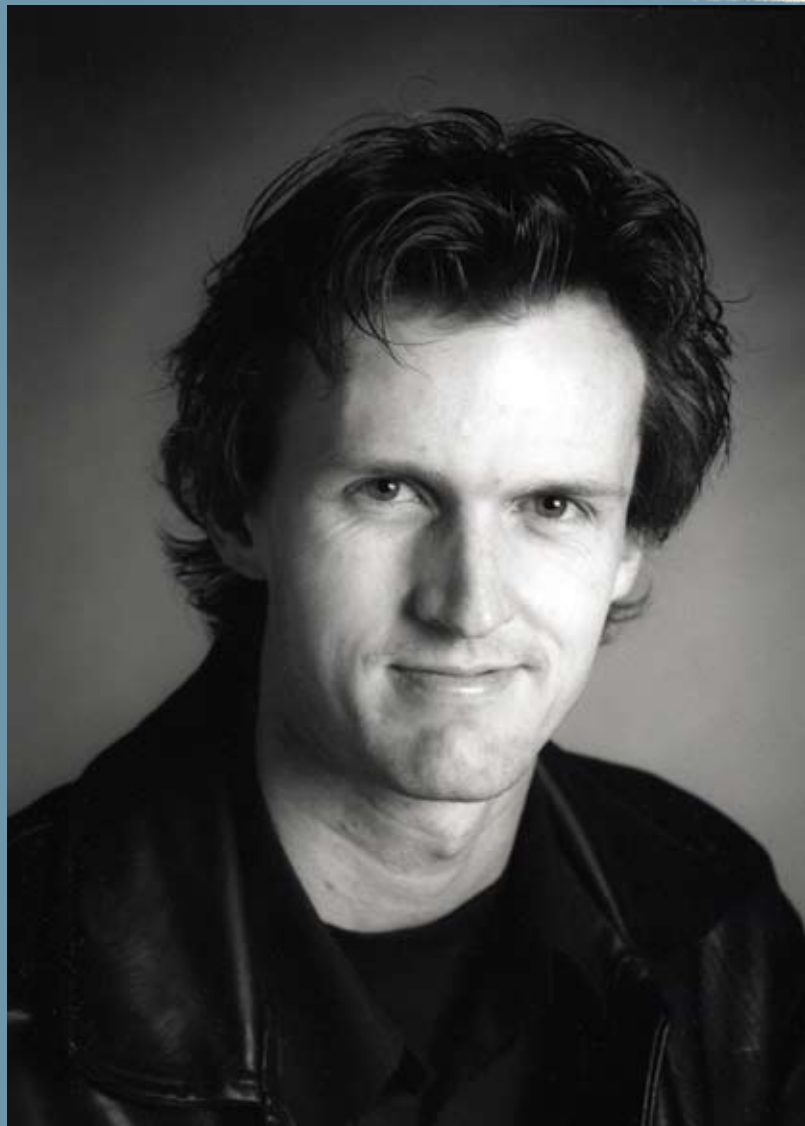
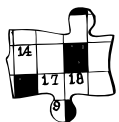


# *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron*



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY KATY MARRINER



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## Introduction

This study guide to accompany *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* has been written for senior secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Literature, Theatre Studies and Drama.

*What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* is a short film about Australian playwright Matt Cameron. Dr Tess Brady interviews Cameron and provides a critical introduction to *Tear from a Glass Eye*, *Ruby Moon* and *Hinterland*. *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* also includes a discussion of some of Cameron's other plays and an investigation of his approach to writing for the stage.

*What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* is one title from a four-part series spotlighting Australian playwrights. The series offers students information about the ideas and processes of the playwrights, as well as the opportunity to hear what the playwrights have to say about their work. Other titles available in the *What I Wrote* series include:

- *What I Wrote: Louis Nowra*
- *What I Wrote: Hannie Rayson*
- *What I Wrote: Katherine Thomson*

Further information about the series can be found at <<http://www.whatiwrote.com.au>>.

## Matt Cameron

Matt Cameron is an Australian playwright, screenwriter and director. His works for the theatre have earned him the label of postmodern absurdist. Cameron's plays include *Mr Melancholy*, *Footprints on Water*, *Ruby Moon*, *Tear from a Glass Eye* and *Hinterlands*. In addition to his playwrighting credits, Cameron has run his own theatre company Neonheart and was the co-creator, co-writer and director for the television series *Introducing Gary Pretty*. Cameron has also written scripts for episodes of *SeaChange*, *CrashBurn* and *Stingers*.

## About the filmmakers

### Dr Tess Brady – Presenter

Dr Tess Brady is a highly respected editor, researcher and teacher of writing at university level. She was the co-founding editor of the international online scholarly journal *TEXT* and has published children's picture books, adult radio drama, crime fiction, short stories and popular non-fiction. Her most recent publication is *Creative Writing: Theory beyond practice*, with Nigel Krauth.

### Catherine Gough-Brady – Director

Catherine Gough-Brady is a documentary filmmaker. She has made works for a variety of media. Gough-Brady has produced and directed educational videos and websites. Her 'docugame' *Docks Dispute* <<http://www.docksdispute.com>> is currently used in tertiary management and industrial relations courses.

## Using *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* in the classroom

Given some of Cameron's plays are currently out of print, teachers may need to use excerpts from their personal copies of the plays to generate discussions and complete questions and activities.

### The writer's context

'I do feel like the times affect what you write.'

– Matt Cameron

'To me doubt is a really healthy and necessary part of life.'

– Matt Cameron

'I find certainty the thing I fear most.'

– Matt Cameron

- Use the internet, critical essays and commentaries to compile a detailed summary of the contexts that shape Cameron's work as a playwright. Discuss your findings with others in the class.

- Drawing on one of Cameron's plays, determine how Cameron's attitudes to the world in which he lives have influenced the construction of the text. Work in a small group to complete the analysis. Develop a Power-Point presentation to communicate this information to the class.

### Views and values

'We see the ordinary in a new way and in that way understand it more.'

– Dr Tess Brady

'We all see the world in different ways and Matt Cameron is a playwright who is very interested in this.'

– Dr Tess Brady

- Drawing on *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* and your knowledge of Cameron's plays, make a list of the ideas and issues that Cameron has brought to audiences' attention. A significant aspect of Cameron's plays is his fascination with the absurd. As you view *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* compile a list of statements that explain Cameron's interest in the absurd.
- *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron* claims that Cameron writes about perception. Is this true of the play that you are studying?
- Why do you think Cameron uses comedy as a platform to explore darker aspects of human existence?

- Cameron's characters are often burdened by fruitless tasks. Make a list of characters for whom this is the case. What is Cameron endeavouring to say about human existence?

### Critical perspectives

- Use the internet, critical commentaries and reviews to arrive at a detailed knowledge and understanding of the critical reception of Cameron's writing. What viewpoints do you support? What viewpoints do you refute?

### The plays

#### *Tear from a Glass Eye*

'*Tear from a Glass Eye* is a love play about indifference.'

– Dr Tess Brady

*Tear from a Glass Eye* is a modern love story. Iris swathed from top to toe in bandages waits on a beach for an overhead plane to explode and fall into the sea. Her boyfriend Titus, accused of causing Iris' dreadful burns, should have been on that flight, but his remains cannot be found in the wreckage.

- 'In *Tear from a Glass Eye*, Cameron shows us how identity is part of loving.' Do you agree?
- In *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron*, Cameron explains his attraction to the idea of the search for the black box after a plane crashes and the

answers contained in it. How does Cameron draw on the idea of a black box in *Tear from a Glass Eye*?

- 'An absurdist tale of random fate.' Is this an apt description of *Tear from a Glass Eye*?
- Were you surprised to learn that Cameron's inspiration for the play were the lyrics of Radiohead's Thom Yorke?

### *Ruby Moon*

Sylvie: Was there a child Ray?

'It makes the safe frightening – and if the safe is frightening, where do we go to hide?'

– Dr Tess Brady

In *Ruby Moon*, Cameron tells a story which we all know and which we all dread. Innocence wanders off and meets evil. A little girl in a red dress, called Ruby Moon wanders down the street to visit her granny. She disappears. Ruby's parents are lost in the nightmare of retracing the events around her disappearance.

- Why do you think Cameron chose to set *Ruby Moon* in an ordinary Australian suburb?
- Whose innocence has been lost?
- *Ruby Moon* is Matt Cameron's most popular play. Why do you think this is so?



- ‘*Ruby Moon* is a really scary play.  
– Dr Tess Brady

What makes *Ruby Moon* scary?

- How does Cameron draw on the images of the night to tell the story?
- ‘Our constructs imprison us.’ Is this Cameron’s message?

### *Hinterland*

Henry Quealy breaches security and brings the Cumberston Report to the notice of the Prime Minister. The report condemns the government and so it is firmly squashed. *Hinterland* is a play about the political. The dark comedy exposes the state of a nation that commissions reports only to ignore them and banishes an ordinary man like Henry to a netherworld because of his opinions.

- ‘I guess I was really interested in that idea that human beings can be led for better or worse.’  
– Matt Cameron

Cameron acknowledges that *Hinterland* was fuelled by anger. His intention was to attack the regressive sensibilities of Prime Minister John Howard. Drawing on pertinent quotations from *Hinterland*, generate a discussion of Cameron’s view of leadership. Use the internet to learn more about the political landscapes that shaped the play’s narrative and characters.

- In *Hinterland*, doors are portals, openings between physical spaces but also between ideas. Working as a class, examine the use of doors as a storytelling device.
  - ‘I liked the idea of this shrinking prime minister’  
– Matt Cameron
- Why do you think Cameron uses absurdism to examine the political?
- ‘Doubt is the thing that fuels our questions and without questions there could be no investigation. There could be no discovery of the new.’  
– Dr Tess Brady

Does *Hinterland* show doubt to be a positive thing?

- Were you surprised by Cameron’s claim that he would like to revise the play?

### *Mr Melancholy*

*Mr Melancholy* is a comic parable about a hermit, living with two other hermits, in a lighthouse without a light. The trio engage in senseless routines: Ollie, the lighthouse keeper, is stealing the beach bucket by bucket; Enzo, the caretaker, is growing a milk moustache and talking to a ventriloquist’s dummy and Margot is interested in marrying death-prone fish and watching dust settle. When Dolores, a circus clown who only wants to be serious, washes up onto the beach – life begins to change.

*Mr Melancholy* marked the beginning of Cameron’s public career as a playwright. The reviews of *Mr Melancholy* acknowledged it as an absurdist play that was clearly influenced by the theatre of Samuel Beckett. Cameron acknowledges that such evaluations came as a surprise.

- ‘*Mr Melancholy* is a play about change.’ Do you think Dolores is the agent of this change?
- ‘Matt calls it an absurdist parable of sorrow and solitude.’  
– Dr Tess Brady

What moments and statements in *Mr Melancholy* endorse this claim?

### *Footprints on Water*

‘A tale of god and sex and faith and floods and desire.’

Noel is a religious zealot. He is building an ark, so that when God destroys his morally corrupt village, Noel as self-appointed chosen one will start the world again. When the flood comes, Noel finds himself trapped by his faith. His beliefs become his downfall.

- ‘God is in the brothel. Sex is in the church.’



What does Cameron want us to think?

- ‘Noel’s sense of superiority is his downfall.’ Do you agree?

### The writing process

- ‘Classic absurdist plays seem unremittingly bleak to me.’  
– Matt Cameron

Absurdism originated as the Theatre of the Absurd, a movement in both Europe and the USA in the 1950s and the very early 1960s. Absurdism reflects the absurd nature of human existence and is characterized by stories of loss and despair. Cameron argues that his plays modify and adapt absurdism to provide a reflection of his contemporary world.

Were you surprised by Cameron’s admission that he knew very little of the classic absurdist?

Use print and electronic texts to find out more about absurdism. Create an A4 collage of words and images that offers your understanding of absurdism. Use the collages to wallpaper the classroom.

‘It’s always really a painful incremental process.’

– Matt Cameron

‘The act of seeing the play ... on stage helps me to see what still I can do to it.’

– Matt Cameron

Cameron is a ‘multiple drafter’. The first draft is a difficult process and he reworks a play again and again, even after it is regarded as ‘finished’ and has been staged. His plays are constantly in a state of becoming. He even regards editing as a thrill. While Cameron does not use a dramaturge, he does



value the opportunity to collaborate with director and actors, believing that their interpretations can help him fine-tune the play.

- Cameron is drawn to the plays that explore the 'power of the emotions'. He names his influences as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and David Mamet. Research the life and writing of either Williams, Miller or Mamet. Create an A4 document that offers an engaging profile of the selected writer.

- 'I'm hardly box-office gold'  
– Matt Cameron

Do you think this bothers Cameron?

- 'Find like-minded people.'  
– Matt Cameron

- 'Make theatre.'  
– Matt Cameron

Cameron offers his tips to success in *What I Wrote: Matt Cameron*. What tip do you think is worth following?

### Analytic responses

The following topics could be used for written text responses, debates, panel discussions and online forums.

- 'Cameron holds a lens up to the ordinary and shows us how disturbing, how provocative it can be.' Discuss.
- 'Cameron's plays reveal the fine line between comedy and tragedy.' Discuss.
- 'Cameron uses humour to draw us in to his worlds.' Refer to one or more of Cameron's plays to justify your interpretation.

### From script to stage

Create and present a short solo performance from one of Cameron's plays. Submit a short written report that describes and analyses the processes used to create and present the performance.



This program is available from **Ronin Films**.

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Printed play scripts are available from **Currency Press** at <<http://www.currency.com.au>>.



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