



Australian Government
Classification Review Board

27 October 2004

23-33 MARY STREET
SURRY HILLS, NSW

- MEMBERS:** Ms Maureen Shelley (Convenor)
Ms Kathryn Smith
Ms Jan Taylor
- APPLICANT:** Roadshow Film Distributors Pty Ltd (Roadshow)
Mr Joel Pearlman, Managing Director
- BUSINESS:** To review the Classification Board's decision to classify the film *Un Long Dimanche de Fiancailles (A Very Long Engagement)*, (the film) MA15+ with the consumer advice 'Medium level violence, medium level sex scene'.

DECISION AND REASONS FOR DECISION

1. Decision

The Classification Review Board (the Review Board) classified the film MA15+ with the consumer advice 'Moderate violence'.

2. Legislative provisions

The *Classification (Publications, Film and Computer Games) Act 1995* (the Act) governs the classification of films and the review of classification decisions. Section 9 of the Act provides that films are to be classified in accordance with the National Classification Code (the Code) and the classification guidelines.

Three essential principles underlie the use of the *2003 Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games* (the Guidelines), determined under s.12 of the Act:

- The importance of context
- Assessing impact

- Six classifiable elements – themes, violence, sex, language, drug use and nudity.

3. Procedure

Having earlier received a valid written application for review, three members of the Review Board viewed the film *A Very Long Engagement* at the Board's meeting on 27 October 2004.

The Review Board then received an oral submission from Mr Joel Pearlman representing the Applicant, which was provided in addition to a written submission.

The Board then met in camera to consider the matter.

4. Evidence and other material taken into account

In reaching its decision the Review Board had regard to the following:

- (i) Roadshow's application for review;
- (ii) Roadshow's written and oral submissions;
- (iii) the film;
- (iv) The Classification Board's report; and
- (v) the relevant provisions in the Act;
- (vi) the relevant provisions in the Code, as amended in accordance with s.6 of the Act; and
- (vii) the *Guidelines for the Classification of Films and Computer Games 2003*.

5 Synopsis

The film is the story of a young woman's search for her missing fiancé who participated in the Battle of the Somme during World War I. Similar to the classic myth *Seven Labours of Hercules* she has to undertake certain tasks, meet setbacks and solve riddles before finding her fiancé who is suffering from amnesia.

The story takes place against a reasonably historically-accurate depiction of post-First World War France. The film shows the horrors of war realistically, whilst weaving elements of a detective story and a theme of true love through the narrative, which is embedded in a traditional "quest" plot element.

6 Findings on material questions of fact

The Review Board found that the film contains aspects or scenes particularly worthy of mention under various classifiable elements:

- (a) **Themes** – The theme of the horror of war is presented strongly in the film. There are several scenes (at approximately 2 minutes 18 seconds, 3 minutes 42 seconds, 5 minutes 14 seconds, 7 minutes 36 seconds, 9 minutes 48 seconds and at 12

minutes) where soldiers either cut off their own hands/fingers or deliberately raise them to get shot off to avoid participating in the war.

In the post-war scenes, the impact of the war on the lives of its participants contributes to their continuing unhappiness.

Also the arbitrariness and incompetence of the authorities is shown through the application of policy (one soldier – who has become impotent – sends his friend to have sex with his wife because he has five children and if he has six he will be excused from further military service). The tension created through his friend’s “betrayal” and his wife’s “unfaithfulness” contributes to the soldier’s war-caused distress.

(b) **Violence** – The film contains several scenes of strong violence, however, given their treatment and context their impact was mitigated somewhat. At approximately 2 minutes a dead German soldier is shown with his face half blown off; at 4 minutes 30 a soldier is seen kicking bodies and is then shown being blown up; at 6 minutes 40 seconds a person slashes another’s buttocks and blood is shown coming from the wound, the scene has a sexual context; at 8 minutes 20 seconds an extended battle scene is shown that depicts war violence it concludes – at approximately 9 minutes and 7 seconds – with the remains of a soldier who is blown up landing all over another soldier who screams in anguish; at 35 minutes a strong scene of violence is shown with a mirror being shot and the shards of glass fall onto the naked body one of the people responsible for the mayhem during the war, he is fatally lacerated and the shards are shown penetrating his body in several places, the scene is depicted in a sexual context; at approximately 45 minutes a person dressed as a religious sister threatens another person with a syringe and she describes the death that would be experienced; at 73 minutes the heroine Tomasina shoots a man in a tunnel there is little detail and no blood is shown; at 79 minutes a soldier is depicted urinating on a battle field when he is shot, there is little detail; at 80 minutes another extended battle scene is shown that concludes approximately 1 minute later with bodies half buried in the trenches; at 83 minutes the soldiers “go over the top” with fixed bayonets and are machine gunned – bodies fall. Violent “flashback” scenes are shown almost continuously from 96 minutes to 108 minutes. At 112 minutes a hospital is shelled and then a Zeppelin airbus crashes into the hospital and explodes. There is a strong sense of menace/threat during this scene but little detail.

(c) **Sex** – The film contains several sex scenes, two which include violence and are detailed above. At 1 minute 46 seconds a simulated sex scene is shown; at 25 minutes a naked person being massaged is shown, they receive “mental stimulation” and reach a sexual climax; at 33 minutes a simulated masturbation scene is shown; at 61 and 62 minutes the simulated love-making of the soldier’s friend and his wife (played by Jodie Foster) is shown.

(d) **Language** – The film contains some coarse language that is moderate in impact.

(e) **Nudity** – Some of the sex scenes include nudity of buttocks and breasts but genitalia are not shown.

(f) **Drugs** – There is some irresponsible consumption of alcohol depicted but the impact is mild to moderate.

7 Reasons for the decision

The Review Board based its decision to classify the film *A Very Long Engagement* ‘MA15+’ with the consumer advice ‘Moderate violence’ on the content of the film as set out in 5 and 6 above.

The Applicant submitted that *A Very Long Engagement* was not a war film but a love story and that its stylised nature reduced the impact of the violence and sex scenes. Whilst the Review Board considered that the impact of the potentially controversial scenes was mitigated by their treatment by the film-maker it did not accept the Applicant’s submission that the classifiable elements could be accommodated by an ‘M’ rating.

A Very Long Engagement is a serious film that confronts a range of issues that face people during times of war and provides realistic perspective from the point of view of the protagonists, their family and friends and the general impact on society. The Review Board believes that the various potentially controversial scenes were depicted in context and were not gratuitous nor glamorised.

The Board therefore found that the treatment of the strong themes was justified by context, as were the violence and sex scenes. Further, the Board found that the impact of the material was strong, but not so high as to warrant a more restrictive rating than the legally restrictive ‘MA15+’ classification. However, the Review Board found that to allow unrestricted viewing to persons under 15 years would fail to protect minors who would likely to be harmed or disturbed by the film.

8 Summary

While the classifiable elements and their impact in the overall context of the film *A Very Long Engagement* did not justify a ‘R18+’ classification, they did make the film unsuitable for persons under 15 years of age and warranted specific consumer advice relating to the moderate violence contained in the film.

The consumer advice of ‘Moderate violence’ was given taking into account the film’s legally restrictive classification and that the likely audience of the film given its subject of war. Such a class of persons, amongst whom the film was likely to be published, would expect a “war film” to contain scenes of violence and the legally restrictive classification would signal to the audience that the film contains strong elements.