

## Document Citation

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# Age of Consent

Australia, 1969

Director: Michael Powell

**Cert:** A. **dist:** Columbia. **p.c.:** Nautilus Productions. **p:** James Mason, Michael Powell. **assoc.p:** Michael Pate. **p.sup:** Brian Chirlian. **p.manager:** Kevin Powell. **assistant d:** David Crocker. **sc:** Peter Yeldham. Based on the novel by Norman Lindsay. **ph:** Hannes Staudinger. **underwater ph:** Ron Taylor. **ed:** Anthony Buckley. **a.d.:** Dennis Gentle. **set dec.:** Bill Piggott. **m/m.d.:** Stanley Myers. **sd. ed:** Tim Wellburn. **sd. rec.:** Paul Ennis, Lloyd Colman. **animal handler:** Scotty Denholm. **l.p.:** James Mason (*Bradley Morahan*), Helen Mirren (*Cora*), Jack MacGowran (*Nat Kelly*), Neva Carr-Glyn (*Ma Ryan*), Antonia Katsaros (*Isabel Marley*), Michael Boddy (*Hendricks*), Harold Hopkins (*Ted Farrell*), Slim De Grey (*Cooley*), Max Moldrun (*TV Interviewer*), Frank Thring (*Godfrey*), Dora Hing (*Receptionist*), Clarissa Kaye (*Meg*), Judy McGrath (*Grace*), Lenore Katon (*Edna*), Diane Strachan (*Susie*), Roberta Grant (*Ivy*), Prince Nial (*Jasper*), Hudson Fausset (*New Yorker*), Peggy Cass (*New Yorker's Wife*), Eric Reiman (*Art Lover*), Tommy Hanlon, Jr. (*Levi-Strauss*), Geoff Cartwright (*Newsboy*). 8,809 ft. 98 mins. Original running time: 103 mins.

Australian artist Brad Morahan is disenchanted with commercial success and his unrewarding, shuttered life in New York. He returns to Brisbane, to an island on the Great Barrier Reef, hoping to recover the original vitality of his work. He is disappointed to find the island already inhabited by an alcoholic old harridan, Ma Ryan, and her attractive grand-daughter Cora. Eagerly saving money to leave the island, Cora readily accepts Brad's offer to pay for her services as a model. Working with this unspoiled subject, Brad finds a new delight in his painting and Cora responds to the older man's interest with an awakening of sexual desire. The relationship is suddenly disrupted by the arrival of Nat Kelly, a bumptious acquaintance of Brad's who begs asylum from his creditors, then steals three hundred pounds before leaving just as abruptly. Another blight in Eden is Ma Ryan, who has become vociferously abusive of Brad's intentions towards her grand-daughter and who eventually discovers Cora's secret cache of money. There is a struggle between the two women and Ma Ryan falls to her death. The police verdict is accidental death; and with the apprehension of Kelly and the return of the money, Brad and Cora are left to themselves and, on Brad's part, a relationship not so selfishly blind.

In this second exploration of his recently adopted home, Michael Powell exchanges the civilised clutter of Sydney for a semi-tropical wilderness on the Great Barrier Reef. Feelings of dissatisfaction—leading to change, uncertainty, and eventually some sort of adjustment—provide a common theme for both *They're a Weird Mob* and *Age of Consent*. Both films begin with a journey, and while *They're a Weird Mob* reflected on an immigrant's aspirations and confusions in the urban setting, *Age of Consent* follows the return of a homesick expatriate hoping to find in a more familiar and natural environment the something lacking in his own life and work. The credit sequence is an underwater cruise round the coral shoals of the Great Barrier Reef, concluding with an opulent starfish crawling on a rock side by side with a gleaming wrist watch suspended in the water. This last specimen is in a

glass tank, part of a familiar advertisement for the reliability of waterproof watches, and eyed wistfully, and ironically, by Brad Morahan through a New York shop window. The scene that follows this briefly effective intimation of Brad's situation is probably the worst in the film. Brad restlessly tries to explain his reasons for leaving the artificiality of his studio life in New York—his plea unintentionally echoed in the scene's dulling sense of film studio artifice—to his unsympathetically business-minded dealer Godfrey (played by Frank Thring, whose superbly supercilious, heavy-lidded, Biblical villains disappeared when the epics went out of fashion; he reappears here, still the archetypal Philistine, but now a scion of New York art circles). But once Brad has been sped on his way by all this brimming, vulgar commerce and installed in his island retreat, the film regains balance. As an Australian, James Mason cannot quite carry off the more blatant colloquialisms of speech and manner, but as an artist, he amply personifies Brad Morahan's amiable but harassed beachcomber's soul, making use of whatever tools are to hand to gouge his works in the sand, splash them on the walls of his shack or assemble them from the available flotsam and assorted crustaceans of the sea-shore. Presented simply and unpretentiously as part of the general clutter of his life, Brad's art is at least debunked of the strained importance that usually attaches to the on-screen productions of movie artists, great and small. Helen Mirren as the half-awakened Cora effectively complements Brad's blissful, fretful immersion in his work. Innocent beyond her years through being effectively marooned on the island, yet deceitful by nature and quickly stirred by Brad's attention, she suggests, sprawled petulantly on her bed chewing at a plastic comb, not so much a 'child of nature' as a combination of Lolita and the orphaned girl-Ewie in Buñuel's *The Young One*. Given the convincing and humorous development of this island duo, it is only a pity that the film's side-line sketches are meagre distractions rather than embellishments. Godfrey the art dealer is the first instance, but the figures tend to grow more grotesque once Powell shifts locations and tries to find a rich vein of regional comedy in patently unfunny caricatures. There is Miss Marley, the red-haired spinster, positively pounding with unrequited passion, and Ma Ryan, a gin-and-weather-worn old sea crone, spluttering in tyrannical fury at her grand-daughter or pleading her age and infirmity in a pathetic, drink-cracked whine. The one exception is Nat Kelly, a delightful performance by Jack MacGowran as the easily deplorable little pest and sponger, blithely oblivious to any put-down and animated with all the wiry agility and nervous movements—especially when eating or talking—of some small, hyperactive animal. There is even a little pathos in the scene where he hobbles back from a determined assault on the susceptible and wealthy Miss Marley, surprised by her unleashed libido, now completely dishevelled and able only to gasp, "I've been raped!"

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