



Kate Winslet plays Tilly Dunnage.

book had a lot of characters and I had to trim some and shift around some of the events so it was more streamlined. I worked with PJ, (Hogan) my husband and also my co-writer. He was extremely helpful in working out the structure."

Moorhouse only ever had one person in mind to play Tilly. But it was not without a few bumps in the journey that she got her mark.

"We just sent the script out and I had always wanted to work with Kate - ever since I had seen her in *Heavenly Creatures*.

"We kept wondering if we should just give up, but I couldn't get the idea of Kate Winslet playing Tilly out of my head, so I said let's just keep waiting, and finally one day I received the most beautiful, effusive email from Kate saying 'I love this character, I know how to play her, I know her, yes I'm doing it.'"

About two months later Winslet fell pregnant.

"I said there is nobody else, we just have to wait for her," Moorhouse says. "Then we approached Judy Davis to play the mother and Judy was very interested in the role. So we had Judy and Kate and a lot of the other actors were interested in working with them. It all came together very beautifully."

Dungatar, the town where the movie is set, is not a real town and had to be built from scratch by production designer Roger Ford, after a long search for a suitable landscape yielded no fruit.

"It was pretty magical feel because the location was all pretty stunning and we got to create the town of Dungatar ourselves," she says.

"Don McAlpine and whole crew were very passionate people and seemed to be really enjoying the process of making the film. "The biggest challenge was the schedule itself - trying to schedule a pretty complicated film on a very tight schedule. It makes such a difference having an incredibly professional crew. It was great to be working with people who understood what I was trying to achieve.

"We were trying to tell a pretty big story and I was trying to really be quite stylised and to have enough time for the actors to give their performances without being rushed and I had a very set visual goal in mind. It's really hard trying to manage the realities of trying to get a film finished in the allotted time

## REVENGE IS BACK IN FASHION

Jocelyn Moorhouse and Sue Maslin have stitched together what could become a classic Australian film. Brian Karlovsky speaks to *The Dressmaker* producer and director about the evolution of the project from page to screen.

Revenge is a dish best served in fine Parisienne silk and thread. That's what director Jocelyn Moorhouse would have you believe in her new sweeping Australian comedy-drama, *The Dressmaker*, which has brought together a stunning Australian cast for a bitter-sweet tale of love, mystery and reprisal.

The film, based on the best-selling novel by Rosalie Ham, stars Kate Winslet as Tilly Dunnage, a beautiful talented misfit who has been working in France for the great haute couture designers.

She returns home to the one-horse town where she grew up to visit her mother "Mad Molly Dunnage" (Judy Davis) and to right wrongs of past.

The cast also includes Hugo Weaving, Liam Hemsworth, Sarah Snook, Rebecca Gibney, Shane Jacobsen, Shane Bourne, Gyton Grantley and Barry Otto.

It was by produced Sue Maslin, who went to the same school as Ham in Jerilderie, southern NSW.

When Maslin approached Moorhouse to direct the film she initially said no. But after reading



Director, Jocelyn Moorhouse.

the book Moorhouse became completely obsessed with making it into a movie.

"I had heard of the project because I had a previous producer who had asked me if I was interested," Moorhouse says.

"One of my kids was having medical issues and it was not the right time for me.

"But then I read the book and it was amazing. The character of Tilly shows an extraordinarily warmth and I love her relationship with her mother and the whole tone was this wonderful gothic, dark comedy.

"I love that it was a real tale of revenge. It was very visual, it was

set in the 1950s and this woman, who has been living in Paris brings her considerable couture abilities back to her old dusty town of Dungatar and I thought that would look amazing on screen."

Moorhouse adapted the book with the help of husband P.J. Hogan, which proved a challenging task considering the many intricate characters in the novel.

"It's a pretty popular novel so there was a bit of pressure to make sure I kept the spirit of the book, which was not easy to do," she says.

"It was a matter of staying faithful to the book at the same time as shaping it into a feature film. The





*Hugo Wearing as Sergeant Farral.*



*The fictional town of Dangatar.*

as well as realising my visual and dramatic ambitions.

Moorhouse says she wanted the film to be very special.

“With the wide shoot we were doing it had to be beautiful and it had to be brave and interesting,” she says.

“I have wanted to make this film for a long time. I worked extensively with Don McAlpine and Roger Ford coming up with a look for the film. We were all trying to make the same film and there was a wonderful feeling of camaraderie, we were all trying to do something special.

The ending of the film was also a major attraction for Moorhouse.

“I thought, ‘that’s going to be a challenge’. The book is a little bit bloodier and I actually pulled a lot of it back. I still want the audience to love Tilly, but at the same time, I love that she is not ladylike and wants revenge and she goes about and gets it.

“She’s not interested in behaving. They hurt her mum, they ruined her life and she can’t let them get away with it. It’s pretty dramatic, but I think it’s cathartic, it’s almost got a religious purification quality about it.”

Moorhouse says it’s the movie she wanted to make.

“I’m proud of it and it’s a pretty lovable film. I think the performances of the four main characters are going to move people. Judy and Kate have an incredible relationship and Hugo is adorable and wonderful. I was so blessed to have an amazing cast. I think people are going to love this cast.”

“It’s a really emotional film that makes you laugh and makes you cry and that’s the type of film I like to see – fingers crossed that’s what everyone else likes to see as well.

Director of photography, Don McAlpine, whose credits include *Peter Pan*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Romeo + Juliet*, says it is his third association with Moorhouse and Hogan.

“It must have been a year that we were looking for locations and talking about the idea. It one of those wonderful films that evolves around you as opposed to getting a call from my agent,” he says.

“My main attraction is their approach to filmmaking. I read the book, I liked the idea and basically you know these people are going to make it an interesting movie. It’s a feeling that you are in company of people you enjoy and understand.

McAlpine says the film is “hyper-real”. “There was an underlying concept that Jocelyn wanted the visuals to have a slightly out there edge, just to make the film look

a little different to your average straight-up-and-down drama and a lot of that was achieved by using a lot of wide angle lenses,” he says.

“We included a lot of the cast and let the story play without cutting the interaction between the characters.

“It’s an incredibly technical thing to pull off – each character has value and has to look good. In a wide shot that has 20 or 30 seconds of dialogue, everyone must participate visually. It has enhanced this film as you do get the impression that you are closer to the action than you are on longer lenses.”

The strong supporting cast are all more or less minor leads, McAlpine says. “When you analyse it, each sub-plot is resolved and all the characters play their part. In a normal script they run down a straight line.

“Most of it was shot in practical locations, even the sets of buildings

were a practical buildings. We did some of it in the studio, more or less at my insistence, where you are protected from the weather and you can spend more hours working, instead of travelling.

“More than half the film was shot on location. We shot on a nature reserve and that was one of the big problems. We had to be careful moving around with all the native animals in these fenced paddocks.

“At night time we were limited to 5km an hour, at the risk of making some species extinct.” McAlpine joined Hogan Moorhouse in the search for the right location.

“The year before I spent two or three weeks driving around country towns, looking for this town and we never found a town that looked like the script. It was a godsend because we could make the set to the script. McAlpine is genuinely proud of the result.

“I think it’s a film that will hang around for a while. It’s story of bitter revenge. It’s a tragedy, but it is full of laughs. It’s hyper-real.

The film also reunited McAlpine with Davis after many years on separate projects.

“We all go back to almost the beginning of time. I worked with Judy on her first film and she was quite distant on that film. As a young girl she had problems with the script and direction and she was very aloof. It was wonderful to get back and talk about those days with a lady that is an amazing actress. This little girl has turned into a fantastic, gifted actress. There was a lot of personal history involved in that film.”

“It was fun coming back to work with and all Australian crew and looking back I can’t recall having more fun on a film. 📍

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– Don McAlpine



*Director of photography Don McAlpine.*