

**Raymond Kevin Mooney** (born 29 January 1945)

Ray is an Australian novelist, playwright and screenwriter. Regarded as an important crime writer his plays have been produced in major Australian theatres and his book *A Green Light* (Penguin 1988) is credited for stimulating crime fiction in Australia.

In 1968 Ray was sentenced to 12 years for rape. Upon his release he completed a 3-year drama course, specialising in directing, at the VCA and formed two theatre companies: *Governor's Pleasure*, a theatre company of ex-prisoners and *ZAP Community Theatre*, comprising mainly street kids from West Heidelberg.

For 30 years Ray taught creative writing at tertiary institutions, including Holmesglen Institute and the VCA Film and Television School. He is currently writing full time.

**Biography:** Ray was born in Thorpdale, Victoria, 1945 to parents Patricia and Jack. His father was a publican and keen fisherman and his mother a barmaid and provider for her five children. Ray was the eldest. His first school was *St Vincent's Primary*, Strathmore, where he was 'asked to leave' for his troublesome behaviour, namely 'fighting and disrespect towards the good nuns'. After a brief period at *St Monica's*, Essendon, it was decided his education would best be served as a boarder at *St Patrick's College*, Ballarat, where he was physically and sexually abused by the good brothers. '*In prison I had nightmares about being back in boarding school. I'd wake and think, thank Christ, I'm only in prison.*'

When his parents threatened to remove him from boarding school if he failed his intermediate exams he duly failed and was banished to *St Kevin's College*, Toorak, as a day student. Here he excelled in sport, winning numerous state athletic titles, but also developed a well-earned reputation as 'a bit of a larrikin'.

He completed Physical Education at *Melbourne University* in 1965 but only taught for one year at both *Merrilands High School* and *Buckley Park High School*, choosing to follow his parents into the hotel trade where he managed the Montague Hotel, South Melbourne.

In 1968 he was sentenced to 12 years for rape and was released in August 1975. During his incarceration Ray put his talents to good use. He was the first prisoner in Australia to start and complete a degree whilst in custody, Bachelor Degree in Social Science from WAIT. He also completed two years of an Accounting degree, WAIT, and organised Latrobe University to run philosophy classes inside Pentridge.

Upon release Ray enrolled in Arts at Latrobe and was credited with the subjects he completed in Pentridge. Ray also competed as an A Grade debater for the La Trobe Team in Pentridge, earning top points as third speaker in a grand final debate which his team narrowly lost to a team of lawyers, comprising the famous debater, Molly Missen. However, life wasn't all roses in prison. Ray spent four months in the infamous H Division for acting as spokesperson during the 1973 prison riots. Despite extreme physical coercion Ray refused to break rocks and it was during his period in H that he decided to become a writer, 'to reveal to the world the horrors of H Division'.

Upon release from H Division Ray spent 4 months in the degrading and condemned C Division before being reclassified to A Division. Determined to take advantage of what the system allowed Ray wrote and directed his first play, *A Blue Freckle*, performed by *Players Anonymous* in A Division's Mess Hall Theatre, in 1975.

Peter Oyston, inaugural dean of the VCA Drama School, saw the play and invited Ray to audition for the first VCA intake upon his release. He was accepted and in 1977, while still a student, wrote his best-known play *Everynight Everynight*, about H Division. The play was made into an award-winning film in 1994 by Alkinos Tsilimidos.

Ray successfully completed the drama course in 1978 and established *Governors Pleasure*, a theatre company of ex-prisoners and people associated with prisons, who produced plays at St Martins, The Pram Factory, Open Stage and numerous university campuses.

In 1996, with Rhonda Johnston, a Melbourne playwright, he established *ZAP Community Theatre*, comprising marginalised kids from West Heidelberg.

Whilst in prison Ray ran physical education classes for prisoners. This transferred upon his release to being the fitness advisor for Collingwood Football Club from 1976-1980. 'We mightn't have won a grandfinal, but we were certainly the fittest club in the VFL.' Collingwood made three grand finals during Ray's tenure.

Ray has proved a prolific writer transcending all genres, from theatre, to screen, to novels, to non-fiction. Renowned for his controversial topics, his writing exhibits a strong social conscience. Ray has directed 40 plays in various venues and held long term positions as script assessor for *Playbox* and the *Australian Playwright's Conference*. He's been Writer-in-Residence at *Holmesglen Institute*, *The Heidelberg Community Health Centre* and *Latrobe University*. His dramaturgical skills have been utilised by numerous playwrights and theatre companies.

For three decades years Ray taught creative writing and theatre technology at various tertiary institutions including *Holmesglen Institute*, *Box Hill TAFE* and the *VCA Film and Television School*.

**Plays:** Ray has written 25 plays, many of them one-act. His first play, *A Blue Freckle*, which he wrote and directed in Pentridge 1975, deals with the contentious issues of rape and police verbal. During the 60s and 70s prison authorities had to approve the content of all prison theatre productions. To get approval Ray claimed a blue freckle was a genesis of Antarctic penguin, knowing the authorities would be too lazy to read the script. By the time they realised the ruse it was too late to cancel the play. A blue freckle is Ray's terminology for the mark a bullet wound leaves on skin, like the wounds police verbal leaves on its victims. The play received a degree of critical acclaim and resulted in Ray enrolling in the drama school at the VCA.

Ray is a graduate of the first intake, Company 78. His next play *Everynight Everynight* was written and directed while Ray was in his second year of the drama course. He resurrected the burnt-out shell of *St Martin's Theatre* in South Yarra. The play was based on the experiences of his friend Chris Flannery, aka Rent-a-Kill, who was sent to H Division when he

was 18. Ray produced the play with ex-prisoners, and actors who had an association with prisons. The play achieved media notoriety when prisoners in H Division rioted to coincide with the opening, and *Ban The Bash* was graffitied all around Melbourne, including on the steps of Parliament House. It played to packed houses the next year at *The Pram Factory* and has been staged numerous times, including a sell-out season at The Adelaide Arts Festival. Its most recent revival was by *Frank Theatre* at Gasworks, 2012. In 1994 Alkinos Tsilimidos, on a budget of \$28,000, adapted it into a film. It achieved AFI nominations for Best Adapted Screenplay and best Director and has achieved genuine cult status in the film industry.

Ray's 3rd play, *Angel of the Graveyard* written in 1978, was performed at *The Pram Factory*. It dealt with schizophrenia and the use of electro convulsive therapy as a treatment. At the time authorities claimed ECT wasn't used as a treatment for schizophrenia. Ray researched the play by posing as a psychiatrist and roaming the grounds of Royal Park Psychiatric Institution, interviewing patients and staff. Written as a two hander it was rewritten for 4 female actors and directed by Kate Cherry at *The Carlton Courthouse* in 1991. Ray later directed the play with a cast from *ZAP Community Theatre*, also at *The Carlton Courthouse*.

In 1981 *West Community Theatre* produced *A Final Siren*, a monologue of the final address by an Aussie rules coach to his players at the start of and during their first grandfinal. Then came *The Dominator* in 1983, the play that shocked many theatregoers and established Ray as a genuine subversive writer. *The Dominator* was a monologue given by a survivor of brutal boys' homes; a survivor who trusted only his motor bike but was betrayed even by his bike when an electric vagina he attached to his bike short circuited and fried him on stage. *The Dominator* was performed in pubs, universities, 'anywhere you could ride a motor bike on stage'. It developed authentic cult status.

He also wrote *Autobiography of an Extra* in 1983 with his wife, Judith Ferrier. This was originally play read at *The Stables* by Sydney Theatre Company, but instantly dismissed when the STC director, Richard Wherrett, wrongfully assumed it was about him. It was performed at *La Mama* the same year, directed by Maud Clark.

1983 was a busy year as Ray co-wrote *Hard Labour, Mate* with his close friend and director, Peter Oyston. This was a satirical send-up of Australia's convict heritage and was the first live performance to be staged at The Old Melbourne Jail. It upset a few of the heritage folk when the production re-hung Ned Kelly using the original beam from Pentridge used to hang Ned Kelly but transferred to The Old Melbourne Jail.

Melbourne's Herring Island was the venue for the Melbourne Writer's Theatre production of Ray's *The Boy from Bearbrass*. Ray took the Mickey out of John Batman, the founder of Melbourne, by portraying him as a used car salesman who duped the Aborigines by buying thousands of square miles of their land for a pittance. Melbourne Writers' Theatre also produced *The Cat from Across the Road* at the *Athenaeum Theatre*. It was about a transvestite prostitute living in a back lane who must endure a torturous 'warm-up' before she can ply her trade each night.

*Black Rabbit* is perhaps Ray's best-known play. It premiered at Playbox (at the Arts Centre) in 1988 to high acclaim and was directed by Peter Oyston. The play explored the injustice of European settlement towards Aborigines.

Ray continued the theme of white injustice towards Australia's indigenous peoples in *Pundulumura* (co-written with Joe Dolce and Gnarnayarrahe Waitairie) at *La Mama* in 1990. He directed this play at *La Mama* and numerous venues around Melbourne. It was also part of the Sydney Theatre Festival with a season upstairs at *Belvoir*. Two buskers musically confront each other over who has the right to their performance space.

In 1992 Ray wrote *Sideshow Alley*, a boisterous romp through the sideshow alley cons and boxing tents of the past, for *ZAP Community Theatre*. It had a successful season at *St Martin's Youth Theatre*, in South Yarra.

*All Aboard* was part of a one-act play season produced by *Chameleon Theatre*. It explored the way travellers form relationships on short trips and how prejudices sometimes allow them to make rash judgments.

In 1997 *The Truth Game*, directed by Daniel Lillford and based on the Walsh Street killings, opened to critical acclaim at the *Carlton Courthouse*. It explored the theme that after Walsh Street police and criminals were at war with each other, with both sides ruthlessly crossing the line of acceptable behaviour. It documented police charging two people they knew to be innocent and pressuring witnesses to give false and adverse evidence to secure convictions.

In 1998 Ray's play *The Drover's Boy* premiered at the *Athenaeum* and was also on the school syllabus. It revealed how early last century drovers sometimes coerced Aboriginal girls into dressing as boys so they could accompany the drover as their concubine. The play highlighted the notion that this was widely known by Europeans, but they choose to pretend otherwise.

In 2001 *The Sinbin* was staged at *The Carlton Courthouse*. It's the last training night before the grand final for St Joey's and the president has banned wives and girlfriends from the after-training entertainment. However, everything that can go wrong does and the night ends in total chaos.

In 2003 *Mouth of the Dog* also premiered at The Carlton Courthouse. This is arguable Ray's most outrageous play. Four mental patients are encouraged to undergo a workshop by a do-gooding counsellor who requires them to take on the roles of Hitler, Pol Pot, Gaddafi and John Howard. It was extreme political satire, directed by Efsia Luce Fele and '*more dangerous than a suicide bomber at a health and safety conference*'.

Ray is currently writing a play about the conflict between two of Australia's greatest athletic coaches, Percy Cerutti and Franz Stampfl and the introduction of steroids into Australian sport.

**Novels:** In 1988 Ray's first novel *A Green Light* was published by Penguin. It became their second biggest seller in dramatic fiction for that year and has been described by many as the best Australian crime novel. Although loosely based on the Australian hitman, Christopher

Dale Flannery, *A Green Light* also documents events from Mooney's life. It received widespread acclaim: 'Ray Mooney's *A Green Light* is the most powerful crime fiction book I've ever read.' Alex Miller, dual Miles Franklin award winner. 'This is the most important and powerful book on crime ever written in Australia, if not anywhere.' Barry Webster 3RRR. 'Mooney's handling of underworld dialogue is masterful...What we have in Johnny Morgan is an absorbing character study of one of the most unpleasant sides of modern-day society.' Ian Freckleton, *The Age*. 'A novel with the ferocious veracity of *A Green Light* should make us all stop and think, and think again, about the patterns of power in our society.' Professor Stephen Knight, *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'If the book stimulates one to think about crime, as it did for me, then it goes some of the way to meeting a higher goal. In the context of crime and prison literature I think *A Green Light* is a valuable contribution.' Michael Bersten. 'For those of us who care about changing the mindless world of men, *A Green Light* is compulsory reading,' Dr Jocelyne Scutt.

Ray has rewritten *A Green Light*, now titled the *The Kingdom Trilogy*, consisting of three stand-alone books: *The Kingdom of Children*, *The Kingdom of Men* and *The Kingdom*. Each book explores the psychological development of hitman, Johnny Morgan.

He is currently writing a fourth book in the series, *Regicide*.

**Non-fiction:** In 2011 Ray co-wrote, *A Pack of Bloody Animals*, with John Kerr detailing the lead up to the Walsh Street killings and the aftermath. Using material the jury and the public never saw, *A Pack of Bloody Animals* tells the story of the war between police and criminals in Melbourne 1988. It re-examines the evidence, much of it in the players' own voices or in previously unpublished interviews with the accused made soon after their acquittal.

Ray decided to write and self-publish crime-related eBooks. 'I wanted to control the information in my books and document the truth for posterity. So, I purposefully by-passed publishers.'

In 2016 he published *The Ethics of Evil – Stories of H Division*, an expose of the horrors of H Division, the punishment section of Pentridge Prison. This was followed in 2021 by *Mouth of the Dog: An Attack on Snitchers, Informers and Verballers*. In the same year he revisited the Walsh Street murders with new information in, *Gangsters with Badges: The Truth about Melbourne's Walsh Street Murders*.