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**Vincent Ward:
The Emergence of an Aesthetic**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

This thesis examines the work and career of New Zealand director, Vincent Ward, focusing on the emergence of his distinctive aesthetic. It places this aesthetic in the context of local and European artistic and filmic traditions (in particular, certain forms of Romanticism and Expressionism) that have influenced Ward's work. It also explores how his childhood and education may have shaped his approach, and examines what his aesthetic has meant in practice, in the process of making each of his major films, as well as in the formal characteristics of the completed films. The study focuses to a greater extent on his early (New Zealand) films as case studies that help us to understand the development of his practice and theory. The career of Ward as a filmmaker who has had a significant influence on the development of the New Zealand film industry is also explored in the light of what may differentiate his approach from that of other local filmmakers and the extent to which it is useful to think of him as a "New Zealand filmmaker".

This thesis draws from extensive primary research in the form of interviews with the director, his family, associates and collaborators (cameramen, editors, co-writers, producers and so on). Textual study has involved the viewing New Zealand and Expressionist films and art-works, and the examination of archival and unpublished material. Secondary research has included coverage of European and local artistic and filmic traditions and the relatively limited body of criticism of Ward's films.

While this thesis takes an essentially *auteurist* approach – identifying characteristic themes, visual motifs and stylistic tendencies – it also seeks to expand and reposition such an approach by taking into account intellectual and cultural history, the contributions of Ward's collaborators, and the complex industrial conditions in which his films were produced. To do so has necessitated a close examination of the filmmaking process. By examining the aesthetic of such a director – known for his heightened individualism, perfectionism, and unusual methods - this study has sought to reveal the strengths and limitations of classic *auteur* theory, suggesting ways in which this approach can be modified and re-invigorated.

The thesis also provides a case study in the difficulties faced by a director of this kind in finding a satisfactory base within the contemporary film industry. The alignment of local and global interests and investments is still a highly complex business.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
List of Figures.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review: Romanticism	4
Research and Literature Review: Expressionism	5
Theoretical Approach and Methodology	9
Interviews.....	19
Textual Research.....	21
Sequence of Chapters.....	24
Chapter One The Context of Romanticism and Expressionism	28
The European Romantic Tradition	28
Gothic Influences	41
Expressionism.....	43
Contexts of Expressionism	53
New Zealand's Expressionist and Gothic Traditions	57
Chapter Two Ward's Childhood and Education.....	62
Childhood and Schooling.....	62
Summing-Up Ward's Family Background	78
Ward's Art School Training	80
Summing-Up Ward's Art School Years	95
Chapter 3 <i>A State of Siege</i>	97
Funding and Pre-Production	101
Production and Post-Production	106
Marketing and Distribution.....	113
Visual Style.....	118
Critical Reception	126
European Influences	130
Summary	135
Chapter 4 <i>In Spring One Plants Alone</i>	137
Aims and Approach	141
Production.....	149
Reception	157
Summary.....	171
Chapter 5 <i>Vigil</i>	175
The Scripting Process	176
Production and Post-Production	189
Visual Style.....	205
New Zealand /Universal Elements	208
Summary.....	213
Chapter Six <i>The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey</i>	216
Scripting and Research	222
Funding.....	226
Visual Style.....	236
Post-Production.....	238
The Narrative	244
Critical Response	248
Summary.....	257

Chapter Seven Hollywood and Beyond.....	259
Alien 3.....	259
Map of the Human Heart	263
1993-1995	277
What Dreams May Come	281
Current Project.....	296
Conclusion	303
Bibliography	318
Vincent Ward A Filmography	335
List of Interviews	341

List of Figures

Figure 1: <i>A State of Siege</i> (bath cleaning scene): An example of Ward's use of chiaroscuro lighting	56
Figure 2: Ending of <i>A State of Siege</i> - Epiphany or horror?	123
Figure 3: <i>In Spring One Plants Alone</i> . Puhi with axe - an image some Maori critics found controversial.	162
Figure 4: Ending of <i>Vigil</i> . An example of Ward's storytelling through the use of mise-en-scène.	191
Figure 5: Elizabeth sewing tutu in <i>Vigil</i> . An example of careful composition in Ward's films	204
Figure 6: Storyboard of <i>The Navigator</i> , Scene 7	241
Figure 7: Storyboard of <i>The Navigator</i> , Scene 25	242
Figure 8: Steinlager ad. An example of the "filmic" look Ward achieved.	280

Introduction

My interest in the work of Vincent Ward began when I first viewed *Vigil* in 1984. What struck me about the film was not only its visual impact – images from the film such as Toss in a tutu and gumboots remained with me years after I had seen the film – but that it was so different from any other New Zealand film I had seen at that time. It seemed to me to have more in common in some respects with European traditions than with local ones. Having lived in Germany for some years, I had an interest in European culture and art, and when I decided some ten years after I had first seen *Vigil*, to embark on a PhD in Film and Media Studies, I originally intended to explore some aspect of German film. However, there was no-one either in the Film, Television and Media Studies Department or the German Department who would be able to supervise a thesis in this area, so Roger Horrocks, who later became my supervisor, encouraged me to consider researching the work of either a New Zealand or American filmmaker who had some links with German culture. Remembering *Vigil*, I thought immediately of Vincent Ward, although at the time I was not aware of the specific German influences on his work or of the fact that Ward's mother was a German Jew who had immigrated to New Zealand after World War Two.

While I was in the process of formulating my thesis topic, my supervisor advised me to get in touch with other universities to find out if anyone else was researching Ward's work. I found to my surprise, given that he is a leading New Zealand filmmaker with an international reputation, that there was no-one currently engaged in similar research. My literature search on Ward and his films unearthed a number of relevant journal articles, reviews, and interviews but nobody had published anything substantial. Subsequently there has been a monogram The Navigator: a Mediaeval Odyssey, written by John Downie, published under the auspices of the British Film Institute in 2000, although this was still focused on a single film.¹ The lack of comprehensive study of Ward's work seemed to me a serious gap in the body of knowledge about New Zealand film.

¹ John Downie, The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey, Cinetek Series (Trowbridge, England: Flicks Books, 2000).

I was interested in investigating the ways in which, and the reasons why, Ward's aesthetic was so different from that of other New Zealand filmmakers in the 1970s and 80s. What were the origins of this aesthetic? One method of examining Ward's aesthetic would have been to examine the completed filmic texts in order to derive or deduce this aesthetic, but this seemed to me a partial approach since it did not allow one to investigate sources. It also overlooked the fact that film is a complex, expensive, highly technical medium in which no artist can hope to realise his or her vision with the freedom of a poet or painter. The definition of "aesthetic" I have utilised in this thesis therefore, includes not only theory but also practice, since theory is implied in every approach to practice and the filmmaking process consists of a dialogue between practice and theory. As Ward's career vividly demonstrates, the director is engaged in a constant negotiation with investors, collaborators and practical contingencies. To understand aims and intentions as well as physical results, I decided that I needed to look at the process as well as the product, at contexts as well as texts. I have indeed made close textual studies of Ward's films, but I have also examined his biography and career. It was possible to do this in detail because this artist is still alive, as are his collaborators. Such a methodology has its dangers, such as the "intentional fallacy", but this can be guarded against by triangulation or the comparison of different perspectives. I have cross-referenced textual study against interviews and against other evidence drawn from secondary sources such as journal articles and reviews. An additional reason for collecting as many kinds of material as possible was the realisation that it will be difficult or impossible to collect such information in the future; and I believe that Ward is an important enough film-maker to treat the matter of posterity very seriously.

Ward himself is extremely reluctant for his approach to be labelled or pigeonholed by any aesthetic category. Nevertheless, one must begin somewhere, and one of the most useful starting points seems to me to be Expressionism. Indeed, this term has already been suggested by several critics. New Zealand critic Brian McDonnell, for example, described Ward as "an expressionistic film director, seeking to make visible in his movies interior states of mind".² European, particularly German critical response to Ward's work, has often linked it with the Expressionist tradition. According to Stan Jones: "[German] critics note Ward's own acknowledgement of the great German

² Brian McDonnell, "Map of the Human Heart," *North and South* May 1993: 128.

Expressionist filmmakers such as Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau and mention the names of the Swiss director Alain Tanner, or the Swede Ingmar Bergman as forerunners of his style”.³ Including Bergman and Tanner along with Lang and Murnau illustrates the broad definitions given to the term “Expressionism”. My first task was therefore to refine my sense of the concept. At the same time, I was necessarily committed to a broad understanding of such an aesthetic in terms of both theory and practice.

I also came to realise that in many respects, Ward’s aesthetic was informed as much by Romanticism as by Expressionism. Again there were precedents for this idea. Stan Jones notes that some German critics interpreted *Vigil* as “a neoromantic film”, in view of “its constant interaction between external landscape and inner fantasy. Such critiques derive from that particularly German quality of ‘Innerlichkeit’ (‘visionary inwardness’) first identified and refined by Romantic literature”.⁴ Ian Conrich, a British academic, sees Ward’s work as being influenced by Romanticism in its Gothic forms, and indeed, as well as traditional Romantic concepts such as “nature” and “the sublime”, the concept of “the grotesque” (associated with Gothic Romanticism), proved to be useful in reaching an understanding of Ward’s aesthetic. While both Romanticism and Expressionism provided me with useful starting points for a discussion of Ward’s approach, it was necessary to locate the precise areas of these traditions that were relevant and ultimately the thesis will go beyond these terms to a specific sense of Ward’s unique combination of interests. As he himself said to me as advice (or friendly warning) for my thesis:

There’s a perspective difference between what any critic or analyst is trying to do and what a filmmaker or what an artist or novelist is trying to achieve, and that’s essentially this, in that to analyse someone’s work or a particular work, you [the interviewer] obviously want to categorise. The only thing that I want or that almost any artist wants to do, is not be categorised, because that blocks possibility. It also defines them in terms of who they are when in fact, most of the process that they’re doing is always re-defining themselves and changing [...]. So generally most of what one does is spend one’s life trying to get away

³ Stan Jones, Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and Its Reception in Germany, Studies in New Zealand Culture, No 3 (Nottingham: Kakapo Books, 1999) 13.

⁴ Jones, Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and Its Reception in Germany 12.

from influences and not be in any way emulative, but rather seek out one's own individuality".⁵

Although this seems, on the surface, to be precisely the attitude of the Romantic artist, I did, however, take Ward's cautions very seriously. My original emphasis on Expressionism was also usefully complicated, as I researched Ward's early years in New Zealand, by a growing realisation of the extent to which he was – at some deep level – also a “New Zealand” filmmaker. This, of course, was another label that required careful definition and placement, but by juxtaposing “New Zealand” and “European” perspectives, I have hopefully been able to arrive at a multi-dimensional study that respects the fluid process of the filmmaker's on-going search and experiment.

Literature Review: Romanticism

Texts that I found useful in defining Romanticism and situating Romanticism within its social, political and artistic contexts were Morse Peckham's The Triumph of Romanticism,⁶ Arnold Hauser's classic The Social History of Art Vol 2,⁷ Hugh Honour's Romanticism⁸ and Robert Hughes' The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change.⁹ Cynthia Chase's examination of the notion of the Romantic artist as visionary and Romantic beliefs regarding the superior reality of art contributed to my understanding of what traditional associations are at play when Ward is described by critics as a “visionary” film-maker.¹⁰ James Twitchell's Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting discusses the Romantic Sublime from its origins in the eighteenth century to its significance as subjective experience and its links to the notion of artistic “vision” in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Jacqueline Labbe, who has examined the Romantic Sublime from a feminist perspective, argues that the experience of the sublime is a kind of masculine rite of passage.¹² Both of these books were useful in contributing to my understanding of John Downie's argument that Ward's work is

⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

⁶ Morse Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina, 1970).

⁷ Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951).

⁸ Hugh Honour, Romanticism (London: Allen Lane, 1979).

⁹ Robert Hughes, The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change, updated and enlarged ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980 and 1991).

¹⁰ Cynthia Chase, ed., Romanticism (London: Longman, 1993).

¹¹ James B. Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983).

¹² Jacqueline M. Labbe, Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998).

strongly connected to the Romantic Sublime. Michael Gamer's Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation interrelates the Romantic and Gothic traditions, claiming that Romantic literature is associated with masculinity and "high culture", while Gothic literature is associated with femininity and "popular culture".¹³ Most useful in shedding light on *A State of Siege* in its treatment of the irrational, was Wolfgang Kayser's classic study The Grottesque in Art and Literature.¹⁴ From these various sources then, I derived my basic vocabulary for discussions of Romanticism and the Gothic in Ward's work. Such studies covered aspects of production and reception as well as textual characteristics. They also explored more general issues such as values and world-view.

Research and Literature Review: Expressionism

Since Ward has often referred to his interest in Expressionist art, in particular the work of Käthe Kollwitz, I spent some time familiarising myself with the work of the major Expressionist artists. In Munich, I visited the Staatliche Graphische Sammlungen, where I was given access to Expressionist drawings and prints, including drawings by Lyonel Feininger and August Macke, sketches and watercolours by Franz Marc, and charcoal drawings by Käthe Kollwitz. Most of the Expressionist prints in the collection were early ones by the artists of die Brücke, and I was able to view a wide range of prints by artists such as Max Pechstein, Erich Heckel, Ernst Ludwig Kirschner, Karl Schmidt-Rotluff and Emil Nolde. Das Lenbachhaus in Munich houses a large collection of art works by a later Expressionist group who were based in Munich, der Blaue Reiter. This collection includes work by Gabriel Münter, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Marc, August Macke and Wladimir von Bechthejeff. I was particularly interested in the *hinterglas* paintings (which utilise a kind of traditional glass painting technique peculiar to the region) of Münter and Kandinsky. What was most striking about the paintings was their brilliant colour and clarity, and these qualities reminded me very much of some of the images of *What Dreams May Come*. As well as viewing Expressionist works, I also looked at the extensive collection of works in das Lenbachhaus, by German Romantic painters who had influenced the Expressionists, in particular, Louis Corinth and Max Slevogt.

¹³ Michael Gamer, Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Wolfgang Kayser, The Grottesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 1957).

While I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I had access to the College of Santa Fe library, which had a wide collection of resources on German Expressionism. One of the most useful of these was German Expressionist Painting by Peter Selz, which gave not only a comprehensive history of the Expressionist movement, but discussed in detail the links between Romanticism and Expressionism, and the Expressionist movement in art, music and literature.¹⁵ From Wagner to Murnau, written by Jo Collier, who teaches at the College of Santa Fe, included some useful discussion of the differences between Romanticism and Expressionism, and the work of Murnau, whose films seemed to me to have a particular resonance with Ward's films.¹⁶ John Barlow's German Expressionist Film is one of the few books amongst a plethora of material on the topic of Expressionism that deals exclusively with Expressionist film.¹⁷ It attempts to define German Expressionism as opposed to the expressionistic (a more general term), and the last chapter is dedicated to the influence of German Expressionism on American cinema, which I found relevant to my research on this aspect of Ward's work. Another more recent book that discusses Expressionism in America is Paul Coates's The Gorgon's Gaze.¹⁸ This book takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of expressionism and its persistence in the styles of such diverse filmmakers as Orson Welles and Ingmar Bergman. I found Coates's theories of the nature of the uncanny to be useful in reaching an understanding of Ward's films, particularly *A State of Siege*.

No discussion of texts on the topic of Expressionist film would be complete without a mention of two seminal studies, Kracauer's From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film, originally published in 1947,¹⁹ and Lotte Eisner's The Haunted Screen, originally published in 1952 and translated and republished in 1969.²⁰ While Kracauer's thesis that the German films of the 1920s were filled with premonitions of the German totalitarianism of the 30s has largely been discredited on the basis that he chose only a limited number of films of the period to illustrate his

¹⁵ Peter Selz, German Expressionist Painting (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957).

¹⁶ Jo Leslie Collier, From Wagner to Murnau: The Transposition of Romanticism from Stage to Screen (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988).

¹⁷ J.D. Barlow, German Expressionist Film (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982).

¹⁸ Paul Coates, The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1947).

²⁰ Lotte H. Eisner, The Haunted Screen, trans. Roger Greaves (U.S.A: University of California Press, 1969).

point, ignoring the larger body of production that did not fit his thesis, The Haunted Screen remains one of the most thorough investigations of German film from 1913 to the 1930s published to date. One influential idea formulated by Eisner was her suggestion that the most notable characteristic of German Expressionist film was the creation of *Stimmung* (mood or atmosphere). The stylistic features of Expressionist film, such as chiaroscuro lighting, the use of shadows and mirrors, and the distorted mise-en-scène, all worked together to create *Stimmung*, which in most Expressionist films consisted of an atmosphere of unease. I see this as a useful concept in the discussion of later Expressionist works, because rather than focussing purely on stylistic characteristics, it defines Expressionism more broadly as stemming from a world-view in which humans are at odds with nature, and in which the indefinable and the unknown are always ready to break through and upset the precarious balance of the known world.

At the British Film Institute library in London, I was able to access some articles written in French including a series of articles published in Cinéma by Paul Leutrat.²¹ These seemed to me to be the most thorough investigation of Expressionist film that I had read since they included not only an in-depth discussion of the history and development of German Expressionist film, from its antecedents in the early part of the twentieth century to the *Kammerspiel* films of the late 1920s and 30s, but also of aspects which I had not seen discussed anywhere else, such as eroticism in Expressionist film. The final article dealt with the influence of German Expressionism on the horror film genre and discussed more recent directors who could be considered contemporary Expressionists such as Andrzej Wajda, or directors whose films could be regarded as being strongly influenced by Expressionism, such as Carl Theodor Dreyer, Ingmar Bergman and Orson Welles. Another article in the British Film Institute library that provided insights into the influence of Expressionism on contemporary filmmakers was by Richard Combs in the Monthly Film Bulletin.²² "From Caligari to Who?" by Barry Salt is a damning criticism of Kraucauer's thesis in From Caligari to Hitler and an assertion that there are really only six German Expressionist films (a purist view which is disputed by many other film historians).²³ Salt does, however, draw useful distinctions between Expressionist film and films that he categorises as having expressivist features. The

²¹ Paul Leutrat, "Actualité De L'expressionnisme," Cinéma.69 (1962). Cinéma 70 (1962). Cinéma 71 (1962).

²² Richard Combs, "Aspects of Expressionism (3) It Lives Again," Monthly Film Bulletin 46.547 (1979).

²³ Barry Salt, "From Caligari to Who?," Sight and Sound 48.2 (1979).

debate over the term Expressionism has proceeded as a push-and-pull between those who argue for an expansion and those like Salt who insist upon a contraction of the definition (usually by limiting it to a precise set of textual or stylistic characteristics, excluding judgements of intention, production, practice, mood or world view).

It has been useful to examine a range of texts on German Expressionism from those written not long after the movement had lost momentum, to more contemporary views on the topic, in order to gain an understanding of how views on Expressionism and its impact have varied historically. Some contemporary writers have examined the phenomenon of Expressionism in the light of recent concerns. For example, Patrice Petro discusses the representation of women in the press and in film during the Weimar period in Germany from a feminist perspective.²⁴ Most of the films Petro refers to are, however, in the style of *die Neue Sachlichkeit* ("the new objectivity") of the late 1920s, rather than classic German Expressionist films. Marc Silbermann's book German Cinema: Texts in Context is a comprehensive study of German cinema that applies a cultural studies approach to the development of German Expressionist cinema.²⁵ As such, it offers some insights into the social and historical contexts and underlying ideology of Expressionist film. A number of other books including Filmkultur zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik,²⁶ Film und Realität in der Weimarer Republic,²⁷ Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe,²⁸ Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider,²⁹ Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933,³⁰ and Art and Politics in the Weimar Period shed light on the way in which the *Zeitgeist* of the Weimar period in Germany exerted a strong influence on Expressionist cinema.³¹ The most recent comprehensive study of Weimar cinema is Thomas Elsaesser's Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary.³² Elsaesser re-evaluates both

²⁴ Patrice Petro, Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²⁵ Marc Silbermann, German Cinema: Texts in Context (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1995).

²⁶ Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg, eds., Filmkultur Zur Zeit Der Weimarer Republik (Munich: K.G.Saur, 1992).

²⁷ Helmut Korte, ed., Film Und Realität in Der Weimarer Republik (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978).

²⁸ Bruce Murray, Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From "Caligari" to "Kuhle Wampe" (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990).

²⁹ Peter Gay, Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

³⁰ Walter Laqueur, Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).

³¹ John Willett, Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety 1917-1933 (G.B.: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1978).

³² Thomas Elsaesser, Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historic Imaginary (London: Routledge, 2000).

Eisner's and Kracauer's arguments in view of the current revival of interest in Weimar cinema and rejects the hard-and-fast distinction made by many critics between Expressionist cinema and the so-called "realist" Weimar cinema by pointing out the similarities in their themes and subject matter.

Theoretical Approach and Methodology

My thesis inevitably falls within the category of *auteur* studies. Ward has been widely regarded as one of New Zealand's strongest candidates for *auteur* status, as a director with a unique vision and a strong involvement in all aspects of production. Hans-Günther Pflaum, writing about *Vigil* in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, already identified Ward as "an *auteur*, a promising debutant director who knows how to exploit his medium more radically and decisively, than any other first-timer".³³ John Downie defends the value of seeing Ward in these terms despite the tendency for film theory over recent decades to have focused on issues of representation and reception to the detriment of *auteur* theory, on the grounds that: "with a filmmaker such as Vincent Ward, we have a punctilious, obsessive sensibility which labours to assert itself as something more than just good craftsman or virtuoso technician. His presence is palpably central to the entire fact of a film's life".³⁴

The notion of the director as being centrally responsible for a film's form, style and meanings is one of the most influential ideas in cinema history. As has often been noted, the origins of *auteur* theory lie in nineteenth-century Romantic notions of "artistic genius" that "resisted the forces of the market in the interests of artistic autonomy in opposition to 'commercial, socially conformist art'".³⁵ The idea of the artist as the autonomous genius will be discussed further in Chapter One, but this notion could be seen as informing Ward's *auteurist* approach to his films. One of the problems, however, with "adopting a fairly consistent romantic position in relation to creativity", according to John Caughie, was that "it exposed film aesthetics to the contradictions of those romantic principles of individual creativity which formed the basis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century criticism, when applied to an expressive form

³³ Pflaum quoted in Jones, *Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and Its Reception in Germany* 13.

³⁴ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 2.

³⁵ Pam Cook, ed., *The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding the Movies* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 115.

[such as film] which was collective, commercial, industrial and popular”.³⁶ While this caused some problems, which were later addressed in different ways, in Caughie’s view, it would be a mistake to think of the development of *auteur* theory - “the installation in the cinema of a figure who had dominated the other arts for over a century: the romantic artist, individual and self-expressive” – merely as a retrograde step, although this could explain why *auteurism* was “easily assimilated into the dominant aesthetic mode”.³⁷ Caughie argues that, “*auteurism* did in fact produce a radical dislocation in the development of film theory, which has exposed it progressively to the pressures of alternative aesthetics and ‘new criticisms’. This dislocation cannot be attributed easily to a single cause, but can be associated with a number of impulses, shifts of emphasis and contradictions which were central to *auteur* criticism”.³⁸ It is worth tracing some of these nuances in order to identify the most useful version of authorship to apply to Ward.

The term *auteur* was first used in the 1920s in the theoretical writings of French film critics, and even earlier in Germany, where certain films were known as *Autorenfilm*, but it was originally the writer of the script rather than the director who was regarded as the *auteur*. Debates about authorship have occupied an important place in film theory since the late 1940s, when Roger Leenhard and André Bazin, writing for the journal Revue du cinéma (1946-49), claimed that the director rather than the writer was the primary creative force in the film-making process. An important statement about the role of the director was made by Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 essay, published in L’Écran Français, “Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo” (“Birth of a new avant-garde: the camera-pen”), in which he argued that film had arrived at the maturity of a serious art form through which artists could express their ideas and feelings. He wrote: “L’auteur écrit avec sa caméra comme un écrivain écrit avec un stylo”. (“The filmmaker-author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen”).³⁹ In the 1950s, contributors to the French film journal Cahiers du Cinéma, founded by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in 1951, developed this notion further by formulating *la politique des auteurs* (later known in English-speaking countries as ‘auteur theory’). The journal brought together the leading French critics and film enthusiasts of the time – André

³⁶ John Caughie, ed., Theories of Authorship: A Reader (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 13.

³⁷ Caughie, ed., Theories of Authorship: A Reader 10.

³⁸ Caughie, ed., Theories of Authorship: A Reader 11.

³⁹ Alexandre Astruc, Du Stylo À La Caméra - Et De La Caméra Stylo: Écrits 1942-1984 (Paris: l'Archipel, 1992) 327.

Bazin (its leading contributor), François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette – and became one of the focal points of the French New Wave movement.

These critics noticed thematic and stylistic consistencies among the films of individual directors and elevated personal signature to a standard of value. They championed the director as the *auteur* - the creator of a personal vision of the world that progresses from film to film, and distinguished between directors who were *auteurs* and those who were merely *metteurs-en-scène* (directors who merely realised the material they had been given rather than transforming it into something of their own). Buscombe attributes “this zeal to divide directors into the company of the elect on the right and a company of the damned on the left” to the possible influence of French Catholicism, and identifies “the presence of Romantic artistic theory in the opposition of intuition and rules, sensibility and theory”.⁴⁰

The Cahiers critics’ limited knowledge of English made them uniquely equipped to appreciate individual cinematic style in that the American films they watched at the *Cinémathèque* movie theatre in Paris (films which had been unavailable during the Second World War) often had no subtitles, thereby inviting a closer look at how meaning is expressed through visual texture, composition, camera movement and editing. They argued that, “artistry was revealed not only in *what* was said, but *how* it was said and believed that, like any creator, the filmmaker ought to be a master of the medium, exploring it in striking and innovative ways”.⁴¹ Their respect for directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Howard Hawks, known for their prolific production of commercial genre films, generated controversy, as did Truffaut’s essay, “A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema” (1954), in which he attacked the “Cinema of Quality” – “prestige” cinema of post-World War Two France - as lacking in originality and being heavily reliant on literary classics. The directors Truffaut named as true *auteurs* – Renoir, Bresson, Cocteau, Tati and Ophüls – wrote their own stories and dialogue, as well as having a personal vision and identifiable visual style.

However, as Peter Wollen pointed out: “The *auteur* theory grew up rather haphazardly; it was never elaborated in programmatic terms, in a manifesto or collective statement.

⁴⁰ Edward Buscombe, "Ideas of Authorship," *Screen* 14.3 (1973): 78.

⁴¹ Kirsten Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (USA: McGraw-Hill, 1994) 494.

As a result, it could be interpreted and applied on rather broad lines; different critics developed somewhat different methods within a loose framework of common attitudes.”⁴² Within Cahiers itself, the theory was hotly debated, and the notion that the director was the sole organising source of meaning in the film was resisted by Bazin, whose 1968 article “La Politique des Auteurs” argued that even good directors could make bad films and that there was a danger of elevating the role of the director to such an extent that this approach could become merely “an aesthetic personality cult”.⁴³ Bazin’s article also acknowledged what are now widely-held beliefs about the weaknesses of the theory: that directors operate not in a vacuum, but in the context of a cinematic tradition and within the constraints of the industry, and social and historical contexts. He used the example of Gregg Toland, the Director of Photography on *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), to demonstrate that the contributions of collaborators should not be underestimated. Bazin did, however, agree with his colleagues in distinguishing between *auteurs* and *metteurs-en-scène*. He believed that a director could be elevated to the status of *auteur* on the basis of “how well he has used his material. To a certain extent at least, the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario, he always tells the same story”. Bazin also agreed with Jacques Rivette’s definition of an *auteur* as “someone who speaks in the first person”.⁴⁴ Bazin’s (and Rivette’s) definitions of an *auteur* are ones that can usefully be applied to Ward, keeping in mind Bazin’s reservations about *auteur* theory.

Another important nuance in Bazin’s complex conception of *auteurism* was his belief that “a film’s *mise-en-scène* should efface individual style to allow the inner meaning to shine through naturally so that the spectator could come to his or her own conclusions without being manipulated”.⁴⁵ This was one reason why he was the champion of deep-focus photography and the long take. According to Cook, “Bazin’s argument comes close to eliminating human intervention in the process of production altogether”, but this would indicate that his views were completely at odds with those of the other Cahiers critics, which was not the case.⁴⁶ Despite his preference for cinematic realism

⁴² Peter Wollen, “From Signs and Meaning in the Cinema: The Auteur Theory,” Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) 19.

⁴³ André Bazin, “La Politique Des Auteurs,” The New Wave, ed. Peter Graham (London: Secker & Warburg in association with BFI, 1968) 152.

⁴⁴ Bazin, “La Politique Des Auteurs,” 150-51.

⁴⁵ Cook, ed., The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding the Movies 120.

⁴⁶ Cook, ed., The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding the Movies 120.

and his deep respect for the inherent mystery of things, Bazin believed that “realism in art can only be achieved in one way –through artifice”.⁴⁷ He argued that the illusion of realism in the cinema is achieved through making choices about what is worth preserving and what should be discarded and that the same event can be represented in a variety of ways. Thus, “for the initial reality, there has been substituted an illusion of reality composed of a complex of abstraction (black and white, plane surface), of conventions (the rules of montage for example), and of authentic reality”.⁴⁸ This view takes into account the importance of the director’s role and is similar to that expressed by Ward in his documented account of *In Spring One Plants Alone*.⁴⁹ It is no accident that, stylistically, *In Spring* bears comparison with some of the films that Bazin admired, such as Bresson’s *Le Journal d’un Curé de Campagne* (“Diary of a Country Priest”), 1950.

Andrew Sarris became the chief champion of *auteurism* in the United States. His conception was extremely vigorous but less nuanced than Bazin’s. (He was therefore the focus of fierce debates with other critics such as Pauline Kael.) He evaluated directors according to three premises: the director’s technical competence, the presence of a distinctive visual style and the presence of what he called “interior meaning”, which arose from the tension between the *auteur* and the conditions of production under which he or she worked.⁵⁰ He never denied the importance of recognising social conditions or the contributions of others in the production process, but he claimed that the great directors had been lucky enough to find (or make) the proper conditions and collaborators for the expression of their talent. His writings, however, demonstrate one of the main weaknesses of *auteur* theory: the tendency to underestimate contextual factors. Filmmakers do not always make decisions based on aesthetics but are often influenced by factors beyond their control, contingencies such as the weather, for example. Noël Carroll also argues that *auteurist* critics tended to confuse mannerisms for expressions of personal vision.⁵¹ (Hitchcock’s appearance in each of his movies

⁴⁷ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 26.

⁴⁸ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 27.

⁴⁹ Vincent Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*” DipFA(Hons), University of Canterbury, 1979.

⁵⁰ Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974) 516.

⁵¹ Noël Carroll, *Interpreting the Moving Image*, Cambridge Studies in Film, eds. William Rothman and Dudley Andrew (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 3.

springs to mind.) There is also the problem of collaboration. According to Stephen Prince:

There is no effective way for *auteurist* criticism to deal with the problems posed by collaboration. The *auteur* critic detects consistent patterns across the body of a director's films and hopes that those things attributed to the director are, indeed, justified. In most cases, though, the critic attributes things on faith, without documentation in the form of interviews or written records about who on the crew did what.⁵²

I have sought to avoid the problems in this thesis by interviewing Ward's collaborators and by accessing all available records.

While there are weaknesses inherent in *auteur* theory, one of the strengths of the theory is that it prevents films being discussed in isolation. As Renoir once remarked, a director really only makes one film and keeps remaking it, thus the recurrent themes, images and style give the director's films "a rich unity".⁵³ This being the case, when critiquing a film it is useful to have acquired knowledge about other films by the same director. In addition, *auteur* theory allows for the possibility of studying how the director's work has developed over time. Another strength of this approach is that it promotes a study of film style, in that *auteurs* are recognised as such by their mastery of the medium. For this reason, the critics of both Cahiers and Movie began "to concentrate on the *mise-en-scène*, which, lying between the script and the cutting room, is the characteristic domain of directorial choice [...]. By taking a script written by someone else and by imposing his directorial style, an *auteur* makes the film its own, they argued".⁵⁴ This approach to *mise-en-scène* underlies the textual studies undertaken in this thesis. From my point of view, however, a strength of *auteur* theory is its tendency to discourage a narrowly textual approach to films. While there are pure forms of *auteurism* that seek to limit discussion to tangible textual characteristics, the theory tends to reach out constantly to at least some other factors – such as the vision or personality of the director, or broad concepts such as "style" or "interior meaning". At the same time, there has been an ongoing debate about the definition of these less

⁵² Stephen Prince, Movies and Meaning, 2nd ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1997) 396.

⁵³ Thompson and Bordwell, Film History: An Introduction 494.

⁵⁴ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, Film Theory: An Introduction (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 107.

tangible categories, particularly under pressure from structuralist and post-structuralist critics.

Later critics claimed that: “by ‘Hitchcock’, they mean not the private individual, but rather the body of films with their unified themes and visual designs. Accordingly, ‘Hitchcock’ becomes a construction required by theory, referring to the films and not to the man”.⁵⁵ This approach was the result of a combination of *auteur* theory and classic structuralism, based on the theories of Levi-Strauss. Thus: “Instead of the personal vision of the creative artist, the new methodology would reveal in any given oeuvre an objective structure that generated its characteristic meanings, patterns and intensities”.⁵⁶ A leading advocate of this kind of ‘scientific’ approach was Peter Wollen, who contended that:

Of course the director does not have full control over his work; this explains why the *auteur* theory involves a kind of decipherment, decryptment. A great many features of films analysed have to be dismissed as indecipherable because of ‘noise’ from the producer, the cameraman, or even the actors [...]. What the *auteur* theory does is to take a group of films – the work of one director – and analyse their structure.⁵⁷

Wollen’s ideas differed from classic *auteur* theory, however, in his belief that:

The structure is associated with a single director or individual, not because he has played the role of artist, expressing himself or his own vision in the film, but because it is through the force of his preoccupations that an unconscious, unintended meaning can be decoded in the film, usually to the surprise of the individual involved [...]. There can be no doubt that the presence of a structure in the text can often be connected with the presence of a director on the set, but the situation in the cinema, where the director’s primary task is often one of coordination and rationalisation, is very different from that in the other arts, where there is a much more direct relationship between the artist and work. It is

⁵⁵ Prince, *Movies and Meaning* 396.

⁵⁶ Lapsley and Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* 109.

⁵⁷ Wollen, "From Signs and Meaning in the Cinema: The Auteur Theory," 530.

in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film *auteur* as an unconscious catalyst.⁵⁸

Wollen argued that this structure consisted of a “master antimony” – the opposition between difference or singularity and universality in the work – manifested across a series of binary oppositions.⁵⁹ Thus the master antimony in the work of John Ford was between nature and culture, and this varies according to how it is played out in the binary oppositions of garden/wilderness, ploughshare/sabre, settler/nomad, European/Indian, civilised/savage, book/gun, East/West and so on.

Such versions of *auteurism* are useful for the effort they make to avoid the reduction of the approach to a personality cult. However, they are premised on the assumption that discursive or semiotic structures are necessarily the most interesting aspect of film aesthetics. Such a priority was typical of the halcyon days of structuralism. In dealing directly with the individuals involved in the production of Ward’s films, I have not found it necessary or desirable to translate everything in terms of discourse. A more eclectic, exploratory approach can yield insights not available to the purer and more specialised structuralist mode of analysis. The so-called “linguistic turn” was valuable in sharpening up our sense of textuality but it led to excessively specialised approaches and lost touch with the experiences and complexities of filmmaking processes and film industry contexts.

The last forty years has seen a continuing series of attacks on *auteurism* in the name of post-structuralism (Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida) or historical materialism. In the case of post-structuralism, these have asserted the primacy of language itself over the user of the language, and the slippery nature of meaning.⁶⁰ The work of historical materialists such as Ed Buscombe and John Ellis has treated the political, economic and technological contexts of filmmaking as more powerfully

⁵⁸ Wollen, "From Signs and Meaning in the Cinema: The Auteur Theory," 532.

⁵⁹ Peter Wollen, Signs and Meanings in the Cinema, 3rd ed. (London: Secker and Warburg in association with the British Film Institute, 1972) 96.

⁶⁰ For Barthes, “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) 148.). No less influential were the writings of Michel Foucault, who was concerned with the effects of the institution on authorship. Like Barthes, Foucault believed that the idea of the author as God was dead (Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," Screen 20.1 (1979): 28.).

determining than the individual director.⁶¹ This work has also been a useful extension of debate, but while bringing new contexts into play, it has tended to exclude the important context of directing. Despite these attacks, *auteurism* has persisted in various forms. It has survived through its use value. Critics can not afford to abandon it, though they are now more inclined to use it as a kind of exploratory hypothesis, or as one aspect of an eclectic approach that gives equal attention to discourse, intellectual history, technology and other material aspects. Caughie contends that *auteurism* today is “a critical, rather than a theoretical practice, fully accommodated within established aesthetics, less concerned, in its security, to defend itself or rationalise itself. Within film criticism, in fact, from being a dislocation, it has become the tradition”.⁶² *Auteurism* has remained closely linked to art cinema, since: “Within the art cinema’s mode of production and reception, the concept of the author has a formal function it did not have in the Hollywood studio system”.⁶³ Art cinema uses the notion of authorship to unify the film’s text, and to organise it for the audience’s comprehension in the absence of identifiable stars and genres. Art cinema audiences are addressed as knowledgeable cinemagoers who will recognise the characteristic style of the author’s work. The art film is intended to be read as the work of an expressive individual and a small industry is devoted to informing viewers of authorial marks: career retrospectives, press reviews, interviews and so on, to introduce viewers to authorial codes.⁶⁴ While it could be argued that art cinema as such has declined in recent years, and the distinctions between art and commercial cinema have become increasingly blurred, the marketing approach taken by film festival organisers, for example, has remained essentially *auteurist*. A sceptical or cynical approach to Ward’s work would stress the development of his name as a saleable “brand” in this context.

The importance of *auteurism* to the discourse of contemporary film culture is discussed in Timothy Corrigan’s recent essay “*Auteurs and the New Hollywood*” and his book, A

⁶¹ Buscombe argued that in view of the limitations of *auteur* theory, what was now needed was “a theory of the cinema that locates directors in a total situation, rather than one which assumes that their development has only an internal dynamic”. (Buscombe, “Ideas of Authorship,” 84.) Ellis proposed that films are the product of the existing technology of cinema, the organization of production itself, and the aesthetic of those controlling production. His 1975 study of films made at the Ealing studios exposed a system of constraints operating on the filmmaker that conventional *auteur* theory did not take account of. (John Ellis, “Made in Ealing,” Screen 16.1 (1975).)

⁶² Caughie, ed., Theories of Authorship: A Reader 15.

⁶³ Timothy Corrigan, “Auteurs and the New Hollywood,” The New American Cinema, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1998) 41.

⁶⁴ Cook, ed., The Cinema Book: A Complete Guide to Understanding the Movies 116.

Cinema Without Walls. Corrigan regards *auteur* theory as a “particular brand of social agency”, evident in the status of the *auteur* as celebrity.⁶⁵ He argues: “if *auteurism* – as a description of movies being the artistic expression of a director – is still very much alive today, the artistic expression of contemporary directors is fully bound up with the celebrity industry of Hollywood”.⁶⁶ Meaghan Morris has also noted that today “the primary modes of film and *auteur* packaging are advertising, review snipping, trailers, magazine profiles – always already in appropriation as the precondition, and not the postproduction of meaning”.⁶⁷ My thesis will take account of this commercial process as it impinges upon Ward’s career, but obviously my conception of him as *auteur* continues to look back to the aesthetic debates initiated by Romanticism and critics such as Bazin. To see an *auteur* as a brand-name is only one, very narrow reading of the term. As Caughie implies, the various forms of and debates around *auteur* theory cover a large part of the “tradition” of film criticism over the years.

In my exploration of various notions of authorship, I was particularly struck by Rivette’s notion that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person, as this seemed to me to be one of the most important distinctions between Ward’s work and the films of other New Zealand directors of the same era. To understand Ward’s films it is necessary to reach some understanding of who this person is who is speaking, and how, and it is therefore appropriate to explore his personal history, the industry in which he operates, the artistic traditions of Romanticism and Expressionism and the New Zealand context, all of which inform his highly individual approach to filmmaking. While some of Bazin’s notions of *auteurism* also seem applicable to Ward – in particular that he writes his own stories (or is closely involved in the script-writing process), and that he has a personal vision and identifiable visual style – I wish to avoid some of the excesses of *auteur* theory by exploring the contributions made by Ward’s collaborators and by acknowledging the constraints placed on the director by practical contingencies and by the industrial contexts in which his films were made. To do so has necessitated an examination of as much of the filmmaking process as possible. While my research has tended to support Downie’s emphasis on Ward’s exceptional involvement in many aspects of production, and on the force of his “sensibility”, the interviews I conducted

⁶⁵ Corrigan, "Auteurs and the New Hollywood," 43.

⁶⁶ Corrigan, "Auteurs and the New Hollywood," 38-39.

⁶⁷ Meaghan Morris quoted in Timothy Corrigan, A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 106.

with Ward's collaborators also made me very strongly aware of their contribution to the films. I have certainly ended up with a complex version of *auteurism* in my recognition of the work of talented associates, of the highly technical process of filmmaking, and of the rough and tumble of the film business. The appreciation of even an outstanding individualist such as Ward benefits from a good deal of contextualisation. Although my primary aim is simply to do justice to Ward and his work, such a study could also be seen as a test of classic *auteur* theory, revealing the strengths and limitations of that approach. In a sense, as we will show, a study of Ward and his work may be an excellent example of how *auteur* theory remains useful.

Interviews

Having once decided to research the contexts and pretexts of Ward's films and aesthetics, I realised that I needed as comprehensive a range of interviews as possible including family, teachers and fellow students, and filmmakers associated with each of his projects. Family included Ward's mother, Judy Ward, and his two sisters, Ingrid Ward and Marianne Chandler. Ward's father had died some time ago, and I was also not able to interview his brother, due to the difficulties of travelling to his relatively inaccessible farm in the South Island. Despite these gaps, the information I gained from other relatives, as well as from interviews with Ward's childhood and school friends - Trevor Lamb, David Field and Graeme Barnes - gave me valuable insights into the dynamics of Ward's family, the parents' expectations of their son, the background of both sides of the family, their lifestyle as members of a rural community in the 1950s and 60s, and Ward's schooling. These findings were useful in providing an understanding of *Vigil* in particular, since it is the most autobiographical of his films.

A number of interviews were conducted with people who had known Ward at Ilam School of Fine Arts when he was a student there in the mid-1970s. These included Maurice Askew, his lecturer in film, Victoria Stafford, a former departmental secretary at Ilam and several of his student colleagues, both from Ward's year and preceding years: Stephanie Beth, Jocelyn Beavan, Murray Freeth, David Coulson and Timothy White, who later produced *A State of Siege* and co-produced *Map of the Human Heart*. It is striking that all of these former students have gone on to pursue successful careers in the film industry. Maurice Askew and Victoria Stafford were able to provide me with documentation and detailed information regarding the course Ward had taken

while at Ilam, and his student colleagues gave insights into the experience of being a student at this art school during the 1970s.

In order to reach an understanding of Ward's working methods, and to test *auteur* notions, I conducted a number of interviews with his colleagues and collaborators. I attempted to interview a range of people who had worked on each of Ward's films. These included Alun Bollinger (director of photography, *A State of Siege* and *Vigil*), Chris King (editor, *A State of Siege*), Leon Narbey (camera operator, *In Spring One Plants Alone*), Graham Tetley (scriptwriter, *Vigil*), Graham Morris (sound recordist, *Vigil*), Bridget Ikin (production assistant, *Vigil*), Elizabeth McRae (voice tutor, *Vigil*, *The Navigator: a Medieval Odyssey*), John Maynard (producer, *Vigil*, and *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey*), Jeff Simpson (director of photography, *The Navigator*), Frank Whitten (actor who played the part of Ethan in *Vigil*), Hamish McFarlane (actor who played the part of Griffin in *The Navigator*), Alison Carter (researcher for *The Navigator* and co-writer of Ward's book, *Edge of the Earth*), and Louis Nowra (scriptwriter, *Map of the Human Heart*). I was able to conduct these interviews in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Sydney with the assistance of funding from the New Zealand Film Archive. I was not able to interview anyone who had worked on *What Dreams May Come*, due to the difficulties of contacting them in the USA. I did, however, conduct two interviews with Ward, one during the post-production of *What Dreams May Come* when I was en route to Auckland via Los Angeles, and one in New Zealand, shortly after *What Dreams May Come* was released.

Another group of people I interviewed were members of the Tuhoe community from the Matahi Valley in the Ureweras, who had known Ward when he was living in the area and working on *In Spring One Plants Alone*: Kero and Maui Te Pou, Bay Takao, Helen and Toka Tewara (local schoolteachers), and Eric Caton (former minister of Waimana Presbyterian church). How these interviews came about was that when I talked with Barry Barclay about the somewhat negative reception of *In Spring One Plants Alone*, by Maori critics, he recalled that amongst the community where the film was made, it had been warmly received. His suggestion was that with his assistance (involving introductions to the local people), I should go to the Matahi Valley myself and find out what Tuhoe thought about the film. I took with me one of my students from UNITEC, Jillian White and her partner Eruera Morgan, who speaks fluent Maori. This trip proved

to be very fruitful in terms of reaching an understanding of how the film was perceived from a Maori perspective and what the local people thought the film had or had not achieved.

Most of the above interviews were taped, and transcribed either by myself or by Jennifer Pointon. Inevitably, not all the material was able to be used in the thesis including a certain amount of anecdotal material that would be suitable perhaps for a biography of Ward but not for an academic study. I have included a small amount of material of this kind, because it makes interesting reading, gives a sense of texture, and above all sheds some light on Ward as a person. Since his work is highly individual and is often in some sense autobiographical, I believe that exploring the personal context to some extent can provide useful input into a discussion of aesthetics and authorship.

Textual Research

I viewed Ward's films on video, or DVD in the case of *What Dreams May Come* (which also included supplementary material). I explored other New Zealand films made in the 1970s and 80s, in order to place Ward's early films in the industrial context of the time and to identify differences in aesthetics. In addition, I viewed a number of films that critics had linked to Ward's work, such as Bergman's *Persona* (1966) and *The Seventh Seal* (1956) which has a number of parallels with *The Navigator*, and Tarkovskij's *Andrei Roublev* (1966). I tracked down as many of the films associated with German Expressionism as I could. In addition to those available in the Audiovisual Library at Auckland University, I was fortunate in being able to access lesser-known films such as *Warning Shadows* (Arthur Robison, 1922), *Raskolnikov* (Robert Wiene, 1923) and *Tartüff* (F.W.Murnau, 1925) at the British Film Institute in London, and at the State Film Museum in Munich.

Other primary research activities included searching the Ilam School of Fine Arts archives for transcripts of university courses attended by Ward and other relevant material such as a report on the film course set up by Maurice Askew. The University of Canterbury allowed me to access the thesis published by Ward on the making of *In Spring One Plants Alone* (although it was first necessary for me to obtain Ward's express permission to do so) and Timothy White's thesis on *A State of Siege*. I visited the New Zealand Film Archive in Wellington to ascertain whether they had any of

Ward's very early films and was pleased to discover that they had the camera original and the sound negatives of *Ma Olsen* and the negative A and B rolls of *Samir*, a short film made with Timothy White while Ward was at Ilam. Unfortunately neither of these films was in a state to be viewed, and it may be some time before the financial resources are found to restore them to a form in which they can be readily accessed. Another valuable source of primary research material was Roger Horrocks, who provided me with unpublished material such as his correspondence with Ward regarding the draft scripts of *Vigil* and several versions of the draft scripts themselves which gave me insight into Ward's approach to scriptwriting.

There is a shortage of secondary sources that give an overview of Ward's work, but I found his own book Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes to be an invaluable source of information, both in documenting the process of making three of his films and in articulating his interests and aims.⁶⁸ Although Lawrence Jones's Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose does not mention Ward, this book was useful in situating Ward's films in the context of a New Zealand literary tradition – offering some categories that could be adapted from literature to film.⁶⁹ The Anxious Images catalogue gave me ideas for relating Ward's work to a New Zealand tradition of painting.⁷⁰ Jonathan Rayner's chapter entitled "Paradise and Pandemonium: the Landscapes of Vincent Ward" in New Zealand – A Pastoral Paradise? gave me an insight into the way in which the subjective treatment of landscape in Ward's films – from *Vigil* to *What Dreams May Come* - extends beyond national geographical boundaries to match the films' broader concerns.⁷¹

A number of reviews and articles have been written on individual films and these were helpful in reaching an understanding of the response to Ward's work both overseas and in New Zealand. Stan Jones's study of the reception of New Zealand film in Germany, Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and its Reception in Germany included interesting insights into the way some of Ward's films were reviewed and interpreted by

⁶⁸ Vincent Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1990).

⁶⁹ Lawrence Jones, Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1990).

⁷⁰ Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art (Exhibition Catalogue), (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984).

⁷¹ Jonathan Rayner, "Paradise and Pandemonium," New Zealand - a Pastoral Paradise?, eds. Ian Conrich and David Woods, *Studies in New Zealand Culture*, No 6 (Nottingham: Kakapo Books, 2000).

German critics.⁷² Out of the Shadow of War, a book about contemporary German connections with New Zealand, includes a chapter entitled “The Film Connection” which situates the reception of Ward’s films in Germany in the context of the “remarkable interest” in New Zealand film shown by German film distributors, filmmakers, festival organisers and audiences.⁷³ A number of interviews with the filmmaker himself have been published, and these, along with the interviews I conducted, were invaluable. Only a few of the articles published on individual films, however, have offered any detailed stylistic analysis. They include Roger Horrocks’s article on *A State of Siege*, “To Postulate a Ready and an Understanding Reader”,⁷⁴ and Matthew Aitken’s “Sightlines on the Usurper”, which provided a detailed analysis of narrative structure in *Vigil*.⁷⁵ Cushla Parekowhai gave a Maori-oriented, post-colonial perspective in her article, “Where the Green Ants Really Dream”.⁷⁶ Miro Bilbrough’s “In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story” similarly offered a resistant reading of *In Spring One Plants Alone*.⁷⁷ Brian McDonnell’s discussion of *A State of Siege* in his PhD thesis provided useful background information as to the genesis of the film and the ways in which it differed from Janet Frame’s novel.⁷⁸ John Downie has written several valuable articles on Ward’s films in addition to his monograph, The Navigator: a Mediaeval Odyssey. Downie usefully discussed Ward’s films as motivated by a European Romantic sensibility, but his discussion tended to ignore New Zealand precedents (the local Expressionist tradition in painting and the so-called “other” or psychological tradition of New Zealand literature). Nevertheless, Downie’s book provides a sensitive close reading of one of Ward’s films and represents the only book-length study of his work (apart from the autobiographical Edge of the Earth).

To investigate the extent to which Ward can be considered a New Zealand filmmaker, and his relationship to the New Zealand film industry, I explored the somewhat limited body of literature on the industry as a whole. There are still few cultural or industrial studies to add depth to the flood of journalistic coverage. Helen Martin and Sam

⁷² Jones, Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and Its Reception in Germany.

⁷³ Lauren Jackson, “The Film Connection,” Out of the Shadow of War, ed. James N. Bade (Oxford: Oxford University Press New Zealand, 1998) 95.

⁷⁴ Roger Horrocks, “To Postulate a Ready and an Understanding Reader,” And/3 (1984).

⁷⁵ Matthew Aitken, “Sightlines on the Usurper,” Illusions.4 (1987).

⁷⁶ Cushla Parekowhai, “Where the Green Ants Really Dream,” Photofile 6.3 (1988).

⁷⁷ Miro Bilbrough, “In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story,” Illusions 7 (1988).

⁷⁸ Brian McDonnell, “The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film,” PhD, Auckland, 1986.

Edwards' New Zealand Film 1912-1996 was a valuable source of factual information.⁷⁹ Although highly erratic in its approach, Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand provided useful production details.⁸⁰ I found A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday helpful in comparing Ward's films made in the late 1970s and early 80s with other New Zealand films made during this period.⁸¹ Film in Aotearoa New Zealand contains interviews with leading New Zealand filmmakers, including one with Ward that I have cited on several occasions in this thesis.⁸²

The paucity of criticism of New Zealand film, even for a major figure like Ward, has been one of the prime motives for writing this thesis. What I wanted to achieve was to do a thorough, wide-ranging analysis of one filmmaker's work, situating it within its local and international contexts. This is the first time such a comprehensive study of Ward's biography and career has been attempted and it raises some significant issues relevant not only to the New Zealand film industry today but to contemporary film culture within the global context.

Sequence of Chapters

The thesis is structured to move from a general discussion of local and European artistic and filmic traditions that informed his work to a more specific or individual focus on how Ward's childhood and education contributed to the formation of his aesthetic, and finally, to explore what this aesthetic meant in practice, in the construction and final form of each of his major films. In more detail: Chapter One includes a summary of the history and development of the European Romantic movement, and the Romantic notion of the artist as visionary. It goes on to point out the links between Romanticism and the European Gothic tradition, examines Expressionism as a later sub-set or variant of Romanticism and discusses why Ward has often been identified as a contemporary expressionist film-maker, a definition that sheds some light on his resistance to being "pigeonholed" and the importance he places on the individual nature of his work.

⁷⁹ Helen Martin and Sam Edwards, New Zealand Film 1912-1996 (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁸⁰ Geoffrey Churchman, ed., Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand (Wellington: IPL Books, 1997).

⁸¹ Nicholas Reid, A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday (Dunedin: John McInroe, 1986).

⁸² Jonathan Dennis and Jan Bieringa, eds., Film in Aotearoa New Zealand, 2nd ed. (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1992).

Finally, it examines local Expressionist and Gothic traditions and the extent to which Ward's work has both been influenced by and helped shape these traditions.

From this point onwards, the thesis proceeds in a basically chronological sequence, tracking Ward's career. (Not all stages are discussed in the same way, however, since each period and each film has particular points of interest.) Chapter Two examines the specific relevance of Ward's upbringing and education, in relation to the themes of Chapter One. The course he attended at Ilam School of Fine Arts in Christchurch is discussed in some detail, as are the projects he completed for his undergraduate degree.

Chapters Three to Six comprise a close examination of the three films he directed in New Zealand, *A State of Siege*, *In Spring One Plants Alone* and *Vigil*, and of *The Navigator: a Medieval Odyssey*, which was an Australian/New Zealand co-production. In my discussion of each film, I have attempted to emphasise different aspects of the production (although not exclusively). Chapter Three, on *A State of Siege*, focuses on Ward's partnership with Timothy White, the producer, and also on the film's cinematography and editing. The influence of the European art film is particularly strong here. Chapter Four documents Ward's two year involvement in the making of *In Spring One Plants Alone* and discusses the reception of the film from both Maori and non-Maori perspectives. The focus in Chapter Five is on the script-writing process of *Vigil*, the soundtrack and the production of the film from an actor's point-of-view. Chapter Six examines the changes in Ward's work as he moved to a larger budget, with the greater commercial pressures that accompanied it and the problems of funding *The Navigator* which resulted in Ward and Maynard having to move to Australia. Both Chapters Five and Six include a discussion of Ward's work as a complex dialogue between national and archetypal or "universal" elements.

I have considered Ward's film projects away from New Zealand and Australia together in a single chapter, Chapter Seven, as the contexts of production were very different from his earlier work. Although Ward's later work retained many familiar elements, it was strongly influenced by the demands of working within the Hollywood studio system. There were other reasons for grouping his later films together, such as the fact that it was financially not possible for me to do as much in-depth interviewing outside of New Zealand and Australia. This limited my discussion of the films made elsewhere. The discussion of *Map of the Human Heart* does examine the process of scripting the

film, and the complex issues of national identity expressed within an international context, while the section on *What Dreams May Come* focuses on the film's visual concept and special effects. Other projects Ward worked on during his years in Hollywood, such as the commercial he directed and films he acted in, are also briefly discussed to document his involvement in various aspects of film-making. The final chapter links back to earlier discussions of Ward as a New Zealand filmmaker by documenting his return to this country in the hope of realising his script "River Queen". Despite the less detailed coverage of the later projects, I feel that the thesis achieves its main aims by focusing on the emergence of Ward's aesthetic. The thesis clarifies this approach by analysing the way it developed – including the director's background, training, and cultural sources. The thesis then proceeds to examine his early films in detail as case studies that help us to understand Ward's aesthetic in terms of both practice and theory. While it would have been interesting to make equally detailed studies of all his films, this would have involved an extremely large thesis and greatly increased the research time and budget required. In general, I do not see the later films as significant departures from his earlier aesthetic. This is not to suggest that they are not deserving of detailed study and I hope that subsequent research can fill in some of the gaps. At the least, my thesis will provide generalisations – derived primarily from the earlier films – which can be tested against case studies of later work.

While my thesis is basically chronological, followed by a conclusion that draws together common threads, it is clear that the vicissitudes of funding and production have made Ward's career a highly complex one. Sadly what could have been the organic unfolding of the vision of an *auteur* has encountered a number of delays and setbacks – closer at times to the irregular career of an Orson Welles than to the regular output of many European *auteurs*.

This study seeks to fill an important gap in the body of knowledge about New Zealand film in its examination of the career of Ward as a filmmaker who has had a significant influence on the development of the New Zealand film industry. In striving to define Ward's aesthetic, using Expressionism and Romanticism as useful frames of reference, the thesis will also consider what differentiates it from that of other New Zealand filmmakers. As a corollary to this discussion, we will examine the extent to which

Ward can be regarded as a “New Zealand filmmaker”, given that his aesthetic is influenced by national traditions and context as well as by international trends.

In general, then, my thesis will seek to provide a detailed survey of Ward’s films with particular reference to the emergence of his distinctive aesthetic. This “aesthetic” is studied from a variety of angles – as practice, as theory, and as formal characteristics (textual results). This study should help to illuminate a range of secondary interests including firstly, the activity of directing and the process of film production today, secondly, the usefulness of *auteur* criticism and the possibility of modifying it to take account of the full complexity of contemporary production contexts, and thirdly, the relevance of national cultural contexts in understanding the work of an individual director, within a global film industry.

Chapter One

The Context of Romanticism and Expressionism

This chapter will explore the artistic tradition in which Ward's work can be situated, a tradition that is as much a European as an Antipodean one. When Ward's work first emerged in New Zealand, it struck viewers as different in some way from other contemporary local films. At first glance, his films seemed to have more in common with the European art film than local filmmaking traditions. The characteristics of his early films which linked them to the European art film included: an emphasis on atmosphere and the psychological state of the characters, and an association with 'high art', particularly literature. While this type of film might have had commercial potential, it was able to be read as a work of art. Other features of this European style "art cinema" were Ward's strong authorial vision, his liking for subjective point-of-view, and careful composition of shots. In contrast, the emphasis on a "roller-coaster" narrative involving dramatic physical action that characterised many other New Zealand films of the period had more affinities with the mainstream American filmic tradition.

One way of explaining Ward's unique approach is to link it with Romanticism as a means of providing a context and indicating the richness and coherence of Ward's aesthetic. The focus on the "inner life" of the characters in Ward's early films, in particular *A State of Siege*, *In Spring One Plants Alone*, and *Vigil*, appears to owe so much to European Romantic (and Expressionist) traditions that it is useful here to provide a brief overview of those traditions and the legacy they passed on to modern culture in general. This may be familiar territory for my readers but I believe the parallels with Ward's work are more extensive than has been realised. What is perhaps less commonly understood is that New Zealand has its own Expressionist and Gothic traditions in the visual arts, as well as in literature and film. Ward was influenced by these traditions and his work has made a substantial contribution to them.

The European Romantic Tradition

Romanticism has been defined as being "the principal movement involving all the arts that flourished in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century [...]. The movement

was understood to stand for an emotive and intuitive outlook, as against the controlled and rational approach that was designated ‘classical’”.⁸³ It can also be seen as a “new state of sensibility”.⁸⁴ Morse Peckham defines Romanticism in terms of particular modes of thought: “Whether philosophic, theologic, or aesthetic, it is the revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organicism. Its values are change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious”.⁸⁵ He goes on to argue that the Romantic period began when “a small number of cultural leaders throughout Europe [...] began to feel that they had arrived at a way of viewing the world which was profoundly different from any world-view that had ever appeared before. And they also felt that this new *Weltanschauung* [...] forced them to see everything – philosophy, religion, the arts, history, politics, society – down an entirely new perspective”.⁸⁶

Romanticism is an aesthetic with social as well as intellectual dimensions. It has been strongly linked to social changes in the late eighteenth century. According to Arnold Hauser: “Romanticism was the ideology of the new society and the expression of the world-view of a generation which no longer believed in absolute values, and could no longer believe in any values without thinking of their relativity, their historical limitations”.⁸⁷ He argues that: “Romanticism was essentially a middle-class movement”, and the world-view most suited to a middle-class public “was expressed most clearly of all in the idea of the autonomy of the mind and the immanence of the individual spheres of culture, which had predominated in German philosophy since Kant and which would have been unthinkable without the emancipation of the middle class”.⁸⁸ As M.H. Abrams puts it, “the Romantic period was eminently an age obsessed with the fact of violent and inclusive change, and Romantic poetry cannot be understood, historically, without awareness of the degree to which this preoccupation

⁸³ The Encyclopedia of Visual Art, vol. 5 (London: The Encyclopaedia Britannica International Ltd, 1968) 746.

⁸⁴ Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) 11.

⁸⁵ Morse Peckham, Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Ambassador Books, 1965) 14.

⁸⁶ Peckham, Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century 15.

⁸⁷ Hauser, The Social History of Art 662.

⁸⁸ Hauser, The Social History of Art 667.

affected its substance and form”.⁸⁹ Raymond Williams spoke of Romantic thought as initially a compensatory reaction to the new social ills of a society in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, which “was coming to think of man as merely a specialized instrument of production”.⁹⁰ Hauser argues similarly that the “uncompromising humanism” of the younger generation of Romantics, Shelley, Keats and Byron, was “their protest against the policy of exploitation and oppression. Their unconventional way of life, their aggressive atheism and their lack of moral bias are the different modes of their struggle against the class that controls the means of exploitation and suppression”.⁹¹

There can be little doubt that Romanticism left an important legacy in its attitudes to art and society. In Hauser’s view:

It represented one of the most decisive turning points in the history of the European mind. Since the Gothic, the development of sensibility had received no stronger impulse and the artist’s right to follow the call of his feelings and individual disposition had probably never been emphasized with such absoluteness [...]. Rationalism, as a principle of science and practical affairs, soon recovered from the romantic onslaught, but European art has remained ‘romantic’.⁹²

The alienation and desire of the Romantics to remain separate from society had a significant effect on subsequent cultural activity. According to William Vaughan: “When the Romantic movement dispersed, the habit of separateness remained. The Primitifs, Nazarenes and Ancients were the ancestors of a permanent avant-garde that became established in Paris during the 1830s in the disaffected world of the Bohemians. Alienation is one of Romanticism’s most lasting legacies”.⁹³ In addition, “The [Romantic] movement left a more permanent legacy in its expressiveness and exploration of the irrational, which have been an inspiration to such movements as Symbolism, Expressionism, and Surrealism. The image of the artist as an independent,

⁸⁹ M.H. Abrams, *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* (New York; London: W.W.Norton & Co., 1984) 46.

⁹⁰ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 59.

⁹¹ Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 696.

⁹² Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 655.

⁹³ William Vaughan, *Romantic Art* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 1978) 266.

self-determining original, moreover, has remained a cherished ideal of the avant-garde”.⁹⁴

These are sweeping generalisations and it is important to remember the great variety of styles and interests within such a broad movement. Nevertheless, the set of concepts and terms associated with Romanticism provides a critical vocabulary that is still useful today. It offers a starting-point for our attempt to explain what distinguishes Ward’s aesthetic interests from those of other New Zealand filmmakers. While Romanticism emerged in a particular historical period, it had lasting effects and it still provides the model (or set of models) for a particular kind of world-view and approach to art in broad terms. Peckham sees Romanticism both as “a general and permanent characteristic of mind, art and personality, found in all periods and in all cultures” and as “a specific historical movement in art and ideas which occurred in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries”.⁹⁵ He cautions us, however, that:

Although in the past, various theorists such as Jacques Barzun have attempted to define Romanticism in terms of characteristics such as a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, the revolt from reason, a vindication of the individual, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of pantheism, a revival of idealism, a revival of Catholicism, a rejection of artistic conventions, a return to emotionalism, a return to nature, there is no generally accepted theory of Romanticism at the present time.⁹⁶

Romanticism provides an explanatory framework and terminology that continues to be useful but one that must be used with an awareness of complexity and as a starting point rather than a way of simply pigeonholing art.

Ward’s aesthetic relates primarily to Romanticism in Peckham’s “general and permanent” sense, but his work also displays a specific connection with German Expressionism, an artistic movement that grew out of some aspects of “historical” Romanticism. (This aspect will be discussed later in the chapter.) While resistant to any attempt to label his work, Ward has described himself as liking or being interested

⁹⁴ The Encyclopedia of Visual Art 768.

⁹⁵ Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism 3-4.

⁹⁶ Peckham, The Triumph of Romanticism 4-5.

in “German Romanticism from the nineteenth century” and “the northern European experience”.⁹⁷ He qualifies these statements by pointing out that his interests are not limited to these aspects. He does, however, acknowledge his “strong German connections” with respect to his mother’s German background, and the feeling that he used to have “a connection with the whole German thing”.⁹⁸ (One also gets the impression that while he may have felt this in his twenties, he has moved on from this to some extent.) When he visited Germany in 1982-83, he was fascinated by what he describes as “the whole German schism”, referring to an apparent contradiction in the German personality – chivalrous and civilized, yet capable of barbarism. He argues that the Germans are a divided people, at war within themselves, whether this is “outwardly depicted by the Berlin wall, or inwardly or more secretively, by the circle of barbed wire of the concentration camp”.⁹⁹ It was an interesting reflection on his mother that he also saw her as being “divided in spirit”, in the sense that although she likes speaking German to any Germans who visit, she has said she will never go back to Germany.¹⁰⁰

One important Romantic concept relevant to a discussion of Ward’s work is the notion of the sublime. The Romantic interest in this area grew out of theories of the sublime that had originated in the eighteenth century, developing in two directions. The first direction was the “rhetorical sublime”, used by critics to investigate “qualities of the soul in art” (taste, rules, traditions), and the other was sublimity “as an affective response to natural phenomena (states of consciousness, pleasures of the imagination, and so on)”.¹⁰¹ The leading theorist of the latter school of thought was Edmund Burke, who differentiated between the sublime and the beautiful: “the beautiful is small, smooth, polished, light and delicate, while the sublime is huge, rugged, irregular, dark and chaotic”.¹⁰² The sublime was associated with pain, danger and terror, in other words with the strongest emotions humans are capable of feeling. Twitchell poses the question: “But why would anyone want to experience the sublime? The answer is that within terror there is an element of delight, provided of course that there is no real threat of personal harm. Hence a painting of a shipwreck, or a fire, or an avalanche, or an

⁹⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

⁹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997

⁹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

¹⁰⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

¹⁰¹ Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 13-14.

¹⁰² Burke quoted in Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 14.

erupting volcano is sublime to a viewer in the gallery, but not to ‘real-life’ sailors, citizens, and farmers who presumably are experiencing the catastrophe.”¹⁰³ The experience of the sublime was often associated with a particularly awesome type of physical environment and generated a sense of awe in the spectator by the sense of its (imagined) threat to his or her life. In the eighteenth century, the sublime was linked with religion: “The fact that the sublime landscape evoked a sense of awe akin to a demonstration of divine power and also appeared to transcend sensory experience made it particularly attractive to the Deist writers [...]. It fitted their Enlightenment conceptions of God as a sort of mathematical absolute, capable of being defined only by what he was *not* and thus only discernible in the unseen laws of the universe”.¹⁰⁴

The nineteenth century brought an expansion of interest in the sublime. The emphasis shifted strongly from the object to the perceiver, and “what had previously been a religious experience (transcendence)” began to be viewed as “a perceptual phenomenon. It is visual first, then visionary. It is literally spectacular [...]. The sublime is a redemptive experience”.¹⁰⁵ The change in emphasis from the external object to the experience of the mind perceiving the object led to the notion of the sublime dissolving the boundaries between subject and object, self and nature. It was this kind of state of mind that many Romantic artists were fascinated with achieving and retaining. Twitchell sees the perception of the sublime as being “a rite of passage in which the romantic ‘hero of consciousness’ must move to some new level of awareness”.¹⁰⁶ This rite of passage is, however, arguably a masculine one, according to Jacqueline Labbe, since there is a “basic equation that genders the sublime masculine and the beautiful feminine”.¹⁰⁷ Her argument is not that female writers did not experience the sublime or include it in their work, but that the experience was masculinized by prominent male writers: “If the sublime indeed functions as a kind of maturity ritual, albeit one that can be re-enacted and is not contingent on the individual’s age, then it is anchored all the more firmly in the masculine world and coded all the more insidiously as unfeminine behaviour”.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 14.

¹⁰⁴ Fiona L. Price and Scott Mason, eds., Silence, Sublimity and Suppression in the Romantic Period (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) 1-2.

¹⁰⁵ Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 15.

¹⁰⁶ Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 24.

¹⁰⁷ Labbe, Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism 37.

¹⁰⁸ Labbe, Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism 39.

One of the nineteenth-century Romantic painters mostly closely associated with the sublime is Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). In his paintings, the “literal human standpoint” is reduced to the absolute minimum, so that the human figure is dwarfed by nature. Twitchell links Friedrich’s work, interestingly, to “the nascent German expressionism” in its “eerie sense of imminence”.¹⁰⁹ It is significant that in *What Dreams May Come*, Ward would specifically refer to the work of Friedrich as providing the inspiration for the scenes in Paradise. He and his collaborators wanted to create “a sense of Paradise that was awesome or sublime” (his words) and he felt that the work of Romantic painters such as Friedrich captured the power and awesomeness of nature in a way that more modern paintings do not.¹¹⁰

Twitchell contends that the sublime is still “an important modern artistic impulse”.¹¹¹ Certainly it is a concept that has resonances with Ward’s work. As John Downie recently wrote:

The Navigator possesses many aspects of an adventure story, pure and simple, but it has an ambition of theme, typical of Ward’s films as a whole, which relates strongly to ideas of the Romantic Sublime, to an aspiring sense of humanity, in which the human adventure in the world is to be characterised by feelings of exultation, awe and scale – a heightening, a taking to lofty levels – in which intellectuality and spirituality are combined to locate, in the early nineteenth-century words of William Wordsworth (a Cumbrian, like Ward’s miners) in “The Prelude”, as ‘something evermore about to be’.¹¹²

Ward’s vision of nature as being at odds with humanity and even at times an implacable enemy, in *A State Of Siege* and to an even greater extent *Vigil*, may seem to represent a departure from the Romantic idea that the inner life of the Romantic and the natural world are in harmony with each other. It is often said that while the Romantics saw themselves as being in opposition to society, they aspired to be at one with the natural world as the source of poetic inspiration. But Peckham challenges this oversimplification by arguing that what was seen to be Romantic nature worship

¹⁰⁹ Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850* 189.

¹¹⁰ Helene Wong, "Development Hell," *Listener* 21 November 1998: 34.

¹¹¹ Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850* 207.

¹¹² Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 49.

was not strictly speaking, nature worship; rather it was the use of the natural world – free from human social enterprise – as a screen against which to project that sense of value which is also the sense of the Self [...], one saw through the phenomenon of nature into the divine noumenon (or ultimate reality) that lay behind it [...]. The ultimate union in the divine of the thing-in-itself of nature and of the Self of the human being, gave a ground of value both to nature and to the purely human.¹¹³

According to Robert Hughes:

One of the great themes of nineteenth-century romantic painting was the interplay between the world and the spirit: the search for images of those states of mind, embodied in nature, that exist beyond or below our conscious control. On the one hand, there was the scale of the world, seen as a place sanctified by its own grandeur [...]. ‘The passions of men’ William Wordsworth wrote, ‘are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature’. On the other hand, not all painters felt Wordsworth’s visionary yet empirical peace with the natural world and the further aspect of Romantic extremity was the desire to explore and record (and so, perhaps assuage) the dissatisfactions of the self: its conflicts and fears, hungers and barely formulated spiritual yearnings.¹¹⁴

In other words, images of nature’s sometimes terrifying power or sublimity were just as important to many of the Romantics as were images of peace and harmony.

The sublime was generally seen as being connected to “vision” – the external view of the sublime landscape generating in the viewer an inner vision, connected with an altered state of consciousness “in which the individual ‘clearly feels a *qualitative* shift in his pattern of mental functioning, that is he feels [...] that some quality or qualities of his mental process are different’”.¹¹⁵ The notion of the artist as visionary – that is, as developing the intensity and uniqueness of the artist’s view of the world to the point where his or her work has a startling originality – is an important aspect of Romanticism relevant to Ward’s aesthetic. The word ‘vision’ can serve as a shorthand for this way of

¹¹³ Peckham, Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century 25.

¹¹⁴ Hughes, The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change 269.

¹¹⁵ Charles T. Tart, Introduction to Altered States of Consciousness, quoted in Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 21.

thinking about art. The Encyclopedia of Visual Art suggests that: “Because Romanticism was essentially a matter of outlook, we can hardly talk of it in terms of a set of formal stylistic characteristics”; rather in Romantic art there was “a peculiar intensity, a state of heightened awareness that is at times visionary and at times simply sensuous”.¹¹⁶ Raymond Williams’ chapter “The Romantic Artist” in Culture and Society 1780-1950, defines one of the most important Romantic ideas about art as “the increasing emphasis on the ‘superior reality’ of art as the seat of imaginative truth”.¹¹⁷ Although “vision” can not be reduced to “style”, the visionary artist needs to develop an adequate – and usually original – artistic language, and needs to take great risks in doing so, undeterred by commercial criticisms that he or she is making his/her work no longer accessible to the average reader or viewer.

Ward has often been described as a “visionary”. John Maynard, the producer of *Vigil*, commented that what distinguished Ward from other filmmakers was that “he’s got a vision” and that “he’s an artist as a filmmaker”.¹¹⁸ In an earlier article for the NZ Listener, Maynard talked about Ward’s “extraordinary concentrated vision”, which “comes from within, it deals with the interior lives of people”.¹¹⁹ Ward has been known to use the term “vision” for example when he describes himself as “looking for pockets of the outside world to match my own interior vision”.¹²⁰

Related to the notion of the artist as visionary is the association of Romanticism with mysticism, in some cases with religious mysticism, as in the work of William Blake. That is, such art creates a sense of depth of the kind we associate with religion – a meditative approach to life, death and the other basic elements of life. Cynthia Chase links the growth of religious themes in Romantic art with Abrams’ interpretation of Romantic thought as the shifting of aspects of the Western religious (‘Judaean-Christian’) tradition to secular (or unorthodox) contexts.¹²¹ This is supported by Hauser’s assertion that: “During the years of the French Revolution, no pictures with a religious content were seen at all in exhibitions [...]. But with the spread of Romanticism, the number of religious paintings increased and religious motifs finally

¹¹⁶ The Encyclopedia of Visual Art, vol. 4 (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica International Ltd, 1968) 746.

¹¹⁷ Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 50.

¹¹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 29 September 1999.

¹¹⁹ John Maynard quoted in Gordon Campbell, "Vincent's Vision," NZ Listener 25 May 1985: 19.

¹²⁰ Vincent Ward quoted in Simon Cunliffe, "Dreams and Rain," City Limits 7 February 1985.

¹²¹ Chase, ed., Romanticism 5.

invaded academic classicism”.¹²² Peckham associates Romanticism with the revival of Catholicism, a notion that has resonances with the influence of Catholicism (albeit in unorthodox forms) in Ward’s films.¹²³

The Romantics’ emphasis on the importance of a complex dialogue between the artist’s inner vision and the world of nature was voiced by Caspar David Friedrich: “The artist should not only paint what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him. If, however, he sees nothing within him, then he should also omit to paint that which he sees before him”.¹²⁴ This emphasis on individual inspiration impacted on critical judgment: “Friedrich declared the artist’s only law to be his feelings. The American painter Washington Allston wrote ‘Trust your own genius. Listen to the voice within you, and sooner or later she will make herself understood not only to you, but she will enable you to translate her language to the world and this it is which forms the only real merit of any work of art’”.¹²⁵ Above all, “a Romantic work of art expresses the unique point of view of its creator”.¹²⁶

Such attitudes are common enough for a painter or poet but less common for a filmmaker who works within a mass medium and is generally encouraged by the film industry to think of himself more as a public entertainer than an artist. Ward describes his inspiration in terms similar to those of Romantic poets and artists: “What you start off with is a feeling in yourself. Then you try and find mirrors outside your world that reflect and give you courage to do whatever you want. I have an idea in my mind, then often I look for material to see if there is anything that will help me articulate it”.¹²⁷ This is reflected in the autobiographical nature of some of his films – *Vigil*, in particular - but also to some extent, *Map of the Human Heart*, which is a retelling of his parents’ love story, transformed by the imagination, in poetic rather than naturalistic terms. Graham Tetley who worked on the script of *Vigil* has acknowledged that Ward knows he is the centre of his artistic production: “He must trust himself, he must trust his experiences, whether they come from his religion, or his childhood, his consciousness, his subconscious, his reading, the way that he sees the landscape. Most people would

¹²² Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 646.

¹²³ Peckham, *The Triumph of Romanticism* 4-5.

¹²⁴ Caspar David Friedrich quoted in Vaughan, *Romantic Art* 24-25.

¹²⁵ Honour, *Romanticism* 16.

¹²⁶ Honour, *Romanticism* 18.

¹²⁷ Dennis and Bieringa, eds., *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand* 89-90.

work from a story, but he's working from these things that come from within".¹²⁸ Ward reiterated this point in an interview for this thesis when he stated that in creating a work of art: "You don't actually start with something that belongs to somebody else [...]. You start with who you are".¹²⁹

In order to preserve his/her inspiration, the Romantic artist sometimes ran the risk of isolation from society. But, as Vaughan points out: "It was not always a matter of individual choice: artists in general were becoming isolated by social changes, by the growing anonymity of their audience. Private patronage did not cease in this period, but it certainly became a less significant outlet than the exhibition".¹³⁰ Peckham asserts that the importance of "the Self as the source of order, meaning, value and identity" stems from the Romantic's sense of isolation from the world and alienation from society, which he claims "were the distinguishing signs of the Romantic, and they are to this day".¹³¹ The Romantic sense of isolation from the world led in some cases to a "tendency to remoteness from practical life with firm social roots and political commitments [...]. An unbridgeable gulf opens up between the genius and ordinary men, between the artist and the public, between art and social reality".¹³² Such a stance is again an untypical one in the film medium which requires large audiences, sizeable investment and teamwork during the production phase. The theme of the isolated artist at odds with society is, however, explicitly articulated in *A State of Siege*. Malfred, in attempting to find "a new way of seeing", feels compelled to leave her home, friends and social circle in the South Island to start a new life in the North Island, where she knows no-one. The implication is that in order to be true to her vision, she must reject conventional society and start afresh, but in doing so, she is forced to rely on her own resources, which prove inadequate to the task. Visionary art is thus in many respects, a demanding, dangerous and high-risk venture. As we will see, this is particularly the case in an expensive medium that depends upon a large audience.

Honour identifies "the only constant and common factor" in the work of the Romantics as "belief in the importance of individuality – of the individual self and its capacity for experience – and the rejection of all values not expressive of it. This emphasis on the

¹²⁸ From an interview on *Kaleidoscope*, screened on Television One, 25 June 1984.

¹²⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

¹³⁰ Vaughan, *Romantic Art* 25.

¹³¹ Peckham, *Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century* 19.

¹³² Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 682-83.

supreme value of the personal sensibility of the artist [...] led to the Romantic conception of personal authenticity”.¹³³ Raymond Williams further characterises the Romantic artist as: “the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius”.¹³⁴ These notions could be seen as informing Ward’s *auteurist* approach to his films – the strength of his vision and desire for artistic control of all aspects of his films – distinguishing him from other New Zealand directors of his generation. (Those directors may also have seen themselves as *auteurs* but not according to this more thorough-going, art-based, European conception).

According to Honour: “The belief in their own uniqueness and individuality, combined with a reluctance to be submerged in any school or coterie, led some Romantic writers such as Goethe and Byron to explicitly dissociate themselves from Romanticism”.¹³⁵ In addition, “the insistence of the Romantics on individuality and originality precluded the creation of a single Romantic style”.¹³⁶ As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Ward has expressed his similar dislike of labels. He reiterates this view in Film in Aotearoa New Zealand: “I hate being categorized: filmmaking is about change and what you’re focused on at a particular time”.¹³⁷ We can sympathise with this view – labels can never be more than a starting-point – yet still see the very intensity of such resistance, in defence of individuality, as a familiar Romantic concern.

Another important aspect of Romanticism, closely linked to the valorising of the artist’s imagination, was the role of the unconscious. Many previous artists had seen inspiration as coming from God. Peckham has described the shift to a more secular, psychological interpretation:

The unconscious is really a postulate for the creative imagination, and as such continues today without the divine sanction [...]. It is that part of the mind through which novelty enters into the personality and hence into the world in the form of art and ideas. We today conceive of the unconscious spatially as inside and beneath; the earlier Romantics conceived of it as outside and above. We

¹³³ Honour, Romanticism 23.

¹³⁴ Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 50.

¹³⁵ Honour, Romanticism 22.

¹³⁶ Honour, Romanticism 23.

¹³⁷ Dennis and Bieringa, eds., Film in Aotearoa New Zealand 89.

descend into the imagination; they rose into it. The last method, of course, is the method of Transcendentalism.¹³⁸

The Romantics' interest in the unconscious is linked to the figure of the *doppelgänger*, which "is always present to the romantic mind and recurs in innumerable forms and variations in romantic literature".¹³⁹ Hauser describes the Romantic as:

rushing headlong into his double, just as he rushes headlong into everything dark and ambiguous, chaotic and ecstatic, demonic and Dionysian, and seeks therein merely a refuge from the reality which he is unable to master by rational means. On this flight from reality, he discovers the unconscious, that which is hidden away in safety from the rational mind, the source of his wish-fulfilment dreams and of the irrational solutions of his problems.¹⁴⁰

In Hauser's view, this sense of the irrational is at the centre of Romantic art. "The characteristic feature of the romantic movement was not that it stood for a revolutionary or an anti-revolutionary, a progressive or a reactionary ideology, but that it reached both positions by a fanciful, irrational and undialectical route".¹⁴¹ This approach also accounts for the Romantics' interest in the grotesque, in its sense of being "something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one".¹⁴² The grotesque can be seen as contradicting "the very laws which rule our familiar world", and as such, is related to our fears of the unknown.¹⁴³ "When applied to landscapes, the word indicated a lack of order as well as a sombre and ominous mood".¹⁴⁴ The grotesque is also associated with "the malice of the inanimate objects and that of animals", a feature which is also evident in German Expressionism and will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.¹⁴⁵ Clearly, many of today's films have non-rational ingredients but few films have such a strongly dreamlike mood as Ward's. (We will examine these 'dream' elements in our close analyses of films.)

¹³⁸ Peckham, *The Triumph of Romanticism* 14.

¹³⁹ Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 669.

¹⁴⁰ Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 670.

¹⁴¹ Hauser, *The Social History of Art* 653.

¹⁴² Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* 21.

¹⁴³ Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* 31.

¹⁴⁴ Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* 77.

¹⁴⁵ Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* 115.

Gothic Influences

The relationship between the “Gothic” and the “Romantic” was complex and sometimes antagonistic. Michael Gamer argues in Romanticism and the Gothic that Romantic literature saw itself as “high” culture, which utilized classical forms of poetry such as the epic and the ode, and associated itself with the masculine, and was opposed to Gothic literature because of its links with “popular culture”, and with the feminine. For that reason, many Romantic literary figures such as Wordsworth and Byron publicly attacked Gothic fiction and made it clear that they had no wish to associate themselves with it. However, as Gamer points out, many of the works written by these authors were Gothic-influenced, for example, Coleridge’s “Christabel”, and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. He suggests that Romantic writers “were appropriating commercially valuable material (to draw readers) and attempting to transform them into culturally *valued* materials (to satisfy an increasingly vocal critical audience)”.¹⁴⁶ This comment has a great deal of resonance when we consider today’s art films.

In recent times, the term “Gothic” has come to be associated with the psychological horror film and is used with particular reference to its creation of an atmosphere of terror. It is necessary, however, to differentiate between “horror” - which according to Ann Radcliffe, the author of The Mysteries of Udolpho could be defined as the fear of some visible menace – and “terror” - which represents the fear of the unseen - in order to differentiate between “horror film” and “Gothic horror”. The term “Gothic” provides a useful frame of reference for approaching Ward’s early work, in particular, *A State of Siege* and *Vigil*, in that both films create an atmosphere of unease. The definition of Gothic that suits such films is obviously the more psychological one, a matter of subtle undertones and not the shock tactics found in the average horror film.

A State of Siege displays an interest in the irrational and the grotesque in Kayser’s sense and provides a good example of the creation of an atmosphere of terror. The film centres around a middle-aged retired woman, Malfred Signal, who leaves the comfort of her community and friends in the South Island after her mother’s death, to live up north in an isolated spot where she knows no-one. From the time she moves into her new house, she seems to be increasingly threatened by an unknown force which culminates in a night of terror when the house is battered by a storm. In the film it is never stated

¹⁴⁶ Gamer, Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation 24.

what the threat actually is. At various times, it is suggested that there is some kind of evil supernatural force in the house which caused the death of the previous tenant, or that it could be malicious children trying to scare an old woman on her own. At other times, the suggestion is that Malfred's terror is a monster of her own creation - a figment of her own vivid imagination or unconscious mind. There is a very effective scene in the film where she appears to be calling her neighbour to report that there is a prowler outside the house. It is not until the end of the scene that the viewer realizes, as the camera tilts down and pans along the telephone cord, that the phone has been disconnected and that the apparent phone call has taken place only in her imagination. In the film, the viewer never sees the source of the menace - its presence is suggested by the soundtrack, the howling of the wind, and finally the smashing of glass as a brick is apparently hurled through her window. In this case, a person's imagination seems out of control - Manfred is an artist *manqué*, and her creative power has turned destructive.

Ward's work has been influenced by both European Gothic and "kiwi" Gothic traditions (which we will discuss later in this chapter). The European Gothic tradition is often associated with the iconography of ruined castles, trap doors, secret passages and catacombs, elements which have powerful psychological undertones often associated with the unconscious. In *A State of Siege*, elements of the interior settings particularly props, have similar undertones. According to David Coulson, who consulted with the director on the film, "Ward was interested in everything that made psychological sense" and he constructed the settings of the film around Malfred's state of mind.¹⁴⁷ As she becomes increasingly unhinged, Ward started removing furniture and fittings from the house. Also, the way the props and the setting were filmed reflects Malfred's state of mind. One example is in the scene where Malfred is cleaning a bath. The objects in this scene seem to have a malevolent life of their own: the medicine bottles on the shelf in particular, trigger unpleasant memories of Malfred caring for her dying mother. The soundtrack is also used to good effect in creating an atmosphere of unease, especially the magnification of natural sounds in the scene such as the scratching noise of the bath being cleaned, the sound of the clock ticking, and the screaming noise of the water being emptied. The film thus provides good examples of how Ward's Romantic/Gothic aesthetic is expressed in practice.

¹⁴⁷ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

Expressionism

The darker side of Romanticism was further developed in the German Expressionist movement. Expressionism originated in German aesthetics, especially the writings of Goethe, according to Hermann Bahr, in his book, *Expressionismus*, first published in 1916.¹⁴⁸ Bahr interpreted Expressionism “as a movement giving primary importance to the inner world of the emotions, by contrast to Impressionism, which remained ‘enslaved’ to the external world of nature or of the senses”.¹⁴⁹ Walter Lacqueur goes as far as to argue that: “[Expressionism] was a movement in the Romantic tradition, perhaps the most extreme form of Romanticism that ever existed. The tendency to put the inner experience above the outer life was typically Romantic, as was the attempt, often unconscious, to recapture the religious (or quasi-religious) ecstasy of the Middle Ages”.¹⁵⁰ Both of these aspects have resonances with Ward’s work. His own definition of Expressionism, in an interview for this thesis, was as “an expression where the emotional content of something is the most important essential element”. He later amended this statement in these terms: “The emotion is still the key thought, and the technique is only there to serve the emotion”. In reference to his own work, he commented that: “Certainly, the emotional content is very important [...] but my aim is to make films that essentially say something about the business of existence, of being, so it’s not just an emotional thing”.¹⁵¹ Granted, this comment seems equally applicable to the best Expressionist art.

The Expressionists tended to focus particularly on potential conflict between the inner self and society, or the inner self and the natural world. The term Expressionism has frequently been used in discussions of Ward’s films, primarily because of their “expressive” qualities in detailing the inner life of their characters. Both *A State of Siege* and *Vigil* explore the inner journeys made by female protagonists, but it would be true to say that almost all of Ward’s films revolve around interior (as well as physical) journeys. The influence of Expressionism was noted by Ward’s producer, John Maynard in an interview for this thesis when he described Ward as an Expressionist filmmaker whose “influences all come from Expressionist painting, from the use of

¹⁴⁸ Cited in *The Encyclopedia of Visual Art*, 837.

¹⁴⁹ *The Encyclopedia of Visual Art*, 838.

¹⁵⁰ Lacqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933* 117-18.

¹⁵¹ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward 11 December 1997.

light as an Expressionist technique".¹⁵² Ward himself discussed some of those influences in an interview for the San Francisco Examiner in which he stated that: "Because my mother is German, I got interested in the German lighting tradition, in Fritz Lang, and I got interested in expressionist painting".¹⁵³ He mentions the German Expressionist painter and lithographer Käthe Kollwitz as being of particular interest to him. It would be a mistake, however, to attempt to "pigeonhole" Ward as an Expressionist in view of his reservations about being categorised and in view of the fact that, as Willett has pointed out: "creative artists are often reluctant to admit anything that might seem like dependence on such a movement [Expressionism]; their sense of their own individuality is too strong".¹⁵⁴

While Expressionism may be a useful starting point to discuss the type of film Ward has produced, we need to be aware that the term has developed a number of different associations and meanings. The remainder of this chapter will endeavour to examine various understandings of the term "Expressionism" and to produce a version that will be relevant to Ward's early films in particular. Again, the concept is intended merely as an initial way to orient ourselves, and it is hoped that by the end of the thesis we will have developed a more complex and specific understanding of Ward's distinctive films.

John Willett defines Expressionism as having three distinct meanings:

1. a family characteristic of modern Germanic art, literature, music and theatre, from the turn of the century to the present day.
2. a particular modern German movement which lasted roughly between 1912 and 1922.
3. a quality of expressive emphasis and distortion which may be found in works of art of any people or period.¹⁵⁵

The second definition of Expressionism is historical, relating to German Expressionism as an art movement that began in the fine arts with the formation of two important groups of artists, die Brücke and der Blaue Reiter. Since Ward has specifically stated

¹⁵² Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 29 September 1999.

¹⁵³ Vincent Ward quoted in Nancy Scott, "Writing Poetry for the Screen," San Francisco Examiner 10 Feb 1981: E1.

¹⁵⁴ John Willett, Expressionism (London: World University Library, 1970) 7.

¹⁵⁵ Willett, Expressionism 8.

that he was interested in this work, it is worth discussing the origins and development of German Expressionism as a historical movement, and attempting to reach an understanding of its stylistic characteristics, and more importantly, the world-view that informed the movement and connected it with Romanticism.

“Die Brücke” (“The Bridge”) was a young group of architecture rather than art students who wanted to revolutionise the somewhat conservative cultural scene in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century by forming an artistic community who lived and worked together towards a common aim. They were fascinated by “primitive” art and the art of the Gothic period, especially by Dürer, a fifteenth century artist best known for his woodcuts. These young artists wanted to preserve the freshness of their sensations and the strength and honesty of their vision, and to reject not only the conservative approach of the artistic establishment, but also the conservative political beliefs of the time. They saw creativity not technique as the most important aspect of art, and wanted art to be accessible to the masses, not just the elite of society. Their art was characterized by strong, bold colours and forms, often outlined in black. Some Expressionist artists such as Lionel Feininger (an American artist who worked for a time in Germany) made use of distortion in elongated shapes and unusual angles, a characteristic that was to have an influence on the sets of Expressionist film.

A later group of Expressionist artists was “der Blaue Reiter” (“the Blue Rider”) group, consisting of a number of artists who were to become very influential in terms of the development of twentieth century art. These included Franz Marc, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky (who was one of a group of Russian emigré artists). The artists of Der Blaue Reiter were much more individual in their styles than the artists of Die Brücke and they were more interested in the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of art than earlier Expressionists. What they had in common was an intense desire to give expression to personal feelings and emotions - the inner world of the artist.

During this period there was a great deal of cross-fertilisation of ideas from one art form to another and the Expressionist movement extended from fine arts to music, literature and theatre, and finally to the cinema. Examples of this cross-fertilisation included the rejection of the usual codes of realism in Expressionist painting, theatre and films, which paralleled the abandonment of tonality in Expressionist music. John Willett regards this “extraordinary concentration of artistic effort from a number of different

fields” as being “one of the remarkable things about the German Expressionist movement”.¹⁵⁶ What Expressionist cinema shared with Expressionism as a broader art movement was “the initial impulse of expressionist protest: visionary, ecstatic, and apocalyptic images, an emphasis on the irrational, self-conscious distortion as a formal property, and a consistently antibourgeois critique”.¹⁵⁷

It is commonly believed that Expressionist cinema began in Germany with the production of *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* (Wiene, 1919), but there were a number of precursors, some of them not in Germany but in other European countries, in particular Denmark. Barry Salt in *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* discusses the influence of Danish film on Expressionist cinema with particular reference to lighting in the films of directors such as Victor Sjöström, Benjamin Christensen and Dr Gar-El-Hama I, who were producing films in Denmark, just prior to World War One.¹⁵⁸ Paul Leutat adds that German Expressionist cinema owes much to the Danish director Mauritz Stiller, as well as to the work of Sjöström and Christensen. Moreover, he cites the work of Soviet directors Kozintze, Trauberg and Youtkevitch and the influence of Soviet theatre on Soviet films, which created a Russian brand of Expressionist cinema.¹⁵⁹

At the same time as these developments were taking place in Danish and Soviet cinema, thematic and stylistic precursors of Expressionist cinema were appearing in Germany. According to George Huaco, these consisted of “four earlier minor films [...], thematically, Stellan Rye’s *The Student from Prague* (1913), and Paul Wegener’s *The Golem* (1914); stylistically, Rye’s *House Without Doors or Windows* (1914), and Otto Ripert’s six-part thriller *Homunculus* (1916)”.¹⁶⁰ Both *The Student from Prague*, and *The Golem* were later remade, the former by Henrik Galeen in 1926, and the latter by Paul Wegener in 1920, and these later versions are usually classified as Expressionist films. If we combine these precursors and sequels with classics such as *Dr Caligari*, then Expressionist cinema adds up to a sizeable body of work.

¹⁵⁶ Willett, *Expressionism* 11.

¹⁵⁷ Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* 19.

¹⁵⁸ Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: Starword, 1992) 71.

¹⁵⁹ Leutat, "Actualité De L'expressionnisme."

¹⁶⁰ George Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art* (New York; London: Basic Books Inc, 1965) 35.

Both the early films listed by Huaco, and the unproduced film scripts written by contemporary writers and compiled by drama critic Kurt Pinthus in his *Kinobuch* (“The Cinema Book”, 1913) provide evidence of the link between Romanticism and the Expressionist sensibility. As J.D. Barlow has noted:

Many of the collected screenplays in *Das Kinobuch* are expressionistic in character, while nearly all of them betray elements of fantasy and dream. As an historical document, *Das Kinobuch* testifies to the importance of the fantastic and dreamlike to the beginnings of the German cinema [...]. These early German film artists wanted to continue the introspective tradition of German Romanticism. They also recognized the similarities between dream narrative and film narrative in the ability of both to transcend space and time and to represent psychological conflicts with visual immediacy. And it was primarily in the manipulation of light and shadow that they attempted to penetrate this inner space.¹⁶¹

Despite these precursors, it is generally accepted that German Expressionist cinema reached its full flowering with the production of *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* in 1919. When the film premiered in Berlin in 1920, it was instantly recognized as something new in the cinema, due to its “stylized sets, with strange distorted buildings painted on canvas backdrops and flats in a theatrical manner”. In addition, the style of acting of some (but not all) of the characters differed from the relatively naturalistic style used in films up to this point in time.¹⁶² The significance of the film lay not merely in the stylized sets, which were influenced by Expressionist art, nor in the acting style, but in the fact that, according to Paul Rotha, “it was the first significant attempt at the expression of a creative mind in the new medium of cinematography. It broke with realism on the screen: it suggested that a film, instead of being a reality, might be a possible reality; and it brought into play the mental psychology of the audience”.¹⁶³

Dr Caligari displays many of the other stylistic features that came to be associated with Expressionist cinema. The most significant is the striking lighting in the film, which is characterized by “its frequent absence: in this world without daylight, streaks of light and shadow are painted on the set, distorting the viewer’s sense of perspective and

¹⁶¹ Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* 65-66.

¹⁶² Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* 108.

¹⁶³ Paul Rotha, *The Film Till Now: A Survey of World Cinema* (London: Spring Books, 1967) 256.

three-dimensionality and depriving spatial relations of their basis in physical reality. Streaks of light and shadow, painted by the designer, are visible on the ground and on the floor and against walls in defiance of any source of light”.¹⁶⁴ The film uses chiaroscuro effects, which were according to Barlow, “favourite techniques of the expressionists – cinematic equivalents of the bold bright forms and dark outlines of the slightly earlier expressionist painters”.¹⁶⁵ Lotte Eisner identifies chiaroscuro lighting as being a technique which “was to become one of the most easily recognizable characteristics of the German film”, and explains how lighting was used to emphasize the relief and outline of objects or the details of a set. “Sets were lit from the base, accentuating the relief, deforming and transforming the shapes of things by means of a mass of dazzling and unexpected lines. Another technique was the placing of enormous spotlights to one side, at an angle, so as to flood the architecture with light and use the projecting surfaces to produce strident effects of light and shade”.¹⁶⁶

She goes on to discuss, at length, the use of lighting to create *Stimmung* (“mood, atmosphere”), which is one of the distinctive features of Expressionist film, and comments that: “In any German film, the preoccupation with rendering *Stimmung* by suggesting the ‘vibrations of the soul’ is linked to the use of light”.¹⁶⁷ John S. Titford explains how this operates: “Precisely because light or the absence of light gives space its reality, being what Germans call a *Raumgestaltender Faktor*, it can effect a Hoffmanesque transformation of concrete into abstract, living into dead, or vice versa, making us doubt our senses, and even our awareness of figure and ground distinctions”.¹⁶⁸ It is undoubtedly primarily for the purpose of creating *Stimmung* that night-time scenes have such an important function in Expressionist cinema, according to Henri Agel.¹⁶⁹

Ward’s interest in Expressionist lighting is particularly evident in *A State of Siege*, where most of the interior scenes use low-key lighting, and some shots, such as interior close-ups on Malfred’s face, utilize chiaroscuro techniques. What is most striking, however, is the way in which lighting is utilized to create *Stimmung*, in this case, a

¹⁶⁴ Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* 39.

¹⁶⁵ Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* Editor’s Forward.

¹⁶⁶ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 92.

¹⁶⁷ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 199.

¹⁶⁸ John Titford, “Object-Subject Relationships in German Expressionist Cinema,” *Cinema Journal* 11-14.1 (1973): 21.

¹⁶⁹ Cited by Michel Sandras, “M Le Maudit Et L’expressionnisme,” *Image et Son*.169 (1964): 75.

sense of Malfred's increasing unease. *Vigil* also uses lighting, as well as colour, in an expressive way. Much of the lighting in the film is low-key, helping to create an often grim atmosphere. In the post-production process, the primary colours were deliberately filtered out to give intensity to the grey/green images.

In *Dr Caligari*, the lighting often “intensifies the uneasiness conveyed by the spatial distortions of the set”.¹⁷⁰ This atmosphere of uneasiness is also created by the use of diagonals and zigzags, which characterize most scenes. Mike Budd describes the settings of the film as “excessive and transgressive; they are perhaps the first and most important way in which the film deviates from the realist norms of classical narrative cinema. They seem insistently to force their attention on us, to refuse the subordination of ‘background’ to narrative action and character demanded by classical cinema”.¹⁷¹ Objects in *Dr Caligari* also seem to have a malevolent character of their own – the streetlights are misshapen, the trees look as if they have tentacles, walls of corridors seem to lean toward each other. “The real and functional aspects of these objects, buildings and walls have been suppressed to allow Francis to invest them with his own peculiar hostile vitality. This ‘spiritual unrest’ and ‘animation of the inorganic’, to use two of Wilhelm Worringer’s phrases, are typical of Expressionism”, according to Barlow.¹⁷² His explanation of this phenomenon is that:

To the expressionists, this stage of alienation, where physical things seem threatening and even aggressive, was a necessary stage in the process of perceiving the true nature of the world. One went from a mindless state of middle-class respectability, in which one’s physical environment was taken for granted and things were veiled in a socially acceptable way of reflex seeing, to the horrifying realization that things are not what they seem, that they are threatening and demonic, to end with an ecstatic and explosive breakthrough to their ultimate essence.¹⁷³

In Ward’s films, particularly in *Vigil* and *A State of Siege*, inanimate objects, such as the tractor in *Vigil* often seem to have a life of their own. The use of inanimate objects in

¹⁷⁰ Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* 38.

¹⁷¹ Mike Budd, ed., *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories* (New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 12.

¹⁷² Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* 36.

¹⁷³ Barlow, *German Expressionist Film* 136.

connection with the Gothic in *A State of Siege* has already been discussed earlier in this chapter, but Barlow's explanation of this phenomenon seems very appropriate to Malfred Signal's inner journey in the film. Having rejected "a mindless state of middle-class respectability", in which the physical world is taken for granted, Malfred feels threatened by both inanimate objects in her surroundings, and by nature itself. At the end of the film, she experiences some kind of epiphany and reaches a "breakthrough" to the "ultimate essence" of things. "Breakthrough" is represented literally by the smashing of the window, though it appears to carry the tragic implication that Malfred is unable to survive the shock. In *Vigil*, after her father's death, Toss finds the world revealed as a world of horror and menace, but through moments of vision she appears to eventually break through to some kind of understanding and acceptance. (Both endings are, nevertheless, ambiguous rather than triumphant. Arguably, *Caligari* set the precedent for ambiguous endings.)

In the development of Expressionist film, Murnau anthropomorphized not only objects, but the landscape itself. According to Leutrat, Murnau did not hesitate to leave the studio, and was able to achieve the same effects as earlier Expressionist filmmakers whose films were entirely studio-made. The reason for this was: "C'est qu'il a compris que la photographie, déjà, c'était autre chose que la réalité et qu'elle permettait de déceler dans la nature ce qui était digne d'être retenu". ("He understood that photography was already something different from reality and that it was able to reveal in nature what was worthy of being remembered".)¹⁷⁴ Lotte Eisner refers to *beseelte Landschaft*, or *Landschaft mit Seele* ("landscape imbued with soul").¹⁷⁵ In *Nosferatu*, *Faust*, and *Der Müde Tod*, for example, she refers to the wind being used as an ill-omen, presaging disaster.¹⁷⁶ In this way, the landscape and natural phenomena are used to create *Stimmung*, and almost become characters in their own right.

These examples lend themselves to comparison with *A State of Siege*, in which the wind, which batters Malfred's house at night, helps create an atmosphere of unease. Similarly, in *Vigil*, the hostile natural environment is instrumental not only in creating *Stimmung* but also in reflecting the inner life of the characters. The farm itself – isolated, claustrophobic and embattled by indifferent nature, is a powerful correlative

¹⁷⁴ My translation. Leutrat, "Actualité De L'expressionnisme," 69: 90.

¹⁷⁵ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 151.

¹⁷⁶ Eisner, *The Haunted Screen* 158-60.

for the emotional states of its inhabitants.¹⁷⁷ The weather too, interacts with the moods of the characters, an example being the storm that seems to reflect Toss's feelings when she looks at the apocalyptic visions in the family Bible. Of course, many dramatic films use landscape expressively, but few with the same mysterious intensity as Ward's films.

Film historians Kirsten Thompson and David Bordwell go so far as to say that "German Expressionism is distinctive primarily for its use of *mise-en-scène*".¹⁷⁸ What has often been pointed out about the *mise-en-scène* of *Dr Caligari*, for example, is the way in which it seems to reflect the distorted perception of the film's mad protagonist. While the *mise-en-scène* of *A State of Siege* and *Vigil* is not as "excessive and transgressive" as that of *Dr Caligari*, it does bear some comparison in that it dramatically reflects the inner state of the characters. In *Vigil*, as Helen Martin has pointed out, "the self is mirrored in external objects" for example, "Toss in tutu and gumboots".¹⁷⁹ When we speak of "mirrored" or "reflected", however, we need to acknowledge that the correlative does not have a simple, one-to-one relationship (as in a straight-forward allegory) – the interplay of inner and outer can be complex and mysterious.

Thomas Elsaesser has commented on the strategies of narration and the narrative structure in Weimar cinema which he describes as being "much looser and [more] disjointed" than the classical realist text. "As a consequence, the narration gives few clues and circumstantial detail about the characters' motives". In his view, this explains why "(especially American) critics have often complained about German films being 'slow' and lacking suspense; judgements that confirm the comparative indifference to the action codes."¹⁸⁰ In addition, according to Coates: "If narrative can be described as a process of mediation between opposites, then expressionism's focus on the isolated individual may seem to render it antinarrative, apparently antidialectical."¹⁸¹ Both of these comments shed light on the kind of criticisms that have been made of Ward's

¹⁷⁷ The most famous use of the term 'correlative' in English, is of course, T.S.Eliot's discussion of *Hamlet*, where he speaks of Shakespeare failing to create a sufficiently clear 'objective correlative' for Hamlet's state of mind. T.S. Eliot, *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953) 107. From an Expressionist viewpoint, however, some excess of mood and feeling is not necessarily a bad thing. The very mystery and intensity of Ward's films may make them vulnerable to Eliot's type of criticism of *Hamlet*, but I use 'correlative' rather in a *Stimmung* or Expressionist sense.

¹⁷⁸ Thompson and Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* 111.

¹⁷⁹ Helen Martin, "Vincent's Vigil," *Alternative Cinema Magazine* 12.3 & 4 (1984-5): 17.

¹⁸⁰ Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historic Imaginary* 81.

¹⁸¹ Coates, *The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror* 156.

narratives, which often focus on the isolated individual and rely on inference and association rather than action codes or oppositions of the usual kind.

Striking visual composition is something else that Ward's films have in common with German Expressionist film - certain shots in *A State of Siege*, for example, seem as carefully composed as a painting. In *Vigil*, a great deal of attention is paid to unusual camera angles – for example, the low angle shot of Ethan carrying the body of Justin (reminiscent of religious paintings of the seventeenth century) or the eerie shot of Toss holding herself underwater in the bath. So intense is the emphasis on angle and composition that a shot that is *not* unusual or striking in a Ward film feels like a wasted opportunity.

One interpretation of the underlying principle of Expressionism is that it is a type of modern-day pessimism -according to Peter Krai, “le drame qu’est pour les expressionnistes toute existence, la souffrance, le déracinement, la dépossession du Moi par les forces ténébreuses et étrangères – sociaux ou purement intérieures” (“the drama that is for the expressionists the whole of existence, the suffering, tearing out of roots, the dispossession of oneself by strange and dark forces – social or purely interior”). This pessimism is, however, according to Krai, counterbalanced by the ecstasy and intoxication of the notion of living life to the maximum intensity (as we suggested earlier in the discussion of grotesque and sublime elements).¹⁸² This view seems to echo Barlow's analysis of the Expressionist's journey, from a phase of alienation in which the world seems threatening and demonic, to the ecstasy of a breakthrough to the “ultimate essence” of the world - a notion we discussed earlier with regard to *A State of Siege*.

Coates describes this awareness of a world beyond the material as an awareness of “the uncanny”, and describes the *doppelgänger*, a figure prevalent in both Romantic and Expressionist works of art, as “a key image in the repertoire of the uncanny”.¹⁸³ Patrice Petro similarly links the “fantastic film” of Weimar cinema with the theme of the double, or split self, which is “commonly employed to explore the crisis of self in terms of a crisis of vision”. She goes on to say that: “fantastic films might be said to destabilize or complicate identification, by rendering vision and selfhood

¹⁸² My translation. Petr Krai, "Autour D'une Brûlure: Le Cinéma Expressionniste Et Ses Commentateurs," *Positif*, 291 (1985): 42.

¹⁸³ Coates, The Gorgon's Gaze: German Cinema, Expressionism, and the Image of Horror 11.

ambiguous”.¹⁸⁴ As discussed earlier in this chapter, the notion of the divided self as an intrinsic part of the German national psyche is something that Ward has commented on as being of particular interest to him. It might be argued that his own sense of having a divided identity is partly a motivating factor for his interest in the divided self. In his words: “I come from Catholic Irish on one hand, and Jewish German on the other, and so I have a natural interest in both underlying traditions [...]. I was interested in living in a Maori community for two years because that was part of who I am”.¹⁸⁵

Contexts of Expressionism

Why did such a cinema come into being in Germany at this time? The specific social and historical answers to that question seem hardly relevant to a filmmaker in New Zealand in the 1980s. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider them if our comparison is to be carried through fully. Willett comments that: “One of the remarkable features of German Expressionism as against any other avant-garde movement before the Second World War, was that its conventions became so widely accepted [that ...], as a result of this, it seemed to permeate the whole cultural life of the Weimar Republic in a way for which there was no parallel elsewhere”.¹⁸⁶ In the same way in which Hauser has argued that the growth of Romanticism was in part a reaction to industrialization, critics such as Mike Budd have argued that the Expressionist movement in the arts

was part of and a response to large social and political transformations; modernism in the arts responds to modernization in all aspects of life. The rise of industrial capitalism in Europe and elsewhere in the nineteenth century brought people from rural areas into the rapidly growing cities, assaulted their traditions, subjected them to the market and the wage system as never before, and produced a new class of urbanized workers with interests often opposed to those of the dominant bourgeois class of owners and managers. Artists, writers and other cultural workers acutely sensitive to these changes found themselves in a chaotic world of unstable values and identities, where their work became a

¹⁸⁴ Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* 33.

¹⁸⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

¹⁸⁶ Willett, *Expressionism* 10.

particular kind of commodity, subject to the vicissitudes of an irrational market.¹⁸⁷

Certainly Ward's films emphasize rural/urban tensions. The tensions can run both ways, in the sense that Ward's mother had the shock of moving from an urbanised European context to a backblock farm in New Zealand. The fictional characters in the films, such as Avik in *Map of the Human Heart*, often make equally dramatic shifts. Other dramatic shifts in Ward's work include: from life to death in *What Dreams May Come*, and from medieval times to the modern world in *The Navigator*.

Anton Kaes has made an interesting link between Expressionism and Medievalism:

Warum gab es nach dem ersten Weltkrieg inmitten von Urbanisierung, Industrialisierung und einem nie vorher so deutlich gespürten Modernisierungsschub, ein solch bemerkenswertes Interesse an mittelalterlichen Figuren, am Okkulten und Mythischen, an Figuren wie dem mittelalterlichen Irrenhausarzt und Mörder Dr Caligari und dem Hypnotiseur und Börsenmakler Dr Mabuse, an Golems und Vampiren?

(“Why, after World War I, in the middle of urbanization, industrialization, and a never before so clearly noticeable thrust towards modernization, was there such a remarkable interest in medieval figures, in the occult and the mythical, in figures such as the medieval doctor in a lunatic asylum, and murderer, Dr Caligari, and the hypnotist and stockbroker, Dr Mabuse, in Golems and vampires?”)¹⁸⁸

Kaes goes on to answer the question by arguing that Expressionist films such as *Dr Caligari* and *Dr Mabuse, der Spieler* (Fritz Lang, 1922) show the dark and hidden side of the apparent progressiveness, rationality and modernity of Weimar society and that the depiction of tyrants and of totalitarian order and omnipotent control can be explained as compensation for the increasing fragmentation and feeling of helplessness of modern industrial life. This view is similar to Marc Silbermann's assertion that Expressionist films “opened up new aesthetic ways of creating and organizing social fantasies: by valorising the autonomous subject against the oppressive rationalism

¹⁸⁷ Budd, ed., *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari: Texts, Contexts, Histories* 13.

¹⁸⁸ My translation. Jung and Schatzberg, eds., *Filmkultur Zur Zeit Der Weimarer Republik* 61.

imposed in industrial society, by prioritising myth and the fantastic over the reality principle and by instrumentalising the growing independence of visual perception from the other senses”.¹⁸⁹ These ideas will certainly be relevant to the medieval elements of Ward’s films.

It is also important to consider the production of German Expressionist films in the context of established industries. Thus, “From an industry viewpoint, Expressionism was the result of product-differentiation, an attempt to compete with the Hollywood product in the European market”.¹⁹⁰ Despite the relatively small number of Expressionist films produced, the importance of Expressionist cinema for the German film industry “cannot be underestimated”, according to Silberman. Not only did it provide the industry with economic processes. “Far from being the norm, these films, perhaps no more than forty of them, were made with a specific goal: to create a quality product and attract middle-class audiences to the cinema”.¹⁹¹ Elsaesser points out that many films in the early 1920s “were produced to coincide with the opening of new picture palaces in Berlin”, in order to attract a “specifically bourgeois audience”.¹⁹² In addition, according to Erich Pommer, the producer of the majority of these films: “The German film industry made ‘stylised films’ to make money, and to try to compete with Hollywood”. He explains that while the Danes and the French had their own film industry, and while the Hollywood industry, by the end of World War I was moving towards world supremacy, Germany needed to provide something different that would be able to compete with these other “a distinct image of cultural legitimacy, which became a competitive factor both for domestic and international audiences”, but it also “introduced innovative modes of representation and functional changes in the status of art and entertainment for the middle classes”.¹⁹³ There are some elements here that obviously have little relevance to Ward’s situation, but others that do remind us of the debates that surrounded Ward’s early films. Should the newly emerged New Zealand feature film industry imitate Hollywood and concentrate on popular entertainment, or should it seek to pursue its own distinct path, following the example of the European art film?

¹⁸⁹ Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* 20.

¹⁹⁰ Erich Pommer quoted in Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art* 36.

¹⁹¹ Sabine Hake, *The Cinema's Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany 1907-1933* (Lincoln and London, Canada: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) 109.

¹⁹² Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historic Imaginary* 59.

¹⁹³ Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* 19.



Figure 1: *A State of Siege* (bath cleaning scene): An example of Ward's use of chiaroscuro lighting

New Zealand's Expressionist and Gothic Traditions

While the Romantic movement had its roots in European art traditions, there is a New Zealand strain of Romanticism clearly visible in some New Zealand landscape painting. It could also be argued that there is also a New Zealand strain of Expressionism in the work of artists such as Rudi Gopas (a German immigrant), and in the work of writers such as Janet Frame. The 1984 exhibition of selected New Zealand artists entitled "Anxious Images" was described in its catalogue as a reflection of the "strong expressionist tradition" which had been "extremely powerful" in New Zealand art in the twenty years prior to the exhibition.¹⁹⁴ This tradition is linked primarily to the South Island where the influence of Rudi Gopas as a charismatic art school teacher "provides a direct link back to earlier German expressionism and accounts for much of the southern concern for anxious images". The "Anxious Images" exhibition included the work of Philip Clairmont, "whose work clearly continues in the German expressionist tradition of apocalyptic visions and hectic attitudes toward form [...], breaking through exteriors to expose the tangled web of emotions which seems to characterise the human condition".¹⁹⁵ Other artists included in the exhibition were Barry Cleavin, Jacqueline Fahey, Jeffrey Harris, Tony Fomison, Vivian Lynn, Alan Pearson, Peter Peryer, Sylvia Siddell and Michael Smither. What they had in common was that their principal concerns were "the expression and communication of powerful emotion: unease, anxiety, anger, fear and pain". The works by these artists shared "no overriding stylistic affinities" but they displayed similarities "in content and intention rather than in outward form".¹⁹⁶ Ward was directly influenced by this local tradition of Expressionism as has been noted by Laurence Simmons, whose review of John Downie's *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey*, makes reference to Ward's training in Fine Arts at Ilam, Canterbury University and the influence of the "strong tradition of Expressionist painting in New Zealand, a tradition which rehearses many of Ward's themes".¹⁹⁷

The atmosphere of unease which underlies this strain of art is mirrored in New Zealand film, according to Sam Neill and Judy Rymer, whose film *Cinema of Unease: A*

¹⁹⁴ *Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art (Exhibition Catalogue)*, Foreward.

¹⁹⁵ *Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art (Exhibition Catalogue)*, 11.

¹⁹⁶ *Anxious Images: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art (Exhibition Catalogue)*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Lawrence Simmons, "Navigating Vincent Ward," *Illusions*.34 (2000): 46.

Personal Journey by Sam Neill (1995) posits the notion that New Zealand's national cinema is a reflection of our troubled psyche. While Neill and Rymer have drawn attention to some psychological aspects of New Zealand film, they do not clearly differentiate between the various manifestations of the "troubled reflection of ourselves" that they see in so many New Zealand films. The discussion of this aspect is primarily limited to one strand - the blokey "Man Alone" phenomenon, epitomized by films such as *Smash Palace* (Roger Donaldson, 1981) and *Bad Blood* (Mike Newell, 1981), based on the true story of mass murderer, Stanley Graham.¹⁹⁸ *Cinema of Unease* points to John Mulgan's *Man Alone* (1939) as being the literary antecedent of this filmic strand.

Other films cited in *A Cinema of Unease* as exhibiting a similar atmosphere of unease include: *Bad Blood* (Mike Newell, 1981), *The Lost Tribe* (John Laing, 1985), *Sleeping Dogs* (Roger Donaldson, 1977), *The Scarecrow* (Sam Pillsbury, 1982), *The Navigator*, and *Smash Palace* (Roger Donaldson, 1981). What many of these films have in common with Romanticism and Expressionism is a subjective point-of-view and a focus on inner, as well as exterior reality. However, in all these films except Ward's, the social dimension of the "Man Alone" tradition seems a more important factor. In relation to *Vigil* Neill and Rymer comment: "This sense of the precarious is something one often feels in New Zealand films. The feeling that something awful is about to begin". This is a valid link with other New Zealand films, although the unease evoked in *Vigil* can not be so easily related to social or political causes. In addition, the subjectivity of a film such as *The Scarecrow* is a matter of first-person narration rather than the dreamlike states explored by Ward who is interested in areas of the mind beyond the everyday self.

Brian McDonnell lists a number of other films that might be considered as typical of the "kiwi Gothic" strain in that they "deal with the dark, troubled side of the New Zealand character". They include *Skin Deep* (Geoff Steven, 1978), *Trespases* (Peter Sharp, 1984), *Heart of the Stag* (Michael Firth, 1984), *Jack Be Nimble* (Garth Maxwell, 1993), *The God Boy* (Murray Reece, 1976), *Utu* (Geoff Murphy, 1983), *Trial Run* (Melanie Read, 1984), *Mr Wrong* (Gaylene Preston, 1985), *The Quiet Earth* (Geoff Murphy, 1985), *Mauri* (Merata Mita, 1988), *An Angel at My Table* (Jane Campion, 1990), *Once*

¹⁹⁸ Graham's story and the various literary and screen versions of the story are explored in depth in Jones, *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose* 296-312.

Were Warriors (Lee Tamahori, 1994), *Te Rua* (Barry Barclay, 1991), *Crush* (Alison McLean, 1992), *Heavenly Creatures* (Peter Jackson, 1994), and *Broken English* (Gregor Nicholas, 1996). McDonnell refers to the background to many of these films as being a “brooding, ominous (even Gothic) landscape into which the hero retreats but where he seldom feels at home”.¹⁹⁹

Most of the films mentioned by McDonnell do not necessarily have stylistic features which identify them as Gothic, but it could be argued that “kiwi Gothic” is better described as relating to “affect” rather than style or genre. However, at a recent conference on the Antipodean Gothic, Ian Conrich classified certain New Zealand films into categories (or sub-genres) of Gothic film.²⁰⁰ Peter Jackson’s *Braindead* (1992), *The Frighteners* (1996) and *Bad Taste* (1986) were classified, according to Conrich, as belonging to the Gothic sub-genre of “Gothic grotesque”; *The Piano* and *Vigil* were classified as “rural Gothic”; and *The Navigator* and *Desperate Remedies* (Stewart Main and Peter Wells, 1993), were classified as “historical Gothic”. Conrich also included in his list of “kiwi Gothic” films, several short films such as *The Singing Trophy* (Grant Lahood, 1993) and *Homekill* (Andrew Bancroft, 2000), which he classified as “farming Gothic”. Conrich argued that in New Zealand Gothic, there is an “implosion of binaries” including: domestic/wild, seen/unseen, known/unknown, community/outsider, mastery/slave (referring to the pioneers’ desire to master the land), and abundance/excess. Similarly, Estella Tincknell argues that *The Piano* appropriates a number of features of the Gothic melodrama genre.²⁰¹

It could perhaps be better argued that while there are a few New Zealand films which can be seen as having stylistic or generic features originating from the European Gothic tradition, this tradition has been ‘translated’ into a local, New Zealand form of Gothic. The European Gothic tradition for example, is associated with naturalised settings that have a deep sense of interiority. The “kiwi Gothic” tradition is more interested in the landscape having psychological undertones. This anthropomorphic interpretation of the landscape is a feature which Neill and Rymer identify as typical of the aesthetic of the

¹⁹⁹ Brian McDonnell, *Fresh Approaches to Film* (Auckland: Addison, Wesley, Longman NZ Ltd, 1998) 22.

²⁰⁰ Ian Conrich, "A Perilous Paradise: New Zealand's Cinema of the Gothic," *Antipodean Gothic Symposium* (Massey University, Albany: 2002), vol.

²⁰¹ Ian Conrich and David Woods, eds., *New Zealand - a Pastoral Paradise?* (Nottingham, England: Kakapo Books, 2000).

“Cinema of Unease”. As the film explains, directors like Paul Maunder, who worked for the National Film Unit, went on in their own films to show a very different vision of New Zealand from the beautiful New Zealand depicted in Unit documentaries. These directors “would turn their backs on the picturesque. They saw the landscape as a metaphor for a psychological interior and looked to the dark heart of the menacing land”.²⁰²

Vigil seems clearly to emerge from this local tradition as well as from its European counterpart. The story is told primarily from the point-of-view of Toss (played by Fiona Kay), a highly impressionable and imaginative child who is learning to cope with the death of her father on their isolated farm. The sparse bleak landscape reflects the emotional state of the characters, who to a large degree, are too inarticulate to express their turmoil. The storm that batters Toss as she builds a shrine to her father in the hope of bringing him back to life, seems to better express her inner conflict than she is able to do herself. In *A State of Siege*, too, the intensifying noise of the windstorm howling around the house seems to reflect Malfred’s state of mind. However, while the landscape is an integral part of the characters, Ward is more interested in exploring an interior rather than an exterior landscape, and in a private rather than an objective or social reality.

Typical of the kiwi Gothic, according to Lawn, are films that “depict an intruder who disrupts a family or community, often exposing underlying stresses”. She points out that: “Our monsters tend to be interior: they are experiences of intense psychological states, often with sexual undertones within isolated nuclear families”.²⁰³ The character of Ethan in *Vigil* is an interesting one in the light of these statements. He is an enigmatic character of whom little is known in terms of his background, where he came from and why he suddenly appears in the isolated valley when Toss’s father is killed. At first there seems to be some link between his appearance and Toss’s father’s death, especially when his first appearance on screen is carrying the dead man over his shoulders. Eventually he becomes the centre of a love triangle in which Toss, the young girl on the verge of sexual maturity has become a rival to her mother and as such, he represents a threat to the precarious balance of relationships within the family. What is

²⁰² Neil and Rymer, *Cinema of Unease: A Personal Journey*, 1995.

²⁰³ Jenny Lawn, *Massey Magazine*, 2001, e-journal, Massey University, Available: http://masseynews.massey.ac.nz/magazine/2001_Nov/stories/gothic.html, 7 Aug 2002.

so effective about the film and what links it so closely to Gothic traditions, however, is its atmosphere of unease and sense of the hostility of the environment. Both *A State of Siege* and *Vigil* are good examples of how the work of Vincent Ward is not only directly connected to the European gothic tradition, but has also participated in a kiwi Gothic tradition. If there is a difference between Ward's work and that of his compatriots, it lies in his shifts of emphasis – from social and political to philosophical and religious, from conscious to subconscious and from narrative to myth. The detailed analyses of Ward's films that follow will provide many examples.

This chapter has examined conceptions of Romanticism, the Gothic and Expressionism and the links between them, and attempted to detail in what respects the aesthetic of Ward's early films may draw upon, or at least parallel, these northern European artistic traditions, as well as their local variants. There is the strong possibility of some direct influence (through Ward's part-German ancestry, his art school interests, and his strong awareness of the films of the period); but a less direct parallel can also be drawn, using the aesthetics of Expressionism (defined in a broad rather than an historically-specific sense) as a starting point for understanding Ward's aesthetic. The exploration and projection of the inner self, the effective creation of *Stimmung*, and the "visionary artist" are a few of the notions associated with Romanticism and Expressionism that will help us to grasp the distinctive aspects of this director's remarkable body of work. While growing out of New Zealand situations and influences, his films also draw on these overseas traditions to create a new kind of cultural and stylistic mix.

Chapter Two

Ward's Childhood and Education

The previous chapter examined Vincent Ward's aesthetic in relation to intellectual history, with particular reference to Romanticism and Expressionism. This chapter will relate Ward's aesthetic to its immediate social contexts - to the ways in which his family, upbringing, training and education may have contributed to the shaping of his artistic vision. The first part of the chapter will discuss Ward's experience of growing up on a farm in the Wairarapa - his family's and friends' perceptions of him as a child, as well as his own recollections of his childhood, his parents' background and attitudes, and his education at primary and secondary school. The second part of the chapter will discuss his training as a filmmaker at Ilam School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury in the 1970s. Although Ward has himself described his early years in Edge of the Earth, his brief memoir leaves a number of gaps. It is an extraordinarily valuable book for an understanding of Ward's creative interests, but it does not seek to be a comprehensive autobiography. Some myths and misconceptions have developed in the tradition of journalistic writing on Ward. The present chapter, based on interviews with friends and family as well as circumstantial evidence, is an attempt to assemble the first detailed account of Ward's early life that can complement his own personal perspective.

In an interview in the San Francisco Examiner, Ward says of *A State of Siege* and *In Spring One Plants Alone* that both films contain "a very strong sense of the land".²⁰⁴ It is *Vigil*, however, that most strongly reflects a sense of the New Zealand landscape as an overpowering force. The way the landscape is represented in *Vigil*, while it follows many New Zealand cultural precedents, may have particular links with Ward's own experiences of growing up on a farm in the Wairarapa.

Childhood and Schooling

Ward was born in 1956, the youngest of four children by six years, while the family was living at Morrison's Bush, about five miles from Greytown, and seven miles from Martinborough. Ward's eldest sister, Ingrid Ward, recalls that, although there are

²⁰⁴ Scott, "Writing Poetry for the Screen," E3.

parallels between the farm where she and her siblings grew up and the farm setting of *Vigil*, Morrison's Bush was not an isolated place, in that they had close next door neighbours on one side of them, and there were plenty of children their age to play with. They were also on the school bus route and were picked up every morning both for primary and secondary school. She recalls that they all had bicycles from an early age, and occasionally cycled into town, but they were still fairly isolated – for example, they were “too far really to go to the movies regularly”.²⁰⁵ Ingrid does concede that growing up at Morrison's Bush may have been a more isolated experience for Vincent, because he was so much younger than his other siblings who were sent to boarding school when he was still young, leaving him at home as virtually an only child.

Marianne Chandler, Ward's second-eldest sister, perceived the farm as being isolated for the reason that her mother had to be very careful with money, and “even though she made sure that we could have things like ballet lessons, we definitely didn't waste trips into town. So I think for all of us, the farm was isolating”. She does however comment that Vincent was “very sociable” and always had “a large crowd of friends”.²⁰⁶

David Field, one of Vincent's friends at primary and high school, remembers Vincent as “a loner, self-absorbed, having favourite places in a world of his own in the hills”.²⁰⁷ In his view, *Vigil* is autobiographical in its depiction of the seclusion of farm life in that when he and Vincent were growing up, they only saw other children at the weekends. Despite this tendency towards living in the world of his imagination, Vincent did many of the typical things that country children do, such as playing with slug guns, belonging to a Scouts group and playing rugby. David recalls that Vincent always liked to take risks, pushing himself to the limit while playing rugby and getting concussion so many times that he became known as “the concussion kid”. He was also always involved in creative projects such as making plaster casts of toys. Later, while living in Christchurch at the same time as Vincent was there and seeing quite a lot of him, David perceived Vincent as being a “very studious, dedicated and self-disciplined” student who often “refused to go out on the town with the boys” because he was pursuing his art.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁰⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²⁰⁷ Lynette Read, interview with David Field, 15 April 1999.

²⁰⁸ Lynette Read, interview with David Field, 15 April 1999.

In Edge of the Earth, Ward describes himself as an imaginative child who inhabited a world that “was partly based in reality, partly the creation of my imagination”.²⁰⁹ He “played in the shadows of other people’s imaginations: Scott and his Ivanhoe, Grimms’ fairy stories and the Knights of the Round Table”. This points to the influence of his father, who loved literature and no doubt read these classic tales to his youngest son.²¹⁰ The world of imagination occupied the boy’s mind to the extent that he was so vague and preoccupied, he did not last long as a Catholic altar boy because he would “ring the gong at the wrong time during Mass”.²¹¹

Ward recalls himself as being “Not a lonely child, but an alone child. I was the youngest, and because my sisters and brother were mostly away at boarding school, I spent a lot of time on my own”.²¹² He believes that the boredom he experienced living in relative isolation encouraged him to become reflective. “I grew up on a farm and I was bored [...]. You also find with people who have had illnesses or something that stops them from engaging in the world that sometimes they’re forced to be more reflective [...]. That affects their view of the world later on, because they’re capable of a reflective approach”.²¹³

Some of the childhood memories Ward describes in Edge of the Earth – such as his father tossing the bodies of dead sheep over the precipice of their farm into the forest, or a hawk diving out of the sky and plucking out the eyes of a dead lamb – inform the narrative and setting of *Vigil*. He has recalled the experience of helping his father “in the bloody business of docking and tailing lambs”, a scene which is repeated in *Vigil* when Toss helps Ethan dock lambs and ends up with her face covered in blood.²¹⁴

Ward’s father, Pat, was a third-generation New Zealand farmer. He had grown up in an isolated area on a farm near Martinborough and eventually acquired his own land as a returned serviceman after World War Two. For Ward’s mother, however, Morrison’s Bush must have seemed like the end of the earth. Judy Ward had been born in Hamburg to a German Jewish family who escaped from the Nazi regime in 1933 and went to live in Israel. She met Vincent’s father, who was sixteen and a half years older

²⁰⁹ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 65.

²¹⁰ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 66.

²¹¹ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 66.

²¹² Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 65.

²¹³ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

²¹⁴ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 66.

than her, on the train to Jerusalem during the war while she was serving in the British army.²¹⁵ After their marriage at the end of the war, she came to New Zealand to live.

In an interview for this thesis, Judy Ward reflected on the difficulties she and Pat encountered when they arrived in New Zealand, and on the harshness of the environment. She recalls they were in a very difficult situation: “Pat’s parents had given him a small piece of land, but it wasn’t enough to make an economic unit, and he was trying to buy surrounding area which was owned by an absentee landlady”. Eventually the government Rehabilitation Department responsible for assisting returned servicemen, after some bureaucratic delays, bought the land for them, but initially they lived in “a shack” which was on wheels and had to be towed onto the site with a tractor. Judy recalls that: “It had no water and it had no toilet. I was pregnant and it was winter and we used the gorse bushes for a toilet. Pat carried the water in two buckets from across the paddock and the creek”.²¹⁶

The picture she presents of life on a farm in the Wairarapa is a very different one from the life she had led as a privileged girl, growing up in Germany in a middle-class Jewish family. She had been born Edith Rosenbacher in Hamburg in 1923, but later took the name Jehudit (Hebrew for Judith) when she went to live in Palestine. Her father was a businessman and her mother, a professional classical musician, who spent her time at the Conservatory in Hamburg, teaching and studying singing and piano. Judy and her sister had been looked after by a *Kindermädchen* (nanny) and when they were older, by a cook. The children “lived in the kitchen with Ilma” (the cook) and had a lot less to do with their parents than most New Zealand children do. According to Judy the children “were allowed to have dinner with the parents at night, but our lives were quite separate. We inhabited the back part of the apartment and the grown-ups inhabited the front”.²¹⁷

The Rosenbacher family was not wealthy, but they were comfortably-off. However, their lives began to change as the Nazis gained power in Germany prior to World War Two. As Ward recounts: “Like many others, the Rosenbachers considered themselves more German than Jewish – indeed, Edith’s father had won the Iron Cross in the Great

²¹⁵ At that time, Jewish leaders were encouraging young people to join the British Army in the hopes that their support for the war effort would lead to the Jews having a greater say in the fate of Palestine after the war. (Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 46.)

²¹⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

²¹⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

War. But it was becoming harder to close one's eyes to what was happening in Germany, as Jews began disappearing without trace".²¹⁸ The Rosenbachers were forced to sell their home and furniture and the girls were expelled from the state school system, so Edith and her sister were sent to a Jewish boarding school in Berlin. The Rosenbacher family was fortunate in that Edith's father realized the danger they faced living in Nazi Germany and took the family to Palestine before the outbreak of World War Two. Initially the father went on ahead to Palestine. The mother and the girls were to follow but Edith's mother had to remain behind for some time when she became ill in Trieste that the two girls had to be put on the boat to Palestine by themselves. When they arrived, Edith's sister was sent to a kibbutz near Haifa and Edith was looked after by Polish friends of her father until her mother arrived about two years later.

How she met Ward's father Pat during the war is described in Edge of the Earth, and it is a story that has made an impact on his work, particularly *Map of the Human Heart*, in which lovers have to cope with considerable difficulties and are separated by circumstances. (This will be discussed in the relevant chapter on the film.) Ward's father Pat joined the army at the age of thirty-three and was sent to the Middle East, but he was severely burned to the extent of being unable to use a rifle. In 1945, while waiting to be sent home to New Zealand he and a friend took a trip to Cedars, north of Beirut and Pat sat next to Edith Rosenbacher on the train. As a result of this encounter, Pat changed his plans and spent a week in Jerusalem with Edith instead of going to Cedars. Shortly afterwards he began making arrangements for them to be married. Once they were married, Edith would become a New Zealand citizen and be provided with free passage to New Zealand.

However, as Ward recounts, there were many difficulties in the way of the marriage. Her family was suspicious of Pat, finding it "strange that a man of thirty-eight would not be married and have children back in New Zealand, and they thought that like many soldiers, he was lying about his past".²¹⁹ There were also bureaucratic difficulties in getting official permission from the Egyptian chargé d'affaires for Edith to join him in Egypt. Eventually, Pat confronted the chargé d'affaires. According to Ward: "My father asked him to be seated, motioned to the gun and assured him that four years at the front had made him an excellent shot". He got what he wanted. Ward comments,

²¹⁸ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 39-40.

²¹⁹ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 53.

“Even now, after hearing this story for years, I am still amused by the Errol Flynn bravado of it all and moved by his acting so desperately out of a real love for a woman he had only seen for a week”.²²⁰

Ward also comments on being struck by the chance nature of events in his parents’ love story. The story as he tells it was that:

Before my father returned to Cairo, my mother went home to Haifa, and they agreed to meet under the clock outside Barclay’s Bank there to say goodbye. He waited for an hour, not knowing that she’d been very ill. Pat realized then that he did not know my mother’s last name or where she lived. He had no idea how to get in touch with her again. He was just about to go when he saw her running through the crowds towards him (and here I am decades later urging her to run faster, urging him not to go yet, otherwise they will never see each other again and their story will never be finished).²²¹

Ward’s parents’ experiences have had a considerable influence on his work. Louis Nowra, who later worked with Ward as script-writer on *Map of the Human Heart*, comments that the idea of fate and the notion of scarring (from his father being burned by petrol in the war) are threads which run through his work.²²² Bridget Ikin, who was a production assistant on *Vigil*, contends that: “a lot of his films were inspired by her [his mother]” and cites as an example “the woman transplanted in *Vigil*, the urban woman come to live in the backblocks”. She also comments that some of the later films “seemed to be a poem to his parents’ marriage [...], the power of their love for each other and the context in which they met through the war” She believes “he’s been very affected by his perception of his parents”.²²³

Back in New Zealand, Edith, who had taken the name Jehudit in Israel, came to be known as Judy. She comments on the difficulties of fitting in with the farming community in the Wairarapa:

I found the people very very nice, but keeping me at arm’s length. They were very polite [...] but I couldn’t get close to them because they were too polite

²²⁰ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 54.

²²¹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 52.

²²² Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

²²³ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

[...]. The people on the farms were friendly, but they were never friends, they did not admit me into their midst really [...]. It had to do with the time, New Zealanders were very insular [...] and they had not yet learnt to mix with people from other places. They thought anybody who wasn't exactly like them was odd. They definitely had goodwill because our house burned down [...] and they were wonderful to us, I mean they gave us so much. We had to set a room aside for everything that was given to us. So they meant well, but they had not yet learnt to relate with people from other places.²²⁴

Judy found it difficult to adapt to many things about New Zealand society. Ward mentions that: "She found it hard adjusting to a country where drinking was a major part of the social fabric [...]. Even the conversation was like nothing she had ever heard before". She had never heard people discussing racing and found it difficult to join in with the farming talk and the news about neighbours and people she did not know. She describes herself as just sitting there "like a shadow, a silent shadow".²²⁵

The difficulties and loneliness she suffered were exacerbated by the constant rain and lack of money, as well as lack of company, including that of her husband. Ward comments that: "after about a year, they moved into an old schoolhouse, where they had their first child. Judy had two children before she had an armchair, three children before she had hot water". Meanwhile, "Pat spent most of his time working – working for others to get money, or working on his own land".²²⁶ Ward describes his father as a perfectionist, "totally driven by his vision of creating the perfect farm", despite the resistance of the land to his efforts.²²⁷ At night he rebuilt the old house, but while he was burning off the old paint with a blowtorch, the house caught on fire. His mother tried to call the fire brigade, but the phone was on a party line and Ward recounts how his mother was too shy to tell the couple already on the line that she needed to interrupt the call. Consequently, the house burnt down, except for one wall that remained, and from that, Vincent's father rebuilt what became Vincent's childhood home.²²⁸

²²⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

²²⁵ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 58.

²²⁶ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 61.

²²⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 61.

²²⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 62.

Despite the difficulties, Judy made a conscious decision to try and integrate with the society in which she found herself. “I myself made up my mind when I came here that I would not seek out anybody from my own background. I would not seek out other Jewish people, let alone German Jewish. And I’ve stuck to that, because I wanted to become what I felt was all of a piece. I didn’t want to be bitsy, itsy-bitsy you know. I wanted to be integrated and I went after that quite consciously”.²²⁹ That she succeeded in becoming integrated into Greytown society is attested to by her daughter Ingrid, who talks about her being “very much involved in community affairs [...]. She used to lead a very active social life particularly geared around helping people. She has more visitors than I do [...] and I think it was because she grew up surrounded by people”.²³⁰

Judy did not speak to her children about her experiences prior to coming to New Zealand until, as adults, they approached her to tell them. When they did finally ask her, she felt that “it was very satisfying to me. For the first time, somebody wanted to know. You know, it’s funny, when I was in the army, I used to think, my children and grandchildren will be so interested in when mother (or grandmother) was in the army, and they’ll want to know all about it. In fact, it never came up”.²³¹

Ingrid Ward reiterates that her mother did not talk very much about her German Jewish background, and did not speak German to the children, except for a few German rhymes they learned when they were young. She attributes this to the commonly-held belief of the time that children would not learn English well if they learned another language. Ingrid believes that her mother encountered prejudice because “she was German-speaking and some people just assumed she was German straight after the War. She was treated as though she was German. And then there was other prejudice of Jews. I never felt it myself, but I think she felt it”.²³²

Judy talks about “an inner loneliness” that she experienced, and her perception that her children were uncomfortable because she was different from other mothers. She recalls:

I expected the children to be embarrassed and I never came to school if I could help it. I remember coming to school to retrieve a piece of clothing. Paddy was

²²⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April, 1999.

²³⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April, 1999.

²³¹ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April, 1999.

²³² Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April, 1999.

dreadfully absent-minded about his clothes. Of course we couldn't afford to lose clothes because we had no money. I came to retrieve something from the lost property box and I saw Ingrid in the playground but I went straight to where I needed to go, and I didn't acknowledge her because I didn't want to embarrass her.²³³

Vincent's other sister, Marianne, did not feel embarrassed by her mother. She states: "We knitted differently, we warmed the butter differently, salted the butter differently. I was quite proud of her".²³⁴ Ingrid Ward's view of her mother was somewhat different from her sister's:

With my mother, half her identity was somewhere else and she was very definitely from another country and very definitely different from other people [...]. It wasn't just that she was culturally different, my mother did different things from other mothers at this time. She did not believe in having her cake tins full and she said so, whereas other farmers' wives filled their cake tins [...]. And if we lost things, like lost clothes, she would come to school and look for them, which other mothers didn't.

In contrast to her sister, Ingrid did find her mother's behaviour embarrassing in some respects: "She was actually a lot more - I don't know whether assertive is the word - but she was just a lot more definite than a lot of other mothers that I knew, who were sort of kindly farmers' wives who cooked large amounts of food [...] and didn't assert themselves. They were sort of plump and bustling and mum wasn't any of those things. And she had a fair sense of the rights of women too".²³⁵

In view of her attitudes towards women's rights, Judy had further difficulties adjusting to the somewhat rigid attitudes towards men's and women's roles at that time in New Zealand. Ingrid comments that her father "was a bit of a perfectionist" and that he regarded the farm as 'his farm'. "Mum would look after the children and dad would look after the farm and I think she felt a bit excluded from decision-making. And she had no independent income. Dad was kind, [...] he was benevolent, you know, it was a kind of benevolent paternalistic kind of thing". She adds: "Dad would have said yes to

²³³ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April, 1999.

²³⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²³⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

everything, but on the other hand, she would have had to ask him. And it was his country [...] and he was nearly forty [...]. It was his country and he knew all about it”.²³⁶

Judy had come from a very different culture. Ingrid describes her mother’s family as being “quite cultured” and her mother and her sisters as being “strong women” who came from a strong matriarchal family. This could be seen as accounting to some extent for Ward’s first three films centring on female characters and for his fascination with characters who are outsiders in society. Certainly, others such as Graeme Barnes, a high school friend of Vincent’s, feel that Vincent was like his mother in terms of his looks and personality and that perhaps he identified more strongly with his mother than his father.²³⁷ Marianne describes her mother as being “articulate and forthright, with strong opinions on life”, but she concedes that the whole family “has strong opinions” and that they always had “interesting” family discussions.²³⁸

Both the parents were “very intelligent and educated and wanting to discuss current issues”, according to Ingrid. She talks about her father growing up in the Depression, on an isolated farm. He attended a one-teacher primary school and then a Catholic boarding school, but had to leave because his family could not afford to pay for his schooling during the Depression, something he regretted all his life. She describes him as being “self-educated” and having a “wonderful grasp of language, a better grasp than any of us because he’d read a lot good literature and he liked language”.²³⁹ Marianne states that their father was the one who was “in charge of” all their education. Initially, he did his duty and sent the children to Catholic schools but he also wanted his children to be educated in a coeducational environment and subsequently they all attended local high schools.²⁴⁰

Pat’s love of literature had a strong influence on the family, according to Ingrid: “My father loved books, so he used to read to us when we were young and books had a high value, even though we didn’t have a huge number of books at home”. She describes herself and her sister Marianne as being “bookworms”. Interestingly however, her

²³⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²³⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Graeme Barnes, 16 December 1999.

²³⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²³⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁴⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October, 1999.

parents' attitude to their children's schooling seems to have been quite casual. She ascribes this to neither of her parents having had much schooling themselves, her father because of the Depression, and her mother because of the war interrupting her studies. Her mother's response to her success in the School Certificate examination, for example, was less than enthusiastic. "When I got a very high mark for School C and informed my mother that other people had been promised \$100 or whatever if they passed [...], she went out and bought me a coconut". She felt her parents' suspicion of academics was responsible for their encouraging her to become a secretary rather than go to university after she left school, but after her teachers talked to her parents and persuaded them that Ingrid did have the ability to do better than being a secretary, she was allowed to attend university.²⁴¹

Despite their parents' suspicions, all four children attended university, although at the time it was still an uncommon thing to do. Vincent studied Fine Arts, the two sisters graduated with Arts degrees, and Vincent's older brother Paddy, who is now a farmer, gained a diploma in agriculture from Massey University. Marianne feels that her parents "never really tried to push us in any direction [...]. They were very practical when it came to money, very pragmatic and they wanted us to be able to earn a living [...]. There was never any pressure. They just tried to help us. But Dad insisted that we learn typing [...] and tried to push us to be good at sports".²⁴²

Another aspect of Pat's interest in language was his passion for giving eulogies, particularly for members of the RSA. Marianne recounts that the family did a "grave-crawl" for her father's eightieth birthday, where they went from Greytown to Martinborough, stopping at the graves of various family members. (In *Vigil*, Vincent cast his father appropriately as one of the mourners at Toss's father's funeral.) Ironically, Pat died at the age of eighty-four, just after he and Judy had been watching a television programme on funerals. He was, according to Marianne, very good at public speaking and a great storyteller.²⁴³ Many of the stories he told were about the War, which Ingrid describes as being probably "the strongest experience of his life". She also remembers him as being "a great letter-writer. He used to write letters to government departments, particularly Social Welfare, advocating on behalf of people".

²⁴¹ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁴² Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²⁴³ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

He was, in her view, “a very meticulous person” and she explains that “although he did a good job of farming” it was not his first love. He had begun to study accountancy at Victoria University just before the War and she believes he would have made a very good accountant because “he liked figures, he was meticulous, he was careful”. The reason for his becoming a farmer after the War was that he had had very bad pleurisy and had been told he had to work outside, so “farming was the obvious thing”.²⁴⁴

Ingrid’s view of her father was that he was “very solid and reliable and kind [...]. He had a certain code that you didn’t cross”, as well as being “a bit of a perfectionist, and a “romantic”, who tended to romanticize things, about his children in particular. She feels that Ward took after Pat in the respect of being something of a “romantic” and recalls that her father was very proud of him - very early on, after Ward had won an award, he referred to him as “the young master”. Claiming that her father “always had a soft spot for Vincent”, she feels that he was “treated a bit like an only child [...], a bit spoilt”. She ascribes this in part to her parents being more relaxed about their youngest child, although her father “was always fairly relaxed about the upbringing generally of children.” Another contributing factor to Vincent being “slightly indulged”, in Ingrid’s view, was that “he was very outgoing, he was actually very charming as a little baby. He was so cute”.²⁴⁵ His mother concurs that he was indeed “so cute, such a sweet looking little boy”, but does not agree that he was spoilt, maintaining she was “too Germanic to tolerate cheekiness”.²⁴⁶

Ingrid remembers Vincent as being “creative” (rather than artistic) and recounts the story of how when he was about eight or nine, she did a stage make-up course and Vincent “used to beg me every afternoon to put the stage makeup on him. And he absolutely adored it [...]. I had to part his hair in the middle and paint a moustache or put other make-up on him and turn him into somebody else”. She also recalls that when he was about four, he came to her and asked her to draw him a lion. She attempted to draw a lion, thinking, “this’ll do for a four-year-old”, but Vincent was disgusted with her drawing and told her one of the boys at school “could draw a whole lot better” than she could. She concedes that: “he obviously had some idea of artistry that I didn’t have”. While Ingrid did not see him as being ‘artistic’, she describes him as being “a

²⁴⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁴⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁴⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

very gregarious, sort of activity-based person who liked making things and building boats and models and things like that”.²⁴⁷

Marianne saw Vincent not as being particularly talented but as being very determined: “When Vincent sets his mind to something, he just goes for it, with dogged determination”. She recounts that he was interested in photography as a teenager and took photo after photo. His attitude towards volleyball and drawing was equally determined: “It was just when he gets his mind to something, he does it”. Her family was somewhat sceptical about his talent because, in her view “it isn’t any more than anyone else has got if they worked just as hard as him [...]. I think it was that normal scepticism you get in a family of someone talented”.²⁴⁸

In contrast, his mother recognized that “love of art was obviously something that was with him”. She finds it difficult to imagine where he got his artistic ability from, since neither she nor Pat had any artistic ability, but suggests that perhaps Vincent may have inherited his artistic ability from her half-sister who was “very very good at drawing”.²⁴⁹ Subsequently, the family was very supportive of Vincent’s filmmaking. Timothy White acknowledges the help of Vincent’s parents during the location shooting of *A State of Siege*, when he and Vincent, because they had very little money, stayed in the parents’ house.²⁵⁰ Both Vincent’s mother and his father became extras in his movies. As well as being one of the mourners at the funeral in *Vigil*, the father appeared as the person who stopped the bus in *A State of Siege*, and Vincent’s mother was an extra in *What Dreams May Come*. Some of the family’s bemused attitude to Vincent’s achievements remained, however, according to Louis Nowra who recollects that in an interview with his mother: “She said something like ‘I was on the set and suddenly they’re obeying Vincent’. It’s like, my idiot son. How come they’re all obeying him?”²⁵¹

Although Pat Ward was a Catholic, and Judy was required to convert to Catholicism when she married, Ingrid recalls that she and her siblings “didn’t have a particularly religious upbringing”. Her father “had [...] a tolerant view of the Catholic Church [...].

²⁴⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁴⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²⁴⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁵⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

²⁵¹ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 19 February 2000.

He was far more interested in being good and kind and doing good works for people [...], so we never said the Rosary at home like a lot of good Catholic families did then". She adds: "My father only went to Communion once a year, which was bordering on mortal sin for the Catholic Church. And we never saw him go to confession. He always took us to Mass, but he didn't believe in prayers at home". Interestingly, she claims that it was her mother who taught the children childhood prayers and they all "went through the practice at that time of making the first Communion".²⁵²

Despite the family not being "overly religious", Judy and Vincent's two sisters later became 'born-again' Christians through the Charismatic movement. Marianne believes although Vincent "never really had a conversion experience through his Catholicism [...], it became part of his art". She points to the ethos and cultural side of Catholicism as being "very much in his films", and uses *What Dreams May Come* to illustrate the point that the film is a depiction of "heaven without the central figure". She also sees the "huge influences of his Catholic upbringing" as being the background to *The Navigator*.²⁵³ Trevor Lamb, a childhood friend of Vincent's, concurs with Marianne in seeing the religious undertones and sense of humour in his work "as reflecting the person" that Vincent is.²⁵⁴

Although Ward also asserts that he was not particularly religious, he was "drawn to the apocalyptic engravings" in his grandfather's leather-bound Bible, a scene that is recreated by Toss in *Vigil*. Ward talks about imagining "demons rising up out of the flaming fields to peals of thunder as my father burned back the barley stubble" and about his attraction to fire.²⁵⁵ Watching his father burn the piles of stillborn lambs is an incident recalled in *Vigil*, as the memorable image of Toss's father burning the sheep carcasses. Marianne says of *Vigil*, that the character of Toss was not a reflection of either of his sisters' personalities, it was more like his own. She does however claim that the idea of the ballet tutu probably originated from her and Ingrid having learnt ballet as kids.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁵³ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

²⁵⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Trevor Lamb, 15 April 1999.

²⁵⁵ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 66.

²⁵⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

Ward sees his childhood as being “not extraordinarily eventful”. What he recalls most vividly is the “emotional intensity” with which he viewed the world, and it is this emotional intensity he wanted to recreate in *Vigil*. He states: “I wanted to see a small, intense child on a farm by himself, combating fierce nightmares and fantasizing victories over imaginary foes. At the same time, I wanted to convey how a child seems to see the real world in oblique glimpses, and, like a detective gathering clues, has to work out what is going on about him”.²⁵⁷

Vincent attended Greytown Primary School, and because they were Catholic, he and his siblings along with twenty or thirty other Catholic children, participated in Catholic religious instruction once a week. At secondary school, Vincent was sent as a boarder to St Patrick’s College (Silverstream). His sister Ingrid says she was not sure what he made of St Patrick’s, but “there were one or two stories long after he left about what he did [...]. Basically he abided by the system, but flouted the rules”.²⁵⁸ At St Patrick’s, his art teacher encouraged his abilities and he won the prize for art, but to study art at sixth and seventh form level, he needed to transfer to Kuranui College for his final two years at secondary school. At Kuranui College he took an active role in school life, playing one of the leading roles in the school production of *Brigadoon*, and contributing drawings to the Kuranui College magazine. Although Kuranui College was a conservative country high school, Graeme Barnes recalls that Vincent’s seventh form schoolmates were very tolerant of him and accepted him despite the fact that most of them were studying science. Vincent was seen as being “way to the left”, but his good looks, wit and popularity allowed him to be accepted.²⁵⁹

By the end of his secondary schooling, Vincent had decided to study Fine Arts at university. Clive Gibbs, his art teacher at Kuranui College, helped him to put a portfolio together to apply, but his parents were not convinced about his choice. Judy says: “It was so clearly something he wanted to do”, but she had doubts about him “being good enough to make a living from it” and suggested to Pat that he should perhaps train as a panel-beater and keep art as a hobby. Both Pat and she realized, however, that “he was gifted that way”, after he kept winning prizes for his art although she admitted: “I kept thinking that was a fluke because I didn’t think he was that

²⁵⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 69.

²⁵⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁵⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Graeme Barnes, 16 December 1999.

good”.²⁶⁰ Their attitude was typical of other parents at the time in a country where few people made a living working in the arts.

Bridget Ikin, who not only worked with Vincent on *Vigil* but also knows him as a personal friend, thinks that despite his parents’ misgiving, they were supportive: “From an early age, he [was] brought up to believe he was very special”. She cites as evidence the fact that a letter which his father wrote him was addressed to “My dear Fellini”, and that when his parents were on the set of *Vigil*, she felt that “they absolutely believed in his talent, that there was a special person amongst them [...], maybe even a God-given talent [...]. They were all religious in different ways [...] and they thought he was an amazing, special person”. In her view, his sisters were also “very protective of him and his talent”.²⁶¹

Some of Ward’s traits as an adult surprised his family. Marianne says of her brother’s methods of working:

One of the things that really staggered me when he was staying with us in Wellington was just how calmly he would negotiate with people and the sorts of pressures that you have in that sort of role. But he stayed calm. He was very good with the children [...]. He has an amazing capacity to actually cope with pressure [...]. It’s not as if he came from a home where anyone else was actually living under those sorts of pressure. I think if you come from a home where people are managing directors of large firms [...], they’ve learnt those sorts of things. But Vincent didn’t get it from home. It’s innate.

However, other traits can be attributed to his family. Marianne describes Ward as “by nature a serious person”, like the rest of the family. “We all take our work seriously and our life quite seriously. I think that’s a characteristic of all of us”. She attributes this trait as coming from her father, who worked seven days a week on the farm and her mother, who “did her best to be a very good mother. So I suppose that’s how we grew up [...]. We’re all a group of perfectionists”.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Judy Ward, 15 April 1999.

²⁶¹ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

²⁶² Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

Summing-Up Ward's Family Background

It is not possible to 'explain' the work of an important artist by reference to his childhood – obviously the artistic process is more sophisticated, more selective, and more creative than that. Nevertheless, biography can help to illuminate some of the specific details of the artist's work. Art comes from somewhere, it has inputs from the past, even if those inputs are transformed in the intensity of the artistic process. In the case of Ward, who has stated that in the creative process, "you start with who you are", an examination of his background seems particularly relevant.²⁶³ Many of the details in the preceding account are not directly relevant to Ward's filmmaking, but in addition to searching for such links, I wanted to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced biography than those currently available, partly to counter the tendency of journalistic accounts to simplify and thereby encourage glib explanations and assumptions.

What emerges are several quite dramatic contrasts that provide at least a starting-point for discussing Ward's later interests as an artist. The first of these is the collision between New Zealand and Europe, embodied in the combination of Ward's parents. The urban European culture of his mother's family, later expressed through Ward's interest in Romanticism and Expressionism, contrasts with the New Zealand rural landscape and lifestyle of his father's family, which forms the backdrop to his early films. Ward believes that not just for himself, but for New Zealanders in general:

Identity is a key issue, because we haven't until recent years had much of a reflection of ourselves in film and television. In writing, we've had some. We're more dominated by American culture. So, because we're a recent culture, defining who we are is more of an issue...Certainly in my work, identity is something I explore a lot and one of the ways that people explore their identity is to ask where they come from. I come from Catholic Irish on one hand, and Jewish German on the other, and so I have a natural interest in understanding both traditions [...], just as I was interested in living in a Maori community for two years because that was part of what I consider who I am. I belong to a culture where the Maori population is a major part of that population, a major shaping force in that population. So, I spent some time in Ireland. I listened to

²⁶³ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

my father's stories that were told in that sort of Irish storytelling vein. And likewise, I was also interested in, and I grew up as a Catholic.²⁶⁴

Ward's interest in identity accounts for the autobiographical nature of some of his work. His own experiences of growing up on a farm are reflected in events portrayed in *Vigil*. The character of Toss, although she is a girl, is clearly based to at least some extent on Ward's childhood feelings of 'aloneness', and on his memories of the imaginative and emotional intensity of childhood. Much of Ward's work displays a fascination with outsiders or people on the periphery of society that can perhaps be linked to his mother being an outsider from the society in which he grew up. Likewise, his interest in having strong female characters as the main protagonists of his first three films, can be linked to the example of his strong-minded mother. There are also some obvious parallels between the depiction of Liz, in *Vigil*, as a cultured woman forced through circumstances to live on an isolated farm, and Judy Ward's situation when she came to live in New Zealand.

A second aspect of Ward's family background that influenced his artistic aesthetic and working methods as a director is the high degree of 'cultural capital' in his family, together with the kind of aspiration and hard work often associated with an immigrant background. This family tradition, while far removed from filmmaking and suspicious of some aspects of high culture (such as universities), did offer Ward qualities and skills that were useful in his subsequent career and accounts to some degree for his perfectionist approach to filmmaking. Ward's belief in his talent and his single-minded commitment to his vision may be attributed, at least in part to the supportive attitude of his family who believed in his "God-given" talents and encouraged him to develop them, and to a lesser degree, to the support of his art teacher at Kuranui College, who encouraged him and helped him to apply to the Ilam School of Fine Arts.

A third influential aspect of his family background was the emphasis placed on religion. The influence of Catholicism is discernible in almost all of his films, but they also reflect an underlying interest in spirituality and mysticism that perhaps relates as much to the Jewish faith (despite his mother having seldom overtly referred to her Jewishness when he was a child) as to elements of Catholicism. While Ward's upbringing and education were Catholic, he did not really begin to explore Jewish traditions until later

²⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

in life. He admits that “he knew nothing” about Jewish traditions until he went to Los Angeles. This has a large Jewish community and he found it interesting to come into contact with what he describes as “the Jewish mystical tradition – in terms of the Kabbalah” through people in the film industry, like Barbra Streisand.²⁶⁵

A final aspect of his background that emerges later in his work, is the strong introspective strain, which he acknowledges in Edge of the Earth when he refers to himself as a “small intense child on a farm by himself”.²⁶⁶ One interesting point arising from this comment is that Ward’s perception of himself seems to be that he was almost an only child. The book makes a great deal of reference to Ward’s parents but little direct reference to his siblings, a fact that did not pass unnoticed by his sister, Ingrid. While she acknowledges that “Vincent had quite a different childhood from the rest of us just because of his age”, she clearly feels that she and her other siblings played a more important role in Ward’s childhood than his book suggests.²⁶⁷ One reason for this gap in the book may have been that his brother and sisters have differing perceptions of their parents and of their childhood and Ward may have seen these as conflicting with his own perceptions. Another reason is that Ward’s sense of himself as an imaginative loner is a Romantic notion, in line with his adult role as artist and *auteur*.

Ward’s Art School Training

While his family background is one factor in the formation of Ward’s aesthetic, his early education and training as an artist and film-maker also appear to have had some influence on his later interests as a film-maker. This section of the chapter will discuss the director’s training at Ilam School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury, and will examine in detail the degree programme he completed, drawing on his own memories of his experiences as a student as well as those of some of his fellow-students and his lecturer.

In 1974, after completing the seventh form at Kuranui College, Ward enrolled at Ilam. Initially, he completed an Intermediate year, during which he studied painting, sculpture, graphic design, and engraving, but instead of majoring in painting, as he had originally intended, he decided to major in filmmaking. Ilam was ahead of its time in

²⁶⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

²⁶⁶ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 69.

²⁶⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999.

offering one of the only filmmaking courses in New Zealand but numbers were limited in the second year to an intake of five students for the Moving Image specialization. Maurice Askew, who headed the Moving Image Department and was interviewed by the Christchurch Star about the new course, gave the reasons for limiting the students as being “a definite lack of equipment” and “a reluctance to put too many students out on to a limited market”.²⁶⁸ At that time, the prospects for getting a job in the film industry “were not that good”, as Murray Freeth, who had been a film student a year ahead of Ward at Ilam, points out. A student came out of Ilam as

An artist, a fine artist, having specialized in filmmaking as other students [specialized] in printmaking or sculpture. The majority of [students] went off and became art teachers. That was the only real prospect for employment, otherwise [they could] go overseas and try and get involved in television or filmmaking. Very few went into television [...], some went to the National Film Unit. But there wasn't any work around really.²⁶⁹

The lack of job prospects in the film industry when Ward first began studying at Ilam was a reflection of the small-scale nature of the industry at that time. In the first half of the 1970s, only three New Zealand features were released, all on 16mm film. Rudall Hayward's *To Love a Maori* (1972) was the first New Zealand feature to be made in colour. *Rangi's Catch* (Michael Forlong, 1973) was made for the British Children's Film Foundation and reformatted for New Zealand.²⁷⁰ Geoff Steven's *Test Pictures: Eleven Vignettes from a Relationship* (1973) was screened only to film festival audiences but, as Martin and Edwards point out, this film was significant in the genesis of the New Zealand film industry in that it “provided a training ground and a collaborative meeting place for many of the film-makers who were to become influential in the upcoming period of rapid growth which would be obvious five years later”.²⁷¹

By the time Ward had completed his course at Ilam this upsurge in filmmaking had begun. The film that “effectively kick-started the ensuing boom in indigenous feature

²⁶⁸ David Young, "School for Young Filmmakers: Is It on the Right Course?," Christchurch Star 23 October 1971.

²⁶⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

²⁷⁰ Churchman, ed., Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand 60-61.

²⁷¹ Martin and Edwards, New Zealand Film 1912-1996 59.

production” was Roger Donaldson’s *Sleeping Dogs* (1977). The first 35mm feature for eleven years, it was released to “packed cinemas throughout the country and went on to be the first New Zealand produced feature released in America”.²⁷² Arguably, the film’s most significant effect on the burgeoning New Zealand film industry was that its success convinced the government of the time to set up the New Zealand Film Commission in the following year, to provide state funding to encourage the development of a national cinema. The availability of access to government funding considerably benefited young filmmakers such as Ward, who later successfully applied to the Film Commission for funding for *A State of Siege*, the film he made to complete his undergraduate qualification at Ilam. (He also obtained funding for this film from the Arts Council and the Education Department.)

The course that Ward undertook at Ilam comprised three years of full-time study, the first year of which consisted of students studying a number of different disciplines and the history of art. In the second year, students were allowed to specialize in moving images, which included the history of film. They were also required to take one BA subject, for which Ward elected to study Contemporary Psychology. The course included not only practical work in film, but also exercises in television, graphics, animation and other audio-visual projects. In the third year, the students continued the study of their specialization, as well as of the history of film, and had the option of doing either another BA unit or an advanced practical film unit. At the end of each year they were required to sit the First, Second and Third Professional examinations. Ward took four years to complete his undergraduate degree and two years to complete a postgraduate qualification, graduating with an Honours degree in Fine Arts at the end of 1979.

Filmmaker Stephanie Beth, a fellow-student of Ward’s in the year after him, has an interesting perspective on the fact that he took four years to complete his undergraduate degree, after failing his second year. She comments:

He would have wanted to fail because he knew, like every child, you had to be nurtured well and he would unconsciously been cultivating his sense of himself as a full-time filmmaker. He knew that this was his one chance - because you only had one chance to make films - you have to start young and you have to

²⁷² Churchman, ed., Celluloid Dreams: A Century of Film in New Zealand 61.

have your foundations achieved. He knew he must not leave university until he had succeeded.

She adds that in the mid-70s, “New Zealanders, anyone who wanted to go into film, had to create their own portfolio of commitment to the task. That’s terribly important and that’s a great instinct of Vincent to take five years. No-one now would think of leaving an institution until they’d had five years”.²⁷³

Maurice Askew, principal lecturer in Moving Image, was the founder of the Moving Image Department at Ilam. He was an Englishman who had spent a number of years in British television, and had eventually become the Head of the Design Department at Granada Television, having started at Granada in 1955, when a number of areas in Britain were starting to set up their own independent television channels. Initially he was offered a job as Head of Graphic Design at Ilam for three years, but he gained tenure and ended up staying there until he retired. Askew was a pioneer in film education, like Robert Hutchins at the Elam School of Fine Arts at Auckland University. They were among the very first to teach filmmaking at tertiary level and faced many problems, including institutional suspicion of the new subject and a lack of resources.

While Askew deserves credit as a pioneer, however, his skills could not cover all aspects of the course. He describes the beginnings of the Moving Image Department as being entirely unplanned:

I was never trained as a cameraman, but after about three or four years, we started using a Berlitz camera. Gradually more and more people were using it, so we bought another Berlitz and it was a natural thing to break away to set up a Moving Image Department, and that’s how it started. And another lecturer came out to do graphics and another lecturer came out to do photography. So I was running the Moving Image Department from the word go.

²⁷³ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

Askew admits, “there were a lot of things I didn’t know. I’d done animation but not camera, but if I hadn’t been in graphics then the film department would never have come in through the back door”.²⁷⁴

Due in part to Askew’s limited experience, the students in Ward’s time were very much left to their own devices. According to Freeth, “with all due respect to Maurice, he wasn’t really a film maker. He was a graphic designer with a real interest in film”.²⁷⁵ While Askew taught the bulk of the course, Freeth recalls there were occasional guest lectures by filmmakers such as Leon Narbey. Narbey was at that time a lecturer in sculpture at Ilam who had made some of his own films; he spent a few days with the Moving Image students teaching them lighting.²⁷⁶ Apart from this kind of occasional tuition in the practical aspects of filmmaking, Freeth asserts that, “you taught yourself really. And I think what the art school really gave us was an opportunity to do these things, it gave you the time, rather than giving you extensive training [...]. In those days, it was self-learning and exploration, rather than training you in the actual method, which was what Vince was very good at. He knew exactly what sort of stuff he wanted to do”.²⁷⁷

Askew says of setting up the course: “Looking back, I’m amazed at how much freedom I had to do this, but nobody else in the university knew what I was doing”.²⁷⁸ His methods were somewhat eclectic, according to Freeth. For the film history examination, for example, “we were encouraged not to write screeds and screeds of answers. We were encouraged to draw our answers”. Askew told the students, with regard to German Expressionism: “Don’t write about it, draw what it looked like”, which was, in Freeth’s view, quite logical since art school students are better at drawing than writing.²⁷⁹

In relation to the content of the course, Askew’s report on the Moving Image Department, written in 1974, states: “It has been found practical to divide film study into two broad areas (and years): realism and anti-realism. To these are added special topics such as censorship and animation. The works of certain directors are analysed,

²⁷⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁷⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

²⁷⁶ Narbey was soon to work with Ward as camera operator on *A State of Siege*.

²⁷⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

²⁷⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁷⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

film theories and various movements are studied and there is extensive film viewing”.²⁸⁰ Later, when interviewed about the course content, Askew added that although “there was no separation between film history and the practice, they had a lot of film history [...]. Each term – there were three terms - we had two subjects, one would have been a director and one would have been a film movement like German Expressionism”. He recalls that Ward was very interested in Hitchcock, especially Hitchcock’s “sudden shock” technique.²⁸¹ The course was so new as to be somewhat raw and under-resourced by overseas standards, but there was an excitement around it – this was new ground for New Zealand art education. In addition, there was no commercial film school in the country and it seems profoundly significant that Ward should have learned his film-making in an art school context.

After Askew became the Chairman of the Canterbury Film Society, he had access to a number of films that he was able to use to teach the history of film, such as the German Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919) and other film “classics”. The choice of films that the students saw in Askew’s course was somewhat eclectic - for example, they also studied musicals such as *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964).²⁸² There were very few videos then, and teaching had to be conducted using 16mm prints, with only a single print of most of the titles available in New Zealand (or in New Zealand and Australia). The Federation of Film Societies was the key source of historical films. Commercial 16mm prints like *Mary Poppins* helped to fill in gaps in the programme.

Timothy White, a fellow-student and close friend of Ward’s, mentions the lack of opportunities at that time in New Zealand to see films that were out of the ordinary, since there was no pay television, no video, no DVD and few art house cinemas. The only opportunities to see film “classics” were provided by the University of Canterbury Film Society and the annual Film Festival.²⁸³ He remembers Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) as being “very much a landmark work in terms of Vincent’s influences and [its] German Expressionism”, which, “with Vincent’s mother’s

²⁸⁰ Maurice Askew, "Course Outline for the Moving Image Department's Programme," (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1974), vol., 2.

²⁸¹ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁸² Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁸³ Film festivals were relatively new in New Zealand at that time. The first one was the Auckland Film Festival established in 1969.

background, was always something that I think he obviously gravitated towards”.²⁸⁴ Other films that they saw through the Film Society included Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), and one which White remembers Ward being particularly interested in, Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972). While he and Ward were both drawn to films that showed “a certain intensity”, White points out that Ward also loved Fellini’s work for its “exuberance”. He comments that: “it’s a mistake to just see Vincent as intense and dark. There’s in fact a kind of lunatic intensity [...], an absurdist quality” in his work.²⁸⁵

An important part of the course, aside from film history and analysis, was the practical work undertaken by the students. According to Askew’s report, they had opportunities not only to realise their own projects but also to work on films undertaken by the Moving Image Department “for other University departments and sometimes for non-profit or other public bodies. At present [1974] films are being carried out in conjunction with the Mountain Safety Council, the Clean Air Society and the Department of Electrical Engineering. Film is sometimes produced for theatre groups to incorporate with theatrical performances”.²⁸⁶

Askew taught not only the students who specialized in film but introduced first year students to graphic design, as part of their intermediate year in which everyone studied the basics of engraving, painting, sculpture, film and graphic design. He comments that Ward “was very good at art” and that in his first year at Ilam “he would have had a good grounding in drawing, painting to a certain extent, [and] abstract art”.²⁸⁷ (Ward’s talent and training in drawing and painting are evident in his later work, for example, *What Dreams May Come*, for which he did some of the scene drawings.) Askew also suggests that Ward’s interest in Expressionist art, particularly in the work of Käthe Kollwitz, was partly a result of his being introduced to the topic in the first year of the course. Film editor David Coulson, a student in the same year as Ward, also recalls the class being shown a documentary of Käthe Kollwitz which “really blew him [Ward] away”.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

²⁸⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Tim White, 29 September 1999.

²⁸⁶ Askew, "Course Outline for the Moving Image Department's Programme," vol., 2.

²⁸⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁸⁸ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

Right from the beginning of the course, Ward created controversy. Coulson recalls that: “At the end of the year, we all had to do the submissions, and that was when I really noticed Vincent’s propensity to carry things further than other people”.²⁸⁹ Each student was allocated a space in the final exhibition for the year, to display samples of their work in the different disciplines. The space that Ward had been allocated was empty until the last minute, when he wheeled in a motorcycle that had been involved in a crash, as the basis for his sculpture exhibit. Coulson describes the work as having “a certain tension” created firstly by the hubbub of the motorcycle being hoisted in by a number of helpers, then by Ward creating a whole work around it, orchestrating a number of disturbing noises such as people screaming and crying, sanding machines being switched on and pieces of metal being banged. Coulson comments that, “it raised certain questions because it was right on the borderline. Are we submitting work that is created or could we create work on the spot? There was some sort of debate about that”.²⁹⁰

Freeth remembers Ward’s intensity and that “underneath that intensity, he was emotionally very involved”. He describes Ward as “the suffering artist” and recalls Ward coming to art school looking “absolutely shattered [...]. He’d probably been up all night writing his scripts [...]. He’d do that night after night”.²⁹¹ Freeth cites an animated film Ward made in his second year at Ilam as an example of his dedication.²⁹² Instead of using a 24-frame or 48-frame dissolve, which was how the animation rostrum was calibrated, Ward did a 266-frame dissolve, which meant that he had to re-calibrate the dial himself - a very time-consuming and exacting task.

Although Ward was “10,000 leagues or two further in terms of intensity [than the industry crowd]”, Stephanie Beth’s memory of the relationships between him and his fellow-students was that: “Those of us who knew Vincent as a student, the first peer group, had no critique of him, we were simply all collegial.” The reason for this was that: “We all lived that way [...]. There was no such thing except immersion in the moving image and we’d all be there twelve hours a day”.²⁹³ Freeth also notes the relaxed nature of the art school at Ilam at that time: “We had our own keys. We just

²⁸⁹ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002

²⁹⁰ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

²⁹¹ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

²⁹² The film appears to have subsequently been lost.

²⁹³ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

came and went when we felt like it. I'm sure Vince was there at two o'clock in the morning working sometimes. We'd go in on Sundays and we'd go in there on Saturdays or after hours".²⁹⁴ The art school at this time was spread out into three different locations. There was the main art school in the centre of campus, an annex in Creyke Road and another house in Kirkwood Avenue where much of the film equipment was kept. Later, after Ward had left Ilam, the art school moved into a new building and security became very much tighter.

However, while the art school environment was relatively relaxed and collegial, many of the students suffered financial hardship as a result of having to pay for all their own materials – including the film stock and the props - as well as for the processing of their films. Beth recounts: "All of us were poor and all of us needed money, because we had to shoot film [rather than video] in those days, so you could go through thousands of dollars, whatever you did, and we'd all be scraping around on fragments and stretching relationships we had and needing family support". Ward, with "his urgency and his zeal" as Beth describes it, put all his resources into his projects, and often could not afford to eat.²⁹⁵ Ward refers to this time at art school in The Edge of the Earth: "Dressing like a ragged leftover from the sixties, I had embraced the earnest belief that artists should focus on their work with religious intensity – to the extent that rather than waste time cooking, I lived on saveloys for a year. When I could no longer stand the sight of them, my obsession finally wavered".²⁹⁶ Beth also recalls that, because he was also unable to afford a flat, Ward would bring his sleeping-bag into the old house on campus, where the film students worked, and sleep on the floor.²⁹⁷

In Askew's view, the class Ward was in was a very good year and as well as Ward, it produced some talented filmmakers, such as Tim White, later an international producer, and editors David Coulson and Maria French. At the time, Askew did not see Ward as being exceptional, but acknowledges that, "to display a smashed-up motorcycle takes a bit of guts [...]. Not now, but then". Askew describes Ward as being "a good student" but hardly a model one. He recalls one incident where Ward broke into his home when he and his wife were out in order to use a piece of animation equipment that was kept

²⁹⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

²⁹⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

²⁹⁶ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 4-5.

²⁹⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

there.²⁹⁸ Victoria Stafford, a former departmental secretary at Ilam, remembers Ward as being very good at “wheedling things” out of people, and as being rather insistent in attempting to acquire or borrow the things he needed for his projects.²⁹⁹

The film equipment that the students in the Moving Image Department had to use was basic – three cameras (two Bolexes and an Arriflex camera that was available on requisition), one old Movieola and one flatbed editing bench, and very little lighting equipment. Askew comments that: “We shot a lot outside. There’s plenty of sun in Christchurch”.³⁰⁰ One disadvantage of outdoor shooting was that the students liked to film people sitting on the beach, and that tended to result in the camera regularly getting sand in it. For television work, there was one television portapack available on requisition. Access to television equipment was reasonably good through the University Education Department, which had a new and quite extensive studio complex.³⁰¹ Sound track mixing could be done in conjunction with local film making studios or the National Film Unit in Wellington.³⁰²

Despite the limited equipment, during his training at art school Ward made a number of films and experiments, many of them shot by the same cameraman, John McWilliams. The films were screened only at art school but despite Ward’s assertion that they served only as training for his first ‘public’ film, *A State of Siege*, “his earliest film, *The Cave*, did serve to announce one of his central themes”, understanding the world “by looking at a number of different points of view – particularly people on the extremes”.³⁰³ This thirty-minute film, shot in 1975 by John McWilliams on 16mm colour and black and white, was based on Plato’s image of the cave where people live in a world of shadows instead of in the sunlight, and because they know nothing else, they see and think in terms of shadows. About one quarter of the film was stills animation.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

²⁹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Victoria Stafford, 10 June 1999.

³⁰⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

³⁰¹ Video had arrived late in New Zealand and although there was some experimentation with it at art schools (particularly in connection with conceptual and performance art), it was hardly an equivalent for 16mm in terms of the visual quality of the results.

³⁰² Askew, "Course Outline for the Moving Image Department's Programme," vol., 2-3.

³⁰³ Roger Horrocks, Vincent Ward: The New Zealand Film Makers at the Auckland City Art Gallery Series (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985).

³⁰⁴ This film appears to be lost, although both Ward and White believe there may be a copy still in existence, probably in someone’s garage.

In his second year at Ilam, there were only four students who specialized in moving images – Maria French, who became an editor with Television One, then went on to work for the National Film Unit, Timothy White, and David Coulson. Coulson recalls the collaborative nature of the course: “We all worked on each other’s movies and we had a hundred feet of film for our first exercise. Vincent was the actor in my one and so that was his first acting experience”.³⁰⁵ The course allowed the students to not only direct their own films, but to experience being an actor, to operate the camera and lighting equipment, and to edit their own and other people’s films - a “hands-on” experience in all aspects of film-making, a process of learning by doing.

Coulson notes that for their first studio television exercise, “most of us did something very simple” but Ward was “always looking forwards and often using [the medium] to the point of pushing it”. He also comments: “At the same time, he was always prepared to put himself in the line”. As an example, he cites Ward’s role in *The Cave*. In the film, “he played one of these guys who journeys up and comes out of the underworld and then he came up through, as I recall, a frozen lake. They shot it backwards so he jumped in and when it was played it was meant to look like he was coming up through the ice. So, he would always push, keep pushing people to do stuff, but it wasn’t as if he was working from a personal comfort zone”.³⁰⁶

In his *Filmography of Vincent Ward*, Horrocks lists some other films made by Ward at Ilam. They include *Boned*, (1976), which Ward directed and photographed, a six minute film of stills animation, shot on 16mm film stock, about life on an isolated sheep station. The film focuses on the casual violence and conflict between people and animals, and appears to have prefigured some of the themes of *Vigil*. In the same year, he made a number of other animation experiments with stills scratching directly on film, and orthodox techniques. There was also a twenty-minute videotape, entitled *Void*, which he wrote, directed and acted in. In this film shot by John McWilliams, Ward played the part of a man “who plans to set up a camera and commit suicide on film, but fails in the attempt”. The soundtrack included a number of interviews with the wives of men who committed suicide, and Horrocks suggests that: “The ‘investigative’ style of

³⁰⁵ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

³⁰⁶ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

cinematography looks forward to the style of *A State of Siege*".³⁰⁷ In 1977, Ward directed and shot (in conjunction with Euan Frizzell) *Ma Olsen*, a 15-minute documentary on one of the local "characters" living in the country outside Greytown, close to where he grew up. The subject of the film was an eccentric elderly woman who lived with numerous animals including cats, rooster, hens, and sheep. Coulson, who edited the film, recalls that the documentary was "a sort of exploration of her space and her world, but it also showed her incredible pragmatism about the world, about how, if anything was sick you just kill it".³⁰⁸ The film, shot on 16mm colour stock, and made with the assistance of the Education Department and TV One, prefigured the subject-matter of *In Spring One Plants Alone* in its exploration of the world of an elderly woman who is an outsider from society.

In the same year, Ward worked as cameraman on a film directed by White, entitled *Samir*, a six-minute film also shot on 16mm colour stock.³⁰⁹ White describes the film as being "sort of sensuous, I wouldn't say erotic, but a very beautiful lyrical piece. It's just of a young boy somewhat voyeuristically looking at his pregnant mother and his father. But it looked amazing and Vincent brought incredible visual design to the very limited set that was constructed [...], and the way it was shot [...]. We had almost no equipment. It was really so rudimentary".³¹⁰ The following year, Ward made the film that established him as an outstanding young director, *A State of Siege*. Although it was a "student film" and only fifty-two minutes long, after it premiered at the Wellington Film Festival in 1978, it was given cinema release in Wellington, and later screened at repertory theatres in various parts of the USA (along with *In Spring One Plants Alone*), where it received several awards. The film was made on a shoestring budget, funded by Ward and White (who produced the film), with small amounts of money from the Arts Council, the Education Department and the Interim Film Commission. (Obtaining this funding for a student film showed unusual initiative.)

White describes the film as stemming from "a quite exciting collaboration. We were both discovering just how to make movies. Truthfully, there was no real lecturer there.

³⁰⁷ Horrocks' information for the Filmography came from Ward himself since these films also appear to be lost

³⁰⁸ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

³⁰⁹ The NZ Film Archive has a copy of the negative A and B rolls of *Samir*, and the camera original and sound negatives of *Ma Olsen*, but neither film is able to be viewed in its present state.

³¹⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

Maurice Askew was a production designer cum animator whose biggest credit was early *Coronation Street*. He was an enthusiast, although Vincent probably had the fieriest relationship with him”.³¹¹ White sees it as an advantage in some respects that “we weren’t surrounded by people of far greater experience, who could take the shortcut to a certain sort of technical and craft expertise”. The experience “helped shape both of our careers to some extent, the fact that we were stumbling along in the dark learning through trial and error, learning truthfully from the grass roots up”. White concedes, however, that while he and Ward had to go out and find people in the industry who could help them make their film, such as Alun Bollinger, Chris King and Geoff Murphy, who worked on *A State of Siege*, they were lucky in that they were maturing “at a time when the industry was really energized, when it was about to explode into *Sleeping Dogs* and *Goodbye Pork Pie*”.³¹²

In explaining White and Ward’s ability to work together successfully, Beth comments: “Timothy came from a business background and that helped enormously. The businessman took on the protégé, you could see that’s what the partnership was”. In her view the strength of Ward’s approach is that “he’s got this enormous resource of the pure artist in him, where he’s been able to intellectualise himself into that world and let other people do it with him”.³¹³ White was able to see Ward’s potential and comments that he was “fascinated” by his fellow-student’s approach to filmmaking. His perception of Ward is that “he works to a theory of chaos” and has “a mind that can be inspired by that kind of chaos and find things that will stimulate it”. He describes their collaboration on *A State of Siege* as being a “happy collision”, and admits that he could not have made anything as good as that working on his own. White feels that the reason the film was successful was that they did not take any “baggage” into it. “We must have had a sense of being really driven, we knew what we wanted to do and we were pretty determined to do it well”.³¹⁴ (The content and style of *A State of Siege* will be discussed in a later chapter.)

Parts of the film were submitted to fulfil the requirements for Ward’s Third Professional Examination of the Diploma of Fine Arts at the end of 1977. The requirements for the course were that the students had to produce one major (completed) film for each unit or

³¹¹ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³¹² Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³¹³ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

³¹⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

subject. The end-of-year examination was conducted by specialist lecturers from the different disciplines in the school – painting, print-making, graphic design and sculpture. However, in Freeth’s opinion, because the other lecturers were not conversant with the film students’ projects, “it became a bit of hit and miss whether you would pass”. He also points out that, “because you’re out doing a lot by yourself, without this formal tuition, you weren’t very sure whether you were hitting the mark”.³¹⁵ In Ward’s case, some of the members of the examining committee did not accept that *A State of Siege* was in a sufficiently complete form to fulfil the requirements of the examination. Maurice Askew defended Ward but he had difficulty persuading the other examiners to accept that the work, although incomplete, showed sufficient promise to justify Ward being awarded a pass mark. Considering that *A State of Siege* was later judged by critics internationally as a work of genius, the half-hearted response by examiners is fascinating evidence of the fact that art schools were still only at an early stage of coming to terms with the new medium of film.³¹⁶

After completing *A State of Siege*, Ward began work on his next film, *In Spring One Plants Alone*, for his DipFA (Honours). Although Askew had been supportive in persuading the other examiners to allow him to pass the previous year, the relationship between teacher and student became increasingly strained. Ward had an altercation with Askew which led to the compromise solution of his being allowed to take leave from Ilam to work on his film. Ward describes the incident in Edge of the Earth:

I’d been given leave to go up north, after accidentally putting my foot through my lecturer’s office ceiling. He was showered with plaster and old film as he sat below enjoying a furtive snack at his desk. I imagine he identified the protruding member by its size (big feet are in fact a family trait) and I’m sure he decided then and there that the sooner he got rid of me the better. He hauled me in and, stressing the first two words, said ‘Go away, make your film’. I was happy to oblige.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999.

³¹⁶ Years later, Ilam was eager to claim Ward as a distinguished graduate. In fact, he was almost not allowed to graduate.

³¹⁷ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 5.

In Spring One Plants Alone, a forty-five-minute documentary shot on 16mm colour film stock, documented the daily life of Puhi, an elderly Maori woman, and her mentally disabled son, Nicki, whom she cared for. The film was shot in a remote part of New Zealand, at Matahi, deep in the Ureweras. Although it was made with the help of Alun Bollinger and Leon Narbey (camera), Jack Body (music) and Chris Lancaster (editing), much of the time Ward lived in the Ureweras and worked on the film alone. Jocelyn Beavan (then Jocelyn Allison), a student at Ilam two years behind Ward, remembers him when he was working on *In Spring One Plants Alone* as being extremely thorough and determined, to the extent that “he would do anything to get what he wanted”, including sleeping in the same bed as Nicki in order to “get on side with Puhi”. Beavan remembers Ward as a student who was “very talented” but “withdrawn”, so single-minded that he “didn’t bother with other students”.³¹⁸

Beth also saw Ward was “far too involved in his own work to be involved with anyone, but by association”.³¹⁹ She describes Ward as “very archetypal” and “enormously romantic”, explaining the term in this way: “When you suddenly abandon all responsibility in the real world and take on the possibility of something creative, that you can create twenty-four hours a day, it’s an utterly romantic act in this culture and all of us could be completely seduced by that to a certain degree”. Referring to Ward’s singularity and his earnestness she comments: “The whole idea of obsession also defines a kind of a character type in terms of the art. He’s a Rousseau rather than a Voltaire. And he’s a traditionalist, because he has really concentrated on people as family”. In contrast, as Beth points out, in the same year that Ward was living on saveloys and going up to the Ureweras, “Timothy White was getting himself a scholarship to go to LA and do a three-month producing course”.³²⁰

Not all of his fellow-students perceived Ward as a complete romantic. Beavan, while she describes Ward as “an angst man” who had a strong affinity with German Expressionism, in particular its painting, remembers that he was not averse to drawing from the ideas of other students. She cites, as an example, her own notion of including a shot of sheep corpses being burnt in the short film she was then making, on the autistic child of a sheep-farmer. She did not end up using the idea in the film, but recalls that

³¹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Jocelyn Beavan, 26 January 1999.

³¹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

³²⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999.

when she discussed it with Ward, he was “very interested” in the idea.³²¹ (He later used it in the opening sequence of *Vigil*).

In Spring One Plants Alone took much longer to make than Ward had envisaged – twenty-seven months, instead of the few weeks originally planned. When it was finally completed and released, it cemented his reputation as a promising young filmmaker by winning the Silver Hugo Award at the 1980 Chicago Film Festival and being the Grand Prix Winner at the 1982 Cinéma du Réel Festival. Ward had now learned what he needed to know about the craft of filmmaking, largely through trial and error, and was starting to work with professionals in the field, rather than through the teaching he had received at Ilam. He was now ready to begin his career as a fully-fledged professional filmmaker.

Summing-Up Ward’s Art School Years

Arguably, the chaotic art school training of the 1970s was well-suited to a highly creative individual like Ward, who perhaps could not have developed so fast and so independently if his course had been more organized. While the lack of available equipment and the lack of specific training and direction given by the film school held some disadvantages, they encouraged (or forced) Ward to be innovative in his use of limited resources and to seek out people in the industry who could help him achieve his goals. One consequence of the lack of equipment, which Ward later turned to his advantage was the absence of any lighting gear: “You had to learn to see in natural light, and I think that’s why the films I make have a special look”.³²²

There were, however, also some more direct inputs from his education at Ilam, such as the training in painting in his first year which helped to develop the strong visual sense that later characterized his films, and also introduced him to the German Expressionist painters and filmmakers. Art school also encouraged him to experiment, even if his experiments, such as displaying a smashed-up motorcycle as a work of art, created controversy. A third benefit was the collaborative nature of the projects he worked on in the Moving Image Department at Ilam. He was fortunate in that the calibre of his fellow-students was unusually high and that he was able to find, in Tim White, someone

³²¹ Lynette Read, interview with Jocelyn Beavan, 26 January 1999.

³²² Scott, "Writing Poetry for the Screen," E1.

who perfectly complemented his skills and with whom he was able to form a successful collaboration.

Again, the film history course taught in the Moving Image Department exposed Ward to film “classics” he might otherwise not have seen. The impact of watching these films was such that even after he left Ilam and became a professional filmmaker, Ward continued the practice of educating himself by watching other “classic” films. His visit to the Museum of Modern Art in 1980, for example, where he saw some of the silent films in the 1920s, had an enormous impact on him. He believes that: “Some of the greatest films were made in the 1920s. Often minimal means created great results: lack of sound can create a film with a concentration and focus that is greater than any that has all the luxuries of Dolby”.³²³

It seems extraordinary that Ward was almost failed his final year undergraduate examination on the basis that the version of the film he submitted, which later won international awards, was not adequate. Fortunately, he does not seem to have been adversely affected by such experiences. In contrast to the attitudes of his teachers, his fellow-students were well aware of Ward’s dedication to his art. Some saw him as being intense to the point of obsession, while others saw him as being the archetypal romantic artist, but all of those interviewed respected the seriousness with which he approached his work and his evident talent.

Ward was fortunate in having the opportunity as a student to work with competent filmmakers such as Alun Bollinger and Leon Narbey, who were to join the ranks of New Zealand’s most highly-regarded professionals in their field. It was also fortuitous that he graduated just at a time when the film industry in New Zealand was beginning to blossom, and public funding for film was increasing, albeit modestly. The following three chapters will examine in more detail Ward’s films, *A State of Siege*, *In Spring One Plants Alone* and *Vigil*, locating them in the broader context of the country’s new film industry.

³²³ Dennis and Bieringa, eds., Film in Aotearoa New Zealand 90.

Chapter 3

A State of Siege

A State of Siege provides a good example of Ward's fascination with the theme of isolated individuals, of his perfectionism in terms of his working methods and approach, and of the influence of European art on his work. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was the first major film directed by Ward and was begun in 1977, during his final year of the Diploma of Fine Arts. Although the film was supposed to have been completed by the end of the year, the project was a larger one than originally intended, and Ward was able to complete only parts of the film to submit for his final examination. This chapter will examine the process of making the film, both from Ward's point-of-view and from the point-of-view of several of those involved in its production. Public reception of the film when it was first released in New Zealand, and when it was later screened overseas, will also be discussed, along with the aesthetic issues that continue to provide the surrounding context of my investigation.

One reason why it is important to look closely at the process of making the film is that it was the result of a close collaboration between Ward and Tim White, who produced it, as well as a collaboration with professional actors (such as Anne Flannery) and crew members (such as cameraman, Alun Bollinger). It is necessary to ascertain the extent to which the contributions of those who worked on the film impacted on the final product, and to what extent Ward, as the director, can be seen as responsible as *auteur* for the finished film.

Ward had previously worked with White on small-scale student projects, but they decided on a more ambitious film to submit as the practical component of their Diplomas (White was a year ahead of Ward, doing Honours). The choice to adapt a literary work was based on the notion that "their conflicting interests could best be reconciled by adapting an existing work of literature" and the belief that "it would be easier to raise money if their comparative inexperience was balanced by the name of an established author (a novel adaptation might also attract the patronage of the

Department of Education)”.³²⁴ This was an approach taken by many other filmmakers at the time – for example, Roger Donaldson and Ian Mune who had obtained Education Department backing for their *Winners and Losers* series in 1976. Ward and White took a “fairly pragmatic approach”, aware that they “couldn’t attempt something that was going to be logistically too ambitious, that it had to be reasonably confined, and had to satisfy someone like Vincent in the strong visual orientation”. White was interested in “the more practical aspects of the confines of the story in terms of characters and setting and so on”.³²⁵

They began to search for suitable material in February 1977, and decided upon Janet Frame’s novel *A State of Siege* as best suiting their purposes. White explained: “It did not take long for us to settle upon the idea of attempting to adapt a work by Janet Frame. Aside from sharing a respect for her writing, we both felt the complex psychological and emotional themes she deals with would present us with a challenge that was unique”.³²⁶ In addition, “We both felt it was so perfect because it certainly triggered all kinds of visual images in Vincent’s head. It wasn’t something that was dialogue-heavy and therefore we felt quite comfortable doing an adaptation”.³²⁷ White also saw the potential for adapting a work by Janet Frame, who at that time, while not being well-known to the general public, was “in the Arts Council circles, heralded as being someone special”.³²⁸ In his application for funding to the Arts Council, White included among the main reasons for choosing to adapt a work by Frame the fact that no similar attempt had been made to film her work and that there had only been three minor stage productions of *A State of Siege* (by the Unity, Globe and Downstage Theatres) and a dramatized version for radio done by the NZBC some years before.³²⁹ (It was rumoured in film circles that the absence of film adaptations was the result of Frame’s own reluctance.)

The choice of subject-matter for the film was an unusual one for two young male filmmakers. Psychological fiction by women had been a strand of New Zealand literature since the days of Katherine Mansfield, and it had attracted some male film-

³²⁴ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 128.

³²⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³²⁶ Timothy White, "Production of a Film Drama," Diploma Fine Arts (Hons), Canterbury, 1987, 2.

³²⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³²⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³²⁹ Timothy White, "Application to the Creative Film Fund of the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council" (1977), 1.

makers, but the vigorous physical action in films of the period such as *Sleeping Dogs* (Roger Donaldson, 1977) and *Wild Man* (Geoff Murphy, 1977) was more characteristic of New Zealand film-making (a very male-dominated tradition in the 1970s). In an interview with Gordon Campbell, Ward explains that they decided to adapt Janet Frame's novel for the film "more or less by chance – after reading a synopsis of the book in a Christchurch library".³³⁰ Campbell also noted that they had been looking for a New Zealand literary work that would present a challenge to film, but "the attraction to the novel ran deeper than that. Leaving aside his early student effort, Ward's last three films have been about the inner worlds of elderly women" (*Ma Olsen, A State of Siege*, and the film Ward was currently working on when he was interviewed for the NZ Listener, *In Spring One Plants Alone*). When asked why he was involved in this "zone of experience", Ward replied:

None of these women has been affected by [...] the things that tend to even people out. They're not part of the television age. None of them has had a husband or any focus that takes them out of themselves into that world. So because of that they are what they are very strongly [...]. I make films only about things that I'm interested in, and the private realities [...], no that's too glib [...], the singular kind of visions that these women are living is something that I'm attracted to".³³¹

New Zealand literature and film was well aware of the "Man Alone" tradition, but here was the female equivalent.

Once the book had been selected, Ward and White needed to secure the film rights. They approached the publishers of the novel, Pegasus Press, since Janet Frame lived under a different name, and preferred any business propositions to be handled by those responsible for publishing the work. Initially, Ward and White requested only limited film rights, that is, those confined to New Zealand, and received a favorable response from the publishing company, who asked Janet Frame to give the final approval and recommended that she defer her fee, which she agreed to do.³³² According to White, however, the intention was to apply later for an extension of rights beyond New

³³⁰ Gordon Campbell, "Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid," New Zealand Listener 29 September 1979: 22.

³³¹ Campbell, "Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid", 22.

³³² White, "Production of a Film Drama," 4.

Zealand, if “the marketing potential existed and the budget necessitated it”, and indeed, as work on the film progressed, White approached Frame personally to give her permission for marketing in Europe, the U.K. and North America.³³³

It was remarkable that Frame gave her permission for two young unknown student filmmakers to make the first film of her work. She had previously been approached by some “quite influential people from the film and literature circles in the USA that had explored trying to make her material, but nothing had come of it”, and was disillusioned with the process and just “plain scared” of how the material might be treated.³³⁴ On the publisher’s recommendation, White wrote “a very personal” letter to her, to which he received a “very sweet response, very straightforward”, granting them the film rights to the novel. Later, when the film was completed, Janet Frame was “just too scared to see it in a public forum, where it premiered at the Wellington Film Festival”, so White arranged a private screening for her in the auditorium of the local school. As he had a projectionist’s certificate, he was sitting at the back, operating the projector, while she sat down at the front. White recalls that: “One of the more terrifying sort of moments of my film career” was waiting for Frame’s reaction to the film. “I eventually plucked up the courage to walk down (from the back of the auditorium), figuring I’d give her two minutes of silence [...]. She had tears rolling down her cheeks. She said it was like a beautiful poem and thanked Vincent and I for making it. That was a great moment, and one of the more gratifying ones, from terror to one of exaltation”. Frame also pointed out to White that the music he and John Cousins had chosen for the film was by the favourite composer - Chopin - of the woman she had based the novel on. Afterwards, White stayed at Frame’s house overnight, and she explained that the primary reason for her giving permission for them to make the film was that White had written the letter in “beautiful italic calligraphy” and she felt that “anyone who could write like that would have to make a beautiful film”.³³⁵

White feels that Janet Frame responded to the “intense sort of lyricism” which Ward had managed to give the film, and that her later decision to allow Jane Campion and Bridget Ikin to film her autobiography may have been because her experience with *A State of Siege* had been a good one. He believes she felt “there was something in youth

³³³ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 4.

³³⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³³⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

that could respond to her work and really comprehend it, and yet re-interpret it too in a way that was also true to a sense of cinema, and not just a very reverential adaptation".³³⁶ This was a highly sophisticated response considering the freedom with which the young men had adapted her novel. This response of one artist to another was a totally different way of negotiating film rights than the hard-nosed commercial transactions that characterized the mainstream film business in most parts of the world. It was also a very lucky way for White and Ward to launch their film careers. (Like his collaborator, White would go on to do important work in film.)

Funding and Pre-Production

Having cleared the copyright, Ward and White were able to apply for funding. They wrote a treatment, which they knew had to be completed by March 1977 in order to apply for assistance from the Department of Education before the end of the financial year. (In those days, government departments were inclined to make generous grants at the end of their financial year to ensure that their budget was spent in full.) They also made an application for funding to the Arts Council. In this application, it is evident that the film was intended to be a much smaller project than the film in its final form - thirty minutes in length and having a budget of \$7,500.³³⁷ \$3,000 of this was hoped to come from the Arts Council, \$1,500 from the Department of Education and \$1,160 from a television license fee. The balance of the budget would be made up by personal investment (\$1,000) and the purchase of prints of the film by the National Film Library for school use (\$840).

To keep costs down, White and Ward decided not only to restrict the length of the film, but also to attempt to hold the shooting ratio of film shot to 8:1 (quite a low ratio for a complex drama by inexperienced film-makers).³³⁸ The crew would be kept to a minimum, fifty percent of their wages would be deferred, and the locations for the film kept to "within reasonable distance of one another, to ensure [that] traveling costs would be kept low".³³⁹ White points out that there were subsequently two occasions when the initial budget had to be adjusted: firstly near the beginning of the first shoot, when it was clear that the film would probably be fifty minutes in length, which

³³⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³³⁷ White, "Application to the Arts Council".

³³⁸ They would use Eastman colour negative 7247 stock.

³³⁹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 9.

impacted on the costs of stock, processing and post-production expenses, as well as on the length of the shoot. The second occasion was when damage to the negative during processing necessitated sending the A and B rolls to Atlab in Sydney, adding a further ten percent to the cost of the film.³⁴⁰

White and Ward were successful in their applications to the Education Department, which advanced them \$4,200 to cover the costs of purchasing film stock and processing, and to the Arts Council, which gave them a grant of \$3,200.³⁴¹ This was an important period when the Arts Council was paying greater attention to film (previously regarded as a lower priority than the traditional arts), and the education system was beginning to teach New Zealand literature in schools, and to make increased use of films. These grants, along with personal finance of \$3,500 allowed them to begin production on the film. Shortly before shooting began, in August, White discussed with Television One's Head of Drama, the possibility of New Zealand Broadcasting Commission investment in the film. However, both White and Ward felt it was important that they had as much "creative freedom" as they felt necessary - a concept often "at odds with the interests of a television corporation".³⁴² At any rate, funding from the NZBC did not eventuate. After the rough cut was completed in February 1978, they applied for post-production funding from their original sources, and received a further \$3,000, as well as an additional \$5,000 from the just-established Interim Film Commission.³⁴³ With the added costs of the repair to the damaged negative, White estimates that the finished film cost around \$23,000 to make, a very modest figure even for those days.³⁴⁴

In their application, White had stated that the project would offer an "excellent opportunity" for the students involved to develop their skills and talents, but in fact, the only two students in the proposed crew were himself and Ward.³⁴⁵ The rest were professionals, who had already had some considerable experience in their fields. They included: Christine Hancox (continuity/makeup/wardrobe), who had had both stage and television experience; Chris King, who had been an editor for a number of years for NZBC and had edited the successful 'kidult' series, *Hunter's Gold* (TV 2, 1976);

³⁴⁰ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 9.

³⁴¹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 7.

³⁴² White, "Production of a Film Drama," 7.

³⁴³ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 129.

³⁴⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³⁴⁵ White, "Application to the Arts Council," 2.

Malcolm Moore, an experienced sound recordist, and Mike Rathbone, who had had over three years' experience in camera work at the National Film Unit. The quality of these and other collaborators was a tribute to the persuasiveness of the student filmmakers, although in this early phase of the new film industry there was a great deal of voluntary labour. (The tradition of professionals helping student filmmakers continues to some extent even today.)

Since the finished length of the film was nearly double that originally envisaged, the number of crew who actually worked on the film had to be expanded from the original proposal. White and Ward were fortunate in securing the services of Alun Bollinger as the film's DOP. Bollinger had trained with the NZBC, and had wide experience of working as cameraman, gaffer or DOP on a number of documentaries and dramas, as well as working on feature films such as *The God Boy* (Murray Reece, 1976) and *Sleeping Dogs* (Roger Donaldson, 1977).³⁴⁶ He was assisted by Michael Rathbone as 2nd cameraman, and assistant cameramen Alister Barry and Barry Thomas, both of whom had worked in film and television for several years. As sound recordist, Malcolm Moore worked with Don Reynolds and Wayne Borden, both experienced technicians. Brian Shennan of the National Film Unit was employed as dubbing mixer. In addition, Geoff Murphy, who had an already well-established reputation in film, assisted with sound and filled the role of assistant director, while Gwen Kaiser assisted with costume and wardrobe on the film. The film's music was adapted by John Cousins, a talented composer, who lectured at the Canterbury University School of Music.³⁴⁷

White states that their reasons for wanting to use such a high-level professional crew were that its "presence would compensate for our relative inexperience at working to demanding schedules and coping with the inevitable stresses that develop on a sizable production".³⁴⁸ There was an additional reason: "Merely from a producer's point-of-view, the use of such people also added weight to any proposal submitted to prospective investors". He adds that while he and Ward were "only interested in working with people whose talent we respected", there were a number of other considerations to take into account, such as whether a prospective crew-member had had previous experience

³⁴⁶ Bollinger was assistant to the DOP Michael Seresin on *Sleeping Dogs*.

³⁴⁷ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 130.

³⁴⁸ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 10.

at working on a low-budget film, whether they were prepared to “work under a system of deferred investment”, whether they would be compatible with the other members of the crew, and most importantly, whether they showed interest or enthusiasm for this particular project. (White and Ward saw this as being “especially relevant to the key creative roles of lighting-cameraman and film editor”.)³⁴⁹ Finding and motivating such a team was a complex task for two students.

At the time of the application to the Arts Council, the ideal actor to play the role of Malfred Signal (who would be “of the utmost importance to the film’s success” in White’s view) was Rosalie Carey. Rosalie had played this part in the Globe production and the radio dramatization of the play and “had shown a great deal of interest” in the role.³⁵⁰ However, after six screen tests, shot during June and July 1977, with various actresses, it was decided to use Anne Flannery for the part. According to White, “the decision to use her was made almost immediately. Apart from being ideally suited to the role of Malfred, she also possessed a very professional attitude that proved to be essential throughout the demanding shooting period”.³⁵¹ Flannery had been a teacher at the New Zealand Drama School and had appeared in a number of screen productions, including the well-known, and somewhat controversial television series, *The Governor* (NZBC, 1977). She had also been nominated for a Feltex Award for her leading role in Ian Mune and Roger Donaldson’s production of *The Woman at the Store* (1975). In selecting supporting actors, White and Ward were restricted because of limited financial resources and because of the need to base the production in Wellington. Many of those they would like to have used had other prior commitments, but Anne Flannery was able to use her contacts to fill the parts, and all the casting was completed before shooting began.

The Arts Council application included a draft of the script in treatment form. While it is similar to the final script, there are some important differences. Instead of the film opening with the farewell party to Malfred, the draft begins with the bus journey to her new home, intercut with a flashback to her teaching days. The farewell party is included in the draft, but as a flashback sequence, which begins when Malfred arrives at her new home. Another major scene in the draft that appears in the final film but with

³⁴⁹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 10.

³⁵⁰ White, "Application to the Arts Council," 2.

³⁵¹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 11.

some important changes, is the scene where she is painting at the beach. In the draft, instead of Malfred herself coming to the realization that she is unable to capture the power of nature with her water-colour painting, nature destroys what she has painted when a wild wind violently splatters the paint. This is the beginning of the storm that drives Malfred back to her house and rages throughout the following night. There is also, as McDonnell has noted, a change in tone, since the draft emphasizes “the suspense of the thriller-type [...]. For example, there were to be shots of an anonymous hand rummaging through a drawer, only later revealed as Malfred’s”.³⁵² Finally, there is more dialogue in the draft script than in the finished film, especially between Malfred and her mother. In the completed film, the difficult relationship between them is suggested by the visuals, such as her mother grasping her hand. One striking, long piece of dialogue that would be retained almost word-for-word from the draft (and from the novel) was Malfred’s speech on the telephone, supposedly to her neighbour.

White notes in his dissertation that: “a full screenplay as such, was never completed as the locations were finalized just in time for the shooting script to be written. (Of course, with a film of this nature, the locations selected often influenced the very structure of a scene.)” He adds: “the greatest difficulty we faced when adapting the novel was an inability to interpret in words the atmosphere and mood, that we knew we could capture visually”.³⁵³ This perhaps accounts for the fact that so much of the dialogue in the original draft script was eventually omitted, to the extent that only fifteen percent of the film has any dialogue or spoken words. In a 1978 article for *Craccum*, the Auckland University student newspaper, Roger Horrocks quoted White as saying: “We try to establish a mood and atmosphere rather than dialogue. We set out to capture what Janet Frame calls ‘the room two inches behind the eyes, a subjective vision of light and darkness’”.³⁵⁴ This serves as a useful summary of the distinctive style of the two filmmakers (and indeed of the novelist).

When it came to choosing the locations for the film, White recalls that they literally drove around both islands – he around the South Island, and Ward around the North Island.³⁵⁵ (Ward would later be famous for his exhaustive location searches.) Although the cottage in the novel is actually set in the very north of the North Island, they decided

³⁵² McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 131.

³⁵³ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 6.

³⁵⁴ Roger Horrocks, "A Work of Genius," *Craccum* 31 July 1978: 11.

³⁵⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

in the end to choose locations close to Wellington for convenience since Anne Flannery had to return to Wellington each night, and they needed to be close to the National Film Unit processing laboratory in Wellington and to equipment hire facilities.³⁵⁶ They eventually found a cottage at Plimmerton, which was “reasonably isolated (yet accessible), and was hooked to an electrical supply (negating the possible need for a generator)”.³⁵⁷ Initially they had difficulties gaining the rights to use the cottage, but “the owners finally gave their consent only because ‘Vincent was so determined’”.³⁵⁸ Most of the film was shot at Plimmerton, but some sections were shot in the Wairarapa, for example the scene of Malfred painting at the beach, which was on the south-east coast, overlooking Mana Island. White and Ward spent “a great deal of time [...] looking for an old bus with a lot of character”, and eventually found one in Greytown, where the bus sequence was filmed. The scenes of the classroom, the fern-house, the mother’s bedroom and the farewell party were shot in Upper Hutt and other parts of Wellington”.³⁵⁹

Production and Post-Production

The shooting schedule was for twenty-five days, preceded by five days for set-construction and five days set aside for contingencies. The film was shot in two blocks: one in September 1977 and the other, later that year, in December. “The schedule had to be arranged that way because Anne Flannery had other acting commitments in October and November. In the first block lasting twenty-four days, all the scenes took place in Wellington and at the cottage at Plimmerton. In the second block of twelve days, they moved to the Wairarapa to film the bus journey and the painting expedition”.³⁶⁰ While they were filming in the Wairarapa, the entire crew stayed with Ward’s parents, who were supportive to the point of paying the crew a week’s wages when money was short. Malfred’s painting trip was shot on December 5 and 6, and the school bus trip on December 9-11. This explains why the bus appears to be going through a summery landscape, while the bach itself seems more wintry.”³⁶¹ Such

³⁵⁶ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 11.

³⁵⁷ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 12.

³⁵⁸ Campbell, “Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid”, 23.

³⁵⁹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 12.

³⁶⁰ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 13.

³⁶¹ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 131.

changes transformed the somewhat lush mood of the Waiheke settings in Frame's novel, but were evocative in their own way.

Alun Bollinger did not shoot all of *A State of Siege*. Mike Rathbone, who was working at The Film Unit at the time as an assistant cameraman, shot some of the film, such as the scene of the mother dying, before Bollinger became involved. Bollinger comments that the cinematographic style of this part of the film is somewhat different from the scenes shot later, being "quite strongly backlit, all the light [...] coming from the window behind the mother", but he makes the point that "Vincent always had a sense of what he wanted so he could describe quite well to whoever was shooting the film".³⁶² Bollinger was initially suggested to Ward as someone suitable to work on the film by Ross Chambers, a sound recordist. Ward approached the camera-man directly and was able to interest him in the project because, as Bollinger recalls, although he realized there was not going to be much money in the job, "I was a fan of Janet Frame [...] and Vincent obviously had an interesting angle" on the story.³⁶³ This was one of the many low budget projects that Bollinger undertook for creative reasons.

There was no generator for the shooting of the film, so although floodlights were used to create the contrast between light and shadow, much of the lighting in the film was natural lighting. Bollinger sees Ward as an extremely visual director and comments:

I have always, specially since working with Vincent, encouraged directors to give me any visual input they can [...]. So Vincent really brought it home to me how useful visual reference can be, because, as a cameraman, I will use any tool I can to get inside the director's head. They can talk about it, and you can read the script, but [it's valuable] if they can give you visual references, and sometimes you will look at another movie. Obviously you're not trying to replicate or mimic necessarily, but you will get ideas and moods and a feeling of what the director likes.³⁶⁴

Both Ward and White were involved in the long, drawn-out post-production phase of the film, White more so than would be normally expected for a producer. According to White, the reasons for this were:

³⁶² Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December, 1998.

³⁶³ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

³⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

Firstly, [Ward] had commitments with another project [presumably *In Spring One Plants Alone*], and could not spend as much time as he or I would have liked. Secondly, a production of this type should have had an assistant editor, but as finances would not allow this, I took on that function in the latter stages. Lastly, it was necessary for me to ensure a certain degree of continuity was maintained throughout editing, because Chris King [the editor] had to work outside of normal working hours, and generally the whole process was rather fractionated (due to the peculiar arrangement I had with Orly Productions over editing facilities).³⁶⁵

Editor Chris King became involved in the film in 1976, just after he had left South Pacific Television and had started working for Orly Productions. He was approached by White, whom he had met while they were working together on a documentary at South Pacific Television in Christchurch, and King explained they were “looking for me to put together a short reel of some footage that had been shot for a drama” since the film-makers were trying to get finance from the Arts Council to complete the film. One of the reasons King believes they were interested in getting him to work on the project was that “I had access to the only six-plate Steenbeck in Christchurch that wasn’t within the confines of Television New Zealand”.³⁶⁶ King was sympathetic to the project because at the time, he was making “horrible” commercials to make money to support his young family, and Ward’s art-school approach struck him as an interesting change. King, who loved the “tactile” nature of editing film, recognized that “both Tim and Vince had a certain [...] energy about them”, so he approached his employer to ask for permission to work on the film. The understanding was that King was allowed to work on free-lance projects providing they were not of a commercial nature, and since his employer was under the impression he was putting together “a ten-minute or twelve-minute reel” of student film, for which he would earn very little, his employer agreed on condition that “it didn’t interfere” with his “liability to the company money”.³⁶⁷

Initially, he put together a short sequence to accompany funding applications consisting of the scene where Malfred meets her boyfriend in the greenhouse. King believes that the version of this scene shown to the Arts Council was somewhat different from its

³⁶⁵ White, “Production of a Film Drama,” 15.

³⁶⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁶⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

later form. Within a few weeks of finishing the second shoot, he made a complete assembly of the material for the film, but this was a “loose fine-cut”, rather than a rough cut, because most of the scenes set inside the cottage were “very tightly scripted and did not involve a lot of cutting”.³⁶⁸ This was the version shown to the Interim Film Commission, to whom White and Ward were applying for post-production funding, and it was fifty-three minutes long. With the help of additional funding from the Interim Film Commission, the Arts Council and the Department of Education, a final cut, with track-laying completed, was finished by the beginning of June and ran to forty-nine minutes.³⁶⁹

King edited the film in his own time, on many occasions getting up at three or four o'clock in the morning, going in to work to edit the film, and making sure he vacated the building by eight a.m., when his employer arrived at work. He recalls that he “basically put the film together by myself” and that there were long periods of time when he did not see either White or Ward, although there were a few scenes - in particular the scene where Malfred was cleaning the bath - where Ward particularly wanted to be involved in the editing process.³⁷⁰ King never at any time saw the full script, but he had read Janet Frame and he had seen one of the few stage productions of *A State of Siege*, in Dunedin, with Rosalie Carey acting in the lead role. He did not even see the completed film. “I would get something and would put something together, and they would say, ‘oh yeah, that’s fine’. And Tim would take it away then it could be months later that they’d come back with more footage”.³⁷¹ There were therefore many scenes that he cut without having the scene that preceded it, or the scene that would follow it. Nevertheless, because of the film’s “quite minimalist” and filmed-in-the-camera style, there were few editing options. The film was basically shot mute and there were very few takes, so King was able to employ a technique of “undercutting as opposed to overcutting”. He recalls the film as being “a real joy to cut” in comparison to cutting commercials, because of the internal visual logic. He would cut “soon after the point of action at the start, and just before the action stopped. I would piece it together, thinking that that would be it, and we would trim it down later”. In the end, they did not have to trim much at all. Since there was no sound for many of the

³⁶⁸ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 15.

³⁶⁹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 15.

³⁷⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁷¹ Interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

rushes, the editing was based on the logic of the visuals, and King explains that “we established a cut basically that was eighty or ninety percent mute – if we got that right within ourselves, then we went with the audio against it”. Even at the final stages of the editing, after the individual scenes had been cut, and they were shaping the piece as a whole, King recalls the scenes were so self-contained, that “not a lot of shaping took place”, apart from linking shots.³⁷² What King is describing is reminiscent of the kind of pure film style advocated by André Bazin which gives visual action room to unfold fully, in contrast to the ‘overcutting’ of the average commercial, or of any drama that relies upon editing rather than acting or *mise-en-scène* to create intensity.³⁷³

Compiling the film’s soundtrack “presented an interesting challenge”, according to White.³⁷⁴ In part due to their efforts to “save both time and money” during shooting and in part due to the problems with the old sound equipment that was all Ward and White were able to obtain from the Film Unit, only a few scenes - such as the phone scene, and getting off the bus, which had dialogue - were shot with true location sound, using a camera with a sync sound recording facility and a sound recordist. King believes that one of the reasons White approached him about working on the film was that in the drama series he had just worked on, he had led a team which had successfully done six episodes of post-sync sound for an actor whose voice was not right for the part, something that was relatively rare in New Zealand at that time. White recognized that King “had that ability”.³⁷⁵ He comments that “Chris King’s experience proved invaluable when it came to track-laying in preparation for the final sound mix, re-scheduled for the beginning of June. A total of six tracks were utilized, although towards the end of the film, the soundtrack became more and more sparse”.³⁷⁶

Since only about twenty-five percent of the film had been shot with synchronous sound, Ward and White spent a long time finding the right sound or sounds to contribute to the mood they felt they had “established visually”. The practical limitation of shooting mute was turned to an advantage by maximizing the evocative potential of sound to help create *Stimmung*. They recorded all the “spot effects” such as keys rattling, and

³⁷² Interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁷³ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

³⁷⁴ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 16.

³⁷⁵ Interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁷⁶ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 16.

footsteps for scenes like the arrival at the cottage and “searched through a great deal of pre-recorded effects and ‘atmospheres’ to get sound for a scene such as Malfred painting by the sea”.³⁷⁷ In fact, as White comments, this was the only stage at which the production got behind schedule. Clearly this was due to a combination of perfectionism and limited resources. King concurs that “the biggest strain in the whole thing was actually doing all the audio” and recalls: “There was a beg, borrow or steal approach” to finding suitable sound equipment. Ward and White “would sneak out [...] with something from the art school or something from Television New Zealand, and do the sound effects in the middle of the night, where they would walk up and down an acquaintance’s verandah to get the squeaky floorboards, or go off and just get quiet atmospheres which was pretty difficult in the city”.³⁷⁸

At the same time as the sound effects were being put together, John Cousins was working on the music for the film. The filmmakers were looking for “a simple theme that possessed a nostalgic, haunting quality and that could be used over two or three scenes we had in mind”.³⁷⁹ Cousins offered them a number of alternatives, and they finally chose a Chopin Mazurka, played slowly and mainly with the left hand, as being appropriate for the atmosphere of the film. King recalls that Cousins also worked on the white noise sound effects for the film. There was some difficulty stretching out the white noise in the last scene. This was the last piece of audio to be completed, and they had to “bury the cross-fade into something else [...], stretch it out to the credits”. Since it was the first time King had had to deal with sound effects of this kind, he was assisted by Cousins who was familiar with electronic music.³⁸⁰

King recalls that after the editing was completed, all the audio had yet to be laid, and they were running out of time. They needed to complete the sound mix in order to reassure the Film Commission, which had funded them for post-production, that the film was on schedule for completion. The project had by then become “a real millstone” around King’s neck, and consequently, Ward, White and Kind agreed to spend a long weekend working continuously on laying the soundtrack for the film. King worked on the six-plate Steenbeck at his company, Ward worked on one which had recently been acquired by a rival company, and White worked on the one at South

³⁷⁷ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 16.

³⁷⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁷⁹ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 16.

³⁸⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

Pacific Television, so they were all “within six blocks” of each other. King recalls that they divided up the scenes so “if there was something that Vincent was particularly keen on laying” he was able to work on the scenes that interested him. White worked mainly on the atmospheres, Ward worked on the scenes he was interested in, and King worked mainly on the key tracks.³⁸¹ They were limited by the sound mixing capabilities of the equipment, since they “couldn’t ever hear more than two audio tracks at a time”, but despite this, the way the different sounds were layered was successful, in King’s view, and most people viewing the film remain unaware that almost all the sound in the film is post-production sound. By the end of the long weekend, the soundtrack had still not been completed, but White was able to take away a reel of about twenty-five minutes to show the Film Commission.³⁸² In the light of Ward’s interest in the visual qualities of silent film-making, it is striking to consider that he and his collaborators shot *A State of Siege* effectively as a silent film, before its highly stylized soundtrack was added.

King says of working with Ward and White: “there wasn’t much common ground [between us] other than the piece of film we were dealing with”. They were students at that time, while King was making commercials for a living. Although they got on well together, King felt it was very much their project. He tried to listen to what they wanted, feeling that “it was extensively their film, so it was my job to find out the rhythm of the film and make it”. He was pleased with the film when he saw it at its first screening at the Academy Cinema in Christchurch, and when he saw the film projected, he was struck by “the power of the big projected image”. He had initially worked mainly in television, but one of the things he had learnt from making commercials shot on 35mm film and shown in cinemas was the importance of “holding onto shots and realizing these shots could be held”.³⁸³ This is again a Bazinian insight seldom encountered in the commercial world.

As soon as the track-laying was complete, the rolls of film were sent to Pacific Film Productions but “the one factor which hindered progress just before the film was due to go to the ‘Lab’ was the lack of a ‘slash dupe’ (i.e. a duplicate workprint)”.³⁸⁴ Normally the sound editor works with one workprint, while the original workprint is sent to the

³⁸¹ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁸² Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁸³ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁸⁴ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 17.

negative-matcher for the “conforming” and assembly of the A and B rolls, but because there was only one workprint, it took ten days before the conforming was complete and the A and B rolls were sent to the National Film Unit laboratory. Meanwhile, the final sound mix had been transferred to an optical negative master in readiness to be ‘married’ to the picture in the answer print, and Ward and White “sat through the entire workprint with the colour-grader, as the grading was not simply a matter of correcting for skin tones”.³⁸⁵

Unfortunately, during the processing at the National Film Unit, the film negative was damaged. This came as a great blow to the filmmakers. A colour reversal intermediate was necessary, and the only laboratory able to do this reliably was the Atlab laboratory in Sydney. Reversing the damage to the negative resulted in considerable extra costs – the budget had to be increased by almost ten percent. This part of the process was clearly one in which White and Ward’s inexperience was a considerable disadvantage, and from which they learnt a great deal from their mistakes. As White comments, in retrospect: “I cannot stress just how important it is during this period to have a close liaison with the laboratory. After spending so much time, money and energy making a film such as *A State of Siege*, it is utter madness to simply hand it over to someone who is not the least bit involved with it”.³⁸⁶ Ward and White were discovering that not everyone in the film industry was as much a perfectionist as they were.

Marketing and Distribution

In terms of marketing and distributing the film, White makes the point that: “One must appreciate that we ventured into the production determined that marketing considerations would not unduly influence the structure of the completed film”.³⁸⁷ This resulted in some problems recouping the costs, since the completed film was neither long enough to be a feature film, nor short enough to be classified as a ‘short’, so in White’s view, “it could only gain theatrical release as part of a ‘double bill’”.³⁸⁸ At one point, the Film Commission hoped to release it as a “double bill” with David Blyth’s *Angel Mine* (1978), a relatively short feature film, sixty-seven minutes in length, also made by a film student but emerging from a different aesthetic. (The Censor tried to

³⁸⁵ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 17.

³⁸⁶ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 17.

³⁸⁷ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 18.

³⁸⁸ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 18.

make sense of it as “punk” filmmaking!)³⁸⁹ As White points out, it was very difficult to find a film “to complement something with the impact of *A State of Siege*”. The length also presented problems for television sales, but since it was the filmmakers’ primary aim to make a film for the cinema with its greater scope for mood and visual subtlety, White did not imagine it would “stand up successfully on the ‘small screen’”.³⁹⁰

There was however, the potential for having the film distributed at international film festivals, and fortunately for White and Ward, Professor Albert Johnson, the noted American film critic and one of the organizers of the San Francisco Film Festival, saw a preview of the film while it was in the laboratory at the National Film Unit. He wrote to several film festival directors, recommending the film for inclusion in the San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London and Berlin Film Festivals. Johnson was visiting New Zealand as a guest of the local film festival and had been alerted to the artistic qualities of this film; but his reaction was even more enthusiastic than anyone had expected. His presence in New Zealand and ability to recognize new talent were a lucky accident that gave the film unexpected international exposure. A Professor at the University of California at Berkeley and former editor of *Film Quarterly*, Johnson was an influential figure in the American festival circuit. Locally, the film premiered at the Wellington Film Festival on 15 July 1978, and was then given cinematic release in Wellington (at the Paramount), Auckland (at the Classic), Christchurch (at the Academy) and Dunedin. The film was purchased by the National Film Library, and despite White’s reservations, was eventually screened on television, on TV1 on 14 October 1979.³⁹¹ Overseas, it was distributed by an American company, Bauer International Pictures, and screened with *In Spring One Plants Alone* at repertory theatres in various parts of the USA. *A State of Siege* was included in the Chicago Film Festival in 1978, where it won the Golden Hugo Award for the best student film, and at the Miami Film Festival, where it was awarded the Gold Medal Special Jury Prize. In 1980, it was screened in the New Directors section of the San Francisco Film Festival.

On the basis of this examination of the process of making the film, it is evident that White was a key collaborator in some respects, and shares equal credit with Ward for the film’s overall success. Significantly, the end credits for the film list Ward as

³⁸⁹ Martin and Edwards, *New Zealand Film 1912-1996* 67.

³⁹⁰ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 18.

³⁹¹ Horrocks, *Vincent Ward: The New Zealand Film Makers at the Auckland City Art Gallery Series*.

director and White as producer on the same title, giving them equal weighting. That the film was “very much a co-operative venture” was affirmed by Ward in an article in The Dominion.³⁹² The NZ Listener commented that: “What makes the Ward/White team work as a unit is that they seem to have split the roles. If Ward is the committed filmmaker, White by general consent is the socially adept partner who moves in to smooth any feathers that might have been ruffled by Ward in mid-flight”.³⁹³ White’s contribution in practical matters was invaluable - he was largely responsible for finding funding for the film, for drawing up a budget and surviving on it, for getting copyright clearance, for drawing up the shooting schedules, for distributing the film, and for the many day-to-day details such as transporting the crew to the shoot, getting equipment and props to the appropriate locations and arranging food and accommodation for the crew. He recalls that: “As happens with most production managers, I ended up physically working longer hours than anyone else. This was due to the fact I was responsible for getting the exposed footage to the film laboratory before 9 a.m. every day and collecting the processed rushes in the afternoon, irrespective of the hours we were working”.³⁹⁴

That these practical concerns were sometimes at odds with what Ward as a perfectionist director had in mind is evident in White’s dissertation, when he makes the point that:

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of producing *A State of Siege* was drawing up an accurate and realistic budget. Of course, this is also often the area where the producer’s relationship with the director is most strained. That is, there is always a conflict of organizational and filmic priorities: Will the money available allow for the amount of shooting estimated as essential in the script? Is synchronous sound essential to a particular scene? Does a frame-burn written into the script really justify its cost, in relation to the overall costs of the film?³⁹⁵

White cites at least one example where he had to “consider the wishes of the director” against his better judgment. With regard to the shooting schedule, Ward “wanted to shoot things in sequential order, as much as possible” and White felt he “had to agree to

³⁹² Catherine De la Roche, "Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film," The Dominion 19 June 1978.

³⁹³ Campbell, “Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid,” 23.

³⁹⁴ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 14.

³⁹⁵ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 8.

this despite the fact that it caused problems during the first shoot, with some day and night shooting running back to back”.³⁹⁶

An important part of White’s role was to make sure that people co-operated with each other on the film. He believes that: “Whatever inter-personal and management skills I had were increased tenfold in the space of just the shoot on that movie, and the whole process of just trying to get it completed”. He cites as an example, Geoff Murphy, who “was determined to make sure we wouldn’t have too easy a time of it”. Murphy was “just the complete opposite of someone like Vincent. He’s slapdash and [...] has a real sense of urgency that’s all about spontaneity and improvisation and just grab it while you can, whereas [with] Vincent [it] was a much more deliberate, calculated process of manipulating everything right down to the last detail”.³⁹⁷ This is an important contrast between Ward’s art-oriented approach and that of a director primarily concerned with narrative energy whose style was more typical of the New Zealand film industry at this time.

Although in many respects, White and Ward’s skills complemented each other, they were also, as King puts it, “complete opposites. Tim was tall and neat [...] and presented himself really well, and Vince was disheveled [...], disorganized at times, sort of shambly, quite intense”.³⁹⁸ Their differences sometimes caused conflict and White describes their relationship as being “tempestuous”. However, he recognized when he decided to work on the project with Ward that their interests dovetailed. “I wanted to produce, feeling that I had greater skills in that area, and saw in someone like Vincent, an exceptional talent of a dimension that truly hadn’t been tested [...], because obviously, I’d seen his other work too, the odd sort of experimental pieces that he’d done at art school”.³⁹⁹ Although they were both equally involved in the post-production process, particularly in the sound-mixing and colour-grading, White saw himself as having “a stronger kind of editorial sense that caused some conflict in the post-production phase, because I had to, under the terms of the course, obviously brand it in some way as my own work too. And film schools always have a bit of a dilemma over the role of the producer. They’re so *auteur*-driven. I think that did cause Vincent a little bit of grief in the post-production phase [...] and probably stood him in good

³⁹⁶ White, "Production of a Film Drama," 13.

³⁹⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

³⁹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

³⁹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

stead. In many ways [it] perhaps galvanized his thinking to make sure that he didn't fall into that same situation again".⁴⁰⁰ Ultimately White became a successful producer working overseas, and Ward concentrated his energies on directing and writing.

Not only were Anne Flannery's contacts in the acting world very useful in the casting of the film, her interpretation of the role of Malfred Signal also made a significant contribution. Her approach (as described in Programme Notes for the US exhibition of the film) focused on Malfred as an unmarried woman in New Zealand society at the time.

The film is set in the late 1950s – it really tells the story of a generation of women who were thirty or thereabouts when World War II finished, and who were single or widowed at that time. Perhaps they lost a boyfriend or a husband in the war. In New Zealand society, at that time, a woman who was in that position was considered 'over the hill', beyond all marital or sexual possibility. This tells the story of one such woman and what became of her.⁴⁰¹

The Production Notes for the film also noted Ward's perfectionism: "the crazy energy that sometimes fired the project", for example in a scene that was not included in the final edit:

Late in the story, Ward wanted to show Malfred Signal lying still while large flies crawled over her face. In order to attract the flies, he laid out some rotting meat. Then he bought a drug to slow the flies down. They still went too fast. So he got some airplane glue and glued their wings together. As Anne Flannery, like a real trouper, held her breath, the treated flies walked down her face and over her nose and open mouth.

The example demonstrates not only Ward's obsessive concern with detail, but also Anne Flannery's commitment to the film, which extended as far as looking after Ward when he, wanting to "capture a sense of Malfred's environment", lived on location for a long period. Ward recalls: "It was a long way away from the shops and I had no transport. Yet each day, Anne Flannery would bring food for me, unsolicited and

⁴⁰⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁴⁰¹ Anne Flannery quoted in *A State of Siege* and in *Spring One Plants Alone: Programme Notes* (Plainfield, USA: Universal Life, 1980-81).

unpaid for”.⁴⁰² In the Production Notes Ward explicitly acknowledged his own obsessive approach, with the publicity emphasizing this as a positive aspect, as evidence of the film’s special intensity and the director’s persona as *auteur*.

Ward acknowledged that he learnt a great deal working with such an experienced cast and crew, “particularly from Anne Flannery”, and admitted that it must have been difficult for them to take direction from an inexperienced young student such as himself. However, he “found everybody helpful. Gwen Kaiser, who had had experience of creating stage and screen costumes, did wonders [...]. Alun Bollinger was always willing to experiment with lighting effects. When we found a location flooded, Peter McCauley, who plays Wilfred, helped clear up. And so it went”.⁴⁰³ White also acknowledged the considerable contribution to the film made by Alun Bollinger:

Alun’s contribution was just so immense and taught Vincent a lot. Taught myself a lot. He was generous-spirited and a good guy. Alun [...] always believed in what we were trying to do [...]. Not a lot would have recognized what we were trying to do. And there was a real sense of ambition. We wanted to make something that would make a difference. It wasn’t just all about a career move or the stepping-stone into something else. [...]. We were genuinely trying to make something that could stand alone.⁴⁰⁴

Bollinger and Geoff Murphy were “both used to working on low-budget productions with the ACME Sausage Company and were a tremendous asset on location – for instance, both were responsible for set construction.”⁴⁰⁵ Such cooperation and multi-skilling were characteristic of the 1970s, and provided the necessary basis for the emergence of the new local film industry.

Visual Style

The cinematography of *A State of Siege* is striking in that the shot sizes tend to be either close-ups or long-shots, with few intervening mid-shots, which, as McDonnell has

⁴⁰² Ward quoted in *A State of Siege* and in *Spring One Plants Alone: Programme Notes*.

⁴⁰³ De la Roche, “Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film”.

⁴⁰⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁴⁰⁵ White, “Production of a Film Drama,” 10.

pointed out, has the effect of jolting the viewer “in close and then out again”.⁴⁰⁶ There are a number of extended takes, particularly of tracking and panning shots, such as the scene where Malfred speaks on the telephone. The strong visual contrasts in the film center around civilization (represented by depictions of ‘civilized society’ and interiors) and wilderness (represented by depictions of exteriors and the forces of nature). Malfred is often shown as being caught between these two worlds, looking out of windows or standing in doorways. Ward’s comments in an article in The Dominion drew attention to certain deliberate strategies on the part of the filmmakers:

In the scenes at her new home, we tried to convey the constant presence of natural forces – the sea and the wind, the darkness and isolation, where she could not escape from either past or present. We tried to capture the sense of an ever-present [natural] environment as in the novel, and to show that this environment is quite foreign to the enclosed world Malfred has ordinarily been used to.⁴⁰⁷

A State of Siege focuses in detail on the contrast between civilization and wilderness. The film’s opening scene evokes a genteel world of bone china teacups and cup-cakes, representing middle class South Island society, in this case a group of women teachers. Throughout this scene Malfred is represented as being somewhat passive, since she does not say anything or respond to the queries or allegations that are directed towards her. The first shot of her is in a MCU, sitting in front of a window. Her braided hair and still face suggest an almost Madonna-like impassivity in the face of her friends’ astonishment at her unprecedented behaviour and her apparent rejection of their society. This shot separates her from her friends, recalling Ward’s later comment that “I always tend to look at things from the outside. I feel more comfortable making films about people on the perimeters”.⁴⁰⁸ What is most striking about this scene is that Malfred’s character and background are constructed almost entirely by visual details - by her posture, gestures, and costume and by the *mise-en-scène*. It is clearly Malfred with whom the audience is encouraged to identify, despite her reticence.

The following scene, representing a journey into the wilderness, sets up a series of contrasts. It begins with the sound of a horn tooting, which constitutes a sound bridge

⁴⁰⁶ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 136.

⁴⁰⁷ De la Roche, "Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film".

⁴⁰⁸ Dennis and Bieringa, eds., Film in Aotearoa New Zealand 89.

between scenes, and shortly afterwards, a piece of piano music begins. The music, composed by Chopin, has associations with soirées in European salons; it provides a link with civilized society of the preceding scene but contrasts strongly with the setting of this scene. The school bus, looking somewhat like a prehistoric monster lumbering through the landscape, is full of children who show no restraint in their speech or laughter. They are noisy and constantly in motion, in comparison with Malfred, who sits silently, very still and upright in her seat. In contrast to the unrestrained children on the bus, there is a flashback to Malfred teaching at a girls' school where the girls sit silent and motionless at their desks, while her carefully modulated voice explains what they are to do. This sequence utilizes chiaroscuro lighting, with Malfred, side-lit, standing by the window, a composition which as McDonnell has pointed out, is "very reminiscent of Vermeer's paintings of women outdoors".⁴⁰⁹ Malfred's bus journey continues through a landscape empty of signs of civilization except for power-lines and the occasional house where the bus driver stops to deliver newspapers or to drop off children.

When the bus arrives at her stop, Malfred's slow genteel descent from the bus contrasts with the children tumbling noisily out of the bus. The surrounding landscape is harsh and unwelcoming and the bus driver attempts to warn Malfred about what happened to the previous occupant of the house she is going to live in. Her monosyllabic replies to the bus driver's queries and warnings to lock her door at night, seen to indicate that, despite her reserved demeanor and conservative dress (with her cameo brooch and white high-necked blouse), she is determined to follow her own path. The extended shot of the bus driving away into the distance creates a strong sense of the landscape and emphasizes her insignificance and isolation in this new environment.

Malfred's determination to turn her back on society exposes her to certain forces that are antagonistic to civilization. The first intimation of these forces comes when she goes to enter the house. The door resists being opened, as if the house itself resented an intruder. When she enters, the interior of the house is dark and brooding. Such scenes provide a good example of what Lotte Eisner meant by the creation of *Stimmung* (mood, or atmosphere), particularly an atmosphere of unease, in German Expressionist films.

⁴⁰⁹ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 141.

The next morning, Malfred wastes no time in dispelling the gloom by opening the blinds to let in the light. After unpacking her belongings, she determinedly cleans to dispel the dust and grime and make the house her home. However, the objects in the house, particularly the old medicine bottles in the bathroom, conspire against her to bring back unpleasant memories and she finds herself thinking back to her mother's last days. Her mother's oppression of Malfred is suggested visually by a memory of her grasping Malfred's hand. The sequence ends with the menacing sounds of the murky water going down the plughole and Malfred sitting looking out the window. The side-lighting of this shot, and the scarf Malfred is wearing around her head, is a composition that suggests very strongly the influence of Ward's art-school training.

The following scene of Malfred painting by the beach has already been discussed in some detail in Chapter One, but it is worth noting that once again, the scene revolves around the contrast between civilization - represented by Malfred in her straw hat and polka-dotted dress, with her delicate water-colour brushes and paints - and the wilderness, represented by the menacing black rocks and the unrestrained power of the waves crashing against the shore. Roger Horrocks points out that while "this scene has no exact precedent in the novel", it makes use of the medium of the moving image brilliantly and economically to convey the central issues of the book⁴¹⁰. His detailed analysis identifies a "pattern of paired POV shots" which initially "encourages us to identify with Malfred" in her dissatisfaction at her attempts to capture the landscape. As the scene draws to a close, however, the film exploits the mobility of the camera and utilizes "complex changes of framing" to emphasize Malfred's "loss of the controlling viewpoint".⁴¹¹

The representation of the landscape in this scene has resonances with the Romantic Sublime. The movement of the camera closer and closer to the oncoming waves creates a sense of the sea as powerful, menacing and awe-inspiring. As discussed in Chapter One, the Romantic Sublime is linked with the notion of inner vision, the external vision of the sublime landscape generating in the viewer an inner vision, but although Malfred is trying to "see for the first time" - as indicated by the extreme close-up on her eyes - she realizes that she is inadequate to the task. Nicholas Reid makes the point that "Her civilized art cannot cope with the violence of the sea, the moaning of the wind. She

⁴¹⁰ Horrocks, "To Postulate a Ready and an Understanding Reader," 140.

⁴¹¹ Horrocks, "To Postulate a Ready and an Understanding Reader," 142.

does not have the resources for solitude. Yes, she has discovered a ‘new way of seeing things’ – but it is something oppressive, something nightmarish, something she never bargained for”.⁴¹²

In the evening, it is not the house or the objects inside that seem to represent a threat to Malfred but what is outside. Firstly the wind, which begins to howl with increasing strength, then mysterious noises, seem to suggest an unseen intruder. She takes refuge in the accoutrements of civilization – her art books, her teacups – to protect herself against the unknown, but when the camera pans from Malfred reading to a photo of Wilfred, her former boyfriend, there is a flashback to a memory of him making sexual advances to her, which she evidently found unpleasant. The flashback is set in a fern-house and the lighting in the scene is cold and menacing, suggesting again that nature is threatening. In the flashback, Malfred tries to take refuge in planning events for various organizations – to avoid facing what she apparently perceives as the wild energies of sexuality, and the threat posed by the menacing landscape. This flashback is closely followed by another – a shot of her mother lying on her deathbed. The linking of these two flashbacks implies that for Malfred, the physical mysteries of sexuality and death are both overwhelming and disturbing. The images are close to stereotype (the repressed spinster) but are rescued by their visual subtleties and the sense that these events happened in a more circumspect era.

Shortly afterwards, Malfred gets ready for bed and her tightly-buttoned high-necked Victorian-style nightgown further suggests her repressed sexuality. As she becomes increasingly frightened by the noises outside, every noise, even that of her brushing her hair, seems threatening. To calm herself, she locks the door and switches on the radio, which plays soothing orchestral music, but the radio suddenly switches itself off. At this point, there is an unusual shot – an extreme close-up of her eyes - similar to the shot of her eyes when she was at the beach, and emphasizing again the theme of vision. This is followed by a shot of a Henry Moore painting of sleepers in the subway during the war on the wall of her bedroom. Unlike the calm landscapes she was looking at in her art book earlier in the evening, this is a disturbing image reflecting the unease she feels. Although the modernism seems out of character, the war association is certainly relevant.

⁴¹² Nicholas Reid, "A State of Siege," Auckland Star 29 July 1978.



Figure 2: Ending of *A State of Siege* - Epiphany or horror?

The following scene where she has two apparent conversations on the telephone, one to the police requesting help and one to the neighbour, is the clearest indication that Malfred is becoming unhinged. The subject-matter is revealing. Her talk of the arrival of the police, with “reinforcements from the city” indicates that the city’s associations of civilization give her a feeling of security. At first, she makes polite conversation with the “neighbour” but is clearly torn between a desire to maintain her reserve, and her fear and paranoia, and by the end of the conversation her voice reveals her panic. As she talks frankly about her career and how she taught pupils to draw pointless objects, her past life seems meaningless and this puts into perspective her desire to learn to “see for the first time”. However, while her voice-over on the soundtrack is carefully-modulated, a long meandering crane shot which starts high and wide, moves in closer to Malfred, then tracks along the telephone cord, reveals that the telephone is disconnected and she is talking to herself in what now seems to be an almost empty room.⁴¹³ This unusual and striking shot is of a kind rare in New Zealand film.

In the next sequence, Malfred’s efforts to remain sane are indicated by her repeating over and over her mantra of identity: “I’m Malfred Signal, I’m fifty-three years old”, but she is unable to shake off the voice in her head, of her overly-possessive mother, and this starts to drown hers out. Her mother calls: “Mallie, Mallie”, and then, as if to a third party, “My daughter, Malfred Signal. She belongs to me”. Finally, Malfred is reduced to pleading: “Stop it, mother, stop it”, as if her mother is still persecuting her even beyond the grave. The lighting in this sequence is extremely low-key, except for side-lighting on Malfred’s face. This chiaroscuro lighting is a good example of the influence of German Expressionism on Ward’s visual style, reminiscent of the lighting in Murnau’s *Nosferatu*.

The following morning, the storm has dispersed and the atmosphere is again peaceful. Malfred appears with her hair in disarray, and singing to herself like the mad Ophelia, but it is evident by her gestures – warming her hands on the teapot, taking comfort in her morning cup of tea - that she is still trying to function normally. Although the night has passed, the scene again has low-key lighting, suggesting that the menace of the

⁴¹³ Bollinger recalls that this is the only crane shot used in the film and that a corridor had to be knocked out and a false wall built into the house to allow access for the crane to be brought in (Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998).

night is not yet over. Malfred goes to the window and pulls up the blind to let in the light. Shortly afterwards, there is a sudden noise of glass breaking. At first, the audience does not see what has caused the noise; there is instead a reaction shot of Malfred in close-up, seen through a broken pane of glass. Once again, the camera focuses on an extreme close-up of Malfred's eyes, but this time, there is an expression of joy on her face, as if, in a moment of epiphany, she is able to really "see" for the first time. She picks up a rock, which is black, like the rocks at the beach – presumably the cause of the broken window. She stares at it and touches it, closing her eyes as though savouring its reality.

The camera pans away from her to the photo of her and Wilfred, and the audience realizes that the glass of the photograph has been broken vertically separating her image from Wilfred's by the rock thrown through the window. It is significant that in this moment of epiphany, Malfred's ties with the past have symbolically been broken. The camera continues zooming in on the photo to a close-up of her face. The last shot of the film is of Malfred lying dead on the floor. One possible reading of this image is that she has finally achieved her goal of being able to see the true nature of the world, but as the shattered windowpane suggests, the shock of reality has been too much for her to bear. Alternately, we might interpret the rock as proof that she really has been terrorized by a prowler. The image is ambiguous but highly evocative. The camera moves in closer, then tilts up to the window, a powerful image of the border between outside and inside, civilization and wilderness. The film ends with a freeze-frame of the window.

As in the case of the original novel, the film is so strongly coloured by subjectivity that the viewer is never entirely sure what is waking reality and what is dream or flashback. We remain close to Malfred's viewpoint (while occasionally taking a step outside it, as in the camera movement that reveals the disconnected telephone cord) and we share in her delusions - or are they in fact, penetrating insights into reality (like Kurtz's "The horror! The horror!" at the climax of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*)?⁴¹⁴ Ward later commented, he wished he had held the final shot of the film longer. He added: "A rock that appears seemingly from nowhere near the end, also figured in a classroom shot

⁴¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and the Secret Sharer: The Complete Texts*, ed. Franklin Walker (New York: Bantam Books, 1969) 131.

at the beginning, but the connection is not made strongly enough".⁴¹⁵ A *Salient* review of the film offered this interpretation of the ending:

Right near the end of the film, Malfred picks up a stone thrown through the window. Where once she told girls to see the stone, see its shadow, she now touches it, holds it. The film captures this moment superbly and if the end of the film follows suddenly after, on reflection, there really seems no way it could have gone on. To return to the short story analogy, such an ending is often achieved by a sudden revelation or twist in meaning. Here the revelation exists, but it follows naturally from the film and is in the fullest sense a proper conclusion.⁴¹⁶

Frame's ending had been equally mysterious but relied upon words, albeit indecipherable, rather than images. While derived from the novel, the use of window imagery was emphasized by Ward as a consistent motif throughout the film.

An important part of the visual style of the film was its lighting, much of it strongly-contrasting in terms of light and shade. There were also strong contrasts between different forms of light – glaring daylight, torch glow and electric light. As Philip Tremewan noted: "Light is the medium for all films, but Ward has, in his cameraman Alun Bollinger's words, a special 'ability to see light' and to use it like a sculptor. Thus, Malfred's face is etched in light as she moves about the darkened house; the dimness of the light in the bush heightens her reactions to the advances her lover makes; the brilliance of the sun reveals the emptiness of her life".⁴¹⁷ Michael Heath, in a review in the *Evening Post*, singled out the use of dark colours in the film "especially and specifically blue", as "a contributing factor to the many moods presented".⁴¹⁸ As these critics noted, colour and light were exploited very skillfully for the purposes of mood (or *Stimmung*).

Critical Reception

In terms of its local critical reception, the film was generally well-received. Reviewers took the film seriously and some thoughtful analyses were published in newspapers and

⁴¹⁵ Campbell, "Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid," 23.

⁴¹⁶ Simon Wilson, "A State of Siege," *Salient* 24 July 1978: 19.

⁴¹⁷ Philip Tremewan, "A State of Siege," *Education* 30.4 (1981): 37.

⁴¹⁸ Michael Heath, "Superb Work from Youth and Age," *Evening Post* 22 July 1978.

magazines around the country (some extracts from these have already been quoted). The Christchurch Press went so far as to publish an article entitled “NZ Film ‘a work of genius’”, quoting Professor Albert Johnson as saying that the young filmmakers “had control of their material, knew how to sustain mood and direct actors, and had ‘a visual sense of story-telling’”.⁴¹⁹ Catherine de la Roche in The Dominion called the film “a fine achievement”,⁴²⁰ and the reviewer for the Salient judged the film to be “In many ways [...] the finest piece of New Zealand filmmaking I have ever seen”.⁴²¹ Michael Heath saw the film as being “without all doubt, the most sensitive and intelligent film that has ever been made in New Zealand” and “a landmark in New Zealand filmmaking”.⁴²² Like Heath, a number of reviewers saw the film as an inspirational example of the emergent New Zealand film industry. Howard McNaughton in the Christchurch Press wrote that the release of the film was an “exciting event” on “just the right scale”,⁴²³ and Maurice Askew, the president of the Canterbury Film Society, and Ward’s film teacher at Ilam, claimed that *A State of Siege* was the “most provocative New Zealand film yet made”.⁴²⁴ McNaughton’s review saw the visual storytelling methods utilized as central to the film: “It is in terms of visual narrative that this film achieves its most fascinating complexity. Many of Frame’s most elaborated gestures are severely simplified and the verbal content is very small, but the visual articulation of the nightmare and death is given a psychoexpressionistic suggestiveness”.⁴²⁵

Not surprisingly, reviewers singled out for special comment the creation of mood in the film. Nicholas Reid in the Auckland Star wrote: “The film’s most remarkable achievement is the great variety of moods that are packed into just under an hour of running time”,⁴²⁶ and Wynne Colgan in the NZ Herald concurred with his opinion: “It was an astonishing mood piece [...], proof positive of what can be achieved by young people of talent and imagination, even when finance is limited and the assignment they set themselves is formidable”.⁴²⁷ This was one way to identify the difference between the film and more action-oriented features (such as *Sleeping Dogs*, Roger Donaldson,

⁴¹⁹ “New Zealand Film a Work of Genius,” Christchurch Press 14 July 1978: 4.

⁴²⁰ De la Roche, “Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film”.

⁴²¹ Wilson, “A State of Siege,” 19.

⁴²² Heath, “Superb Work from Youth and Age.”

⁴²³ Howard McNaughton, “Overflow Showing for Exciting New Zealand Film,” Christchurch Press 14 July 1978: 6.

⁴²⁴ Askew quoted in McNaughton, “Overflow Showing for Exciting New Zealand Film,” 6.

⁴²⁵ McNaughton, “Overflow Showing for Exciting New Zealand Film,” 6.

⁴²⁶ Reid, “A State of Siege,” 8.

⁴²⁷ W. Colgan, “Daunting Challenge,” NZ Herald 29 July 1978: 6.

1977, *Solo*, Tony Williams, 1977, *Wild Man*, Geoff Murphy, 1977, and *Off the Edge*, Mike Firth, 1977). The film was also seen to be unusually artistic in filmic terms. Stephen Ballantyne, in the NZ Listener praised the directing style: "If film is a language, Ward speaks it with natural ease, which is more than can be said for many of our fellow countrymen".⁴²⁸ Salient commented: "Ward and his crew knew how to use the medium of film. They managed to translate Janet Frame's story, which is securely grounded in the medium of literature (words) into their own story, created out of light and shade, movement and stillness, expression and depiction".⁴²⁹

This review gave much of the credit for the film to Alun Bollinger: "Whether gliding round the rooms of the cottage, capturing in extraordinary close-ups Malfred's eye or hand, or challenging the brutal pounding sea, Bollinger's camera-work is a powerful evocation of light, colour and shape, and most of all shadow".⁴³⁰ Like many reviews it also singled out Anne Flannery's performance as worthy of praise. Flannery's "expression, timing and depth of feeling" played "a central role in the film's success". She had "an extremely difficult job, in creating a character with very little resort to words, who is literally scared to death, yet who all the while maintains a mental rationalization and 'mature' exterior as a defense. In a sense, Malfred's mind unravels, but it doesn't become untidy. Flannery captures this brilliantly".⁴³¹ Catherine de la Roche observed similarly that Anne Flannery's "beautifully modulated performance as Malfred communicates [...] the innumerable shades of experience in past and present, recollection and stark reality".⁴³² In general, the local response to the film was surprisingly positive, considering the occasional awkwardnesses that were an inevitable result of inexperience and an extremely limited budget. Clearly the enthusiasm had something to do with the fact that here was proof that New Zealand's new film industry could produce art as well as action films and knockabout comedies.

Overseas responses were also appreciative. When *A State of Siege* and *In Spring One Plants Alone* toured the USA, in 1980-81, The San Francisco Chronicle commented on the "quietly powerful performance of Anne Flannery, her eyes lost in reverie".⁴³³ The

⁴²⁸ S. Ballantyne, "Drawing Battle Lines," NZ Listener 2 September 1978: 26.

⁴²⁹ Wilson, "A State of Siege," 19.

⁴³⁰ Wilson, "A State of Siege," 19.

⁴³¹ Wilson, "A State of Siege," 19.

⁴³² De la Roche, "Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film".

⁴³³ Judy Stone, "A Hypnotic Look at an Old Woman," San Francisco Chronicle 11 February 1981: 61.

film was praised for its evocation of horror: “Ward evokes more horror with his play of light and shadow in this low-budget movie than Stanley Kubrick was able to create in all of *The Shining*. Finally, what Ward expresses is the devastating horror of utter loneliness”. The same article discussed Ward’s unquestionable talent and described both the films as being “unusually poetic”.⁴³⁴ An article in the Los Angeles Times announced that: “Perhaps the most original talent of New Zealand’s First Wave belongs to 24-year-old Vincent Ward”. It described *A State of Siege* as “a stunning, almost surreal evocation of the disintegration of a spinster schoolteacher” and Ann Flannery as “a remarkable actress”.⁴³⁵ The Minneapolis Star described the film as “strikingly visual” and commented that “the images carry both [Ward’s] films beautifully”.⁴³⁶ A later review in the Los Angeles Times perceptively singled out for comment the use of light, shade and texture in the film:

Early on in *A State of Siege* we glimpse Malfred instructing her pupils on the importance of texture, proportion and shadowing – elements with which Ward himself has taken extraordinary pains in the making of his films. Both are rigorously constructed with one exquisitely composed image following another and incorporating a highly expressive play of light and darkness.⁴³⁷

In the American reviews, White is not mentioned as a collaborator on the film – no doubt due to the fact that the film was screened together with Ward’s *In Spring One Plants Alone*, a project in which White was not involved.

The film also screened in Sydney in a program introducing four films by young filmmakers from New Zealand, entitled “Compromise, Risk”. A New Zealand Film Commission writeup quotes a review by Meaghan Morris in the Sydney Morning Herald describing the film as: “A taut and sensitive treatment of an ageing spinster’s retreat into isolation, memory and madness. Magnificently photographed by Alun Bollinger and with a superb performance by Anne Flannery, *A State of Siege* achieves a tense and strange poetry of life in a social and spiritual backwater, whose apparent uniformity and calm holds unfamiliar experience and unknown dangers”.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Stone, “A Hypnotic Look at an Old Woman,” 61.

⁴³⁵ “The Film Biz of New Zealand,” Los Angeles Times 27 July 1980.

⁴³⁶ Joanna Connors, “New Zealand Films,” The Minneapolis Star 18 November 1980.

⁴³⁷ Kevin Thomas, “New Zealand Women - Two Portraits,” Los Angeles Times 14 March 1981.

⁴³⁸ New Zealand Film Commission advertising for *A State of Siege*.

Tony Mitchell wrote about the film later, in 1984: “In its detailed exploration of textures and its brooding definition of objects against a background of darkness, it conveyed a distinctively European, metaphysical tone, with its vigorously-crafted camera-work prowling about Frame’s disintegrating heroine in a way which, in its concentration on extremities, recalls both Beckett and Bresson”.⁴³⁹ This description of the film, as McDonnell points out, is evidence that its success with New Zealand intellectuals was assisted by its resemblance to the work of “European ‘masters’ like Bresson”.⁴⁴⁰ In terms of critical reception, Ward and White had, perhaps, a lucky run since the film’s narrative was not merely enigmatic, it was at times confusing. Certainly there were viewers who found the dialogue (such as it was) awkward, and the ending so obscure as to be frustrating, but those attuned to art films embraced it warmly. Its overseas exposure was modest, but for a student film it was exceptionally well-received. Ward would not always be as fortunate with the response to his work, particularly to his liking for narrative leaps and elisions.

European Influences

A State of Siege does have many similarities to the European art film in both style and form. Ward was still at art school at the time, involved with the European painting tradition as well as the European art film. In the preliminary discussions with his Director of Photography, Ward showed Bollinger two of Carl Theodor Dreyer’s films, *Day of Wrath* (1943) and *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, in order to explain the kind of cinematographic style, particularly the lighting he wanted to achieve in *A State of Siege*. Bollinger, while “never much of a film buff”, was “enormously impressed” by some of the techniques that Dreyer used in *Day of Wrath*, particularly in one sequence between the husband and wife, in which there was “a shift of emphasis at the right part of the scene, without any complicated camera moves, it just goes to the right place for the right move”. He felt he could relate to what Dreyer was trying to achieve, as he himself worked “instinctively - what feels right is what you try and shoot, something that feels right for the mood and the sound”. He loved the way Dreyer seemed to be “quite uninhibited by standards and conventions, just did what felt right”.⁴⁴¹ Again, the phrase offers an apt description of Ward’s own approach. This story also reflects the fact that

⁴³⁹ Tony Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," *Art New Zealand* 30.Autumn (1984): 38.

⁴⁴⁰ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 150.

⁴⁴¹ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

many of the new wave of New Zealand filmmakers had not had the opportunity to study film classics such as *Day of Wrath* – Ward’s enthusiasm for European film was untypical.

Another film that Bollinger recalls being shown by Ward was *The Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973). This too, he found novel. He commented that: “especially back a few years, [such films] never even saw the light of day on screens in New Zealand”.⁴⁴² Bollinger adds that while Ward was “talking occasionally through them, I made sketches so I could remember certain things about the style of composition or the weight of contrast within frames”, so that later he was able to go back to the sketches and ask Ward what it was he liked about specific aspects. Bollinger attributes “the contrasty look in *State of Siege*” to this method.⁴⁴³

David Coulson, a student colleague of Ward’s who discussed the film with him, believes that Ward was also influenced by Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965). The mise-en-scène in the shot of Malfred talking on the telephone that begins with the room being crammed with furniture and ends with it being almost empty, would seem to support Coulson’s belief that Ward deliberately emptied the room to indicate Malfred’s increasing disturbance of mind. Coulson comments that Ward was “very interested in everything that made psychological sense”, and that the film was “a perfect vehicle for him to play around with those kinds of ideas”. He presumes that Ward borrowed the idea from *Repulsion* where Polanski moved furniture out of the sets and built different sets of the same corridors, in order to show the shifting perceptions of the character (played by Catherine Deneuve) who is slowly going mad while she is left alone in her sister’s apartment for several days.⁴⁴⁴ The closeup shot of Malfred’s photo at the end of the film is, as McDonnell points out, “like the shattering last shot of *Repulsion*, in which the young girl’s photo reveals the insanity we should have noticed all along”.⁴⁴⁵ The influence of Alfred Hitchcock is also evident in the film’s ending, for which Maurice

⁴⁴² Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998. In fact, such films were being screened in New Zealand by the Film Society movement and the film festivals, but their distribution was certainly limited.

⁴⁴³ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁴⁴⁴ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

⁴⁴⁵ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 148.

Askew believes Ward borrowed Hitchcock's "sudden shock" technique, a technique in which he had shown a particular interest at art school.⁴⁴⁶

The film has direct links with Expressionism in its subjectivity, chiaroscuro lighting, and unusual composition of shots. A good example is the shot of Malfred's mother lying on her deathbed, with the figure of the dying mother in the background overshadowed by Malfred in the foreground, a composition reminiscent of Edvard Munch, the Norwegian Expressionist painter. In one of his first meetings with King, the film's editor, about the look he was trying to achieve in *A State of Siege*, Ward talked about Munch's painting, *The Scream*, in reference to "feel and light, light and shade more than anything".⁴⁴⁷ Direct links aside, the film has much in common with the spirit of Expressionism in its creation of an atmosphere of unease and its subjectivity. As in many Expressionist paintings and films, distortion is used both to help create an atmosphere of unease and to suggest disturbance of mind. An example of this is the scene where Malfred is clambering down to the beach to do a sketch of the sea. The camera tilts up to the looming cliff face and revolves in a way that suggests her inner disorientation and confusion. Nature often seems to reflect the protagonist's disturbed state of mind, as in the scenes later in the film, where the intensifying noise of the windstorm howling around the house seems to reflect Malfred's increasing unease. The film's soundtrack is used to increase this mood, for example in the magnification of sound effects in the scene where Malfred is cleaning the bath, particularly of the scratching noise of the bath being cleaned and the sound of the clock ticking, which creates an atmosphere of unease. As in many Expressionist films, objects seem to have a malevolent life of their own.

The dialogue in *A State of Siege* is minimal and the strength of the film lies primarily in its visual impact. The visual irony in the beach scene is created by the wordless depiction of Malfred's futile painting attempts to capture the menacing power of the sea, evoked by the camera moving closer and closer to the crashing waves as they explode ferociously against the rocks. Such scenes reflect Ward's interest in Dreyer and other great silent filmmakers. In his words:

⁴⁴⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999.

⁴⁴⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Chris King, 2 February 1999.

Filmmakers, painters, craftsmen, build on the shoulders of other craftsmen, always. They may react to the previous generation, but to some degree, they are always standing on their shoulders. I went back to silent films because I love the ability to tell a story with minimal dialogue. When I started to make films, I consciously started out to make them like this, because I really respect and admire that style of story telling.⁴⁴⁸

As in Expressionist films (and indeed, many European art films), the narrative is structured in such a way as to privilege the protagonist's inner life and psychological state over conflict and action. Indeed, there is very little that actually happens in terms of the plot, and much of the apparent action, such as Malfred being threatened by an intruder, seems as much the creation of the protagonist's imagination as the representation of an actual event. The conflicts in the narrative are not between characters so much as an inner conflict stemming from Malfred's realization that her old way of life and world-view are meaningless.

Ward's perspective on the ending of the film is a somewhat different one today than it was when he was a young art-school graduate:

I would have indicated, given you a few more clues now [...]. I was out of art school and it was OK to be a little obscure. I wouldn't be quite as obscure now [...]. I would indicate a little more clearly that the rock through the window was basically some kids fooling round, that probably what happened the night before was largely in her imagination and that she died of a heart attack [...]. I would probably now have an extra shot of you seeing her have some sort of heart attack.⁴⁴⁹

Directors' comments in later years sometimes involve a considerable shift of thinking. In this case, his provocative suggestion that there was a prosaic explanation – “kids

⁴⁴⁸ Dennis and Bieringa, eds., *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand* 90. Compare Ward's comments about *A State of Siege*: “Right through, we've tried to put images and sounds above words. Not more than ten percent of the film has dialogue”. (De la Roche, "Joint Work Turns Janet Frame Novel into Film.") He made a similar point in the *New Zealand Listener*: “What you have going for you with a film as compared to a book is the richness of the visual images. That's what we're doing really. That's what it's about. You just have to get the right images and set them to work”. (Campbell, "Vincent Ward: Living on Celluloid," 23.)

⁴⁴⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 16 October 1998.

fooling around” and “a heart attack” – seems an attempt to distance himself from the young art filmmaker he once was.

In its time, *A State of Siege* was the first unmistakable example of art cinema in the new wave of features in the 1970s. It served as a *cause célèbre* for those suspicious of the ‘Hollywoodization’ of the new local film industry. There were, however, some precedents. During the 1960s, Australian and New Zealand audiences were exposed to the European “art films” of that period, often through film festivals. New Zealand filmmakers were quick to imitate what they saw and the influence of the European art film soon became evident in New Zealand films such as John O’Shea’s *Runaway* (1964). Tony Williams, the film’s Director of Photography notes that he and John O’Shea deliberately imitated the style of Antonioni’s *L’Avventura*, which they had seen while shooting *Runaway*.⁴⁵⁰ While other filmmakers had drawn on art film techniques, they had combined them with mainstream American or British influences. *A State of Siege* was more thorough-going. This mode would be further developed by *Vigil* and continued by a number of other films, primarily by female directors (for example, Christine Jeffs’ *Rain*, 2001). *A State of Siege* was the first New Zealand film to tell its story primarily from a female perspective, and its storyline of a woman threatened by an intruder set a precedent for several later films made by women directors – for example, Melanie Read’s *Trial Run* (1984) and Gaylene Preston’s *Mr Wrong* (1985). As McDonnell points out, the situation in *Trial Run* is also similar to *A State of Siege* since the protagonist is an artist (a photographer) who needs space on her own to work, and like Malfred Signal, moves to an isolated bach on the coast, where she feels threatened by noises at night, by overhanging cliffs, by running footsteps and stones thrown through windows. The main promotional image for the film was of the star Annie Whittle seen through a shattered window, a very similar image to that of Malfred towards the end of *A State of Siege*. The major difference between *Trial Run* and *Mr Wrong*, and *A State of Siege* however, is that in the later films, both female protagonists were able to fight back and escape from what threatened them (though both films end in deaths). As McDonnell’s points out, this reflected the feminist view that a female

⁴⁵⁰ Susan Pointon, unpublished interview with Tony Williams, November 1999.

protagonist, instead of acting like a victim, should “react assertively, face her fear, be seen to survive, not be overwhelmed by pressure”.⁴⁵¹

While *Trial Run* and *Mr Wrong* do not necessarily fit the category of “art films”, there are a number of later films which bear similarities to *A State of Siege* in their style and form, including Jane Campion’s *An Angel at My Table* (1990) and *The Piano* (1993), Alison MacLean’s *Crush* (1992), Nicky Caro’s *Memory and Desire* (1998) and most recently, Christine Jeff’s *Rain* (2001). The New Zealand literary tradition that these films are associated with is what Lawrence Jones refers to as “the other tradition” in New Zealand writing.⁴⁵² He argues that there is a “direct line of development” from Katherine Mansfield to Robin Hyde, Janet Frame, Yvonne du Fresne, Patricia Grace and Keri Hulme and he describes the primary unifying feature of this literary tradition as being “a concern for the inner life and subjective perception”.⁴⁵³ It is significant that a number of the films associated with this tradition are adaptations of literary works. *Rain* for example, was adapted from a novella of the same title by Kirsty Gunn. *A State of Siege* was the first of this type of film.

Summary

A State of Siege owes much to the influence of Romanticism in its depiction of the landscape, which has resonances with the Romantic Sublime, and its portrayal of the isolated artist striving to express her inner vision. The notion of inner vision - evidenced by the extreme close-ups of Malfred’s eyes at significant moments - underlies the artist’s inner journey towards her goal of “learning to see for the first time”. Stylistically, the chiaroscuro lighting and the careful composition of shots indicate Ward’s interest in German Expressionism, and the film’s extreme subjectivity, creation of *Stimmung* and interest in the irrational seem to express an Expressionistic world-view. The film’s atmosphere of unease and menacing landscape reflecting the character’s state of mind indicate links with the “kiwi Gothic” tradition but the film’s main impact on the direction of New Zealand cinema, and what differentiated its aesthetic from other local features of the time, was that it was New Zealand’s first identifiable art film.

⁴⁵¹ McDonnell, "The Translation of New Zealand Fiction into Film," 153.

⁴⁵² Jones, *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose* 229.

⁴⁵³ Jones, *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose* 225.

Although this was Ward's first feature, he emerges as an *auteur* with a distinctive visual style, fully able to exploit the medium. The theme of the isolated individual is one that would become a constant theme in his later work, and his perfectionism and active involvement in all aspects of production, would emerge as distinguishing features of his approach. This is not, however, to underestimate the important contributions of his collaborators to the film. White's contribution to the practical details of the film's organization was invaluable, as were the experience and expertise of other cast and crew members. Ward was fortunate, however, in that his collaborators recognised that he had a strong vision for the film and were prepared to work towards realising that vision. While the director's role was undoubtedly important in producing the final product, my analysis of the process of making the film has demonstrated some of the practical and financial constraints operating on the filmmakers. I have also attempted to contextualise the film within both local and international cinematic and artistic traditions, keeping in mind that no artist operates entirely within a vacuum.

Chapter 4

In Spring One Plants Alone

The subject of Ward's next film was similar to that of *A State of Siege* - a woman living on the periphery of society – but it was documentary rather than fiction. Unlike Malfred Signal, Puihi does not live alone but with her forty-year-old mentally disabled son. This forty-five minute film was made over a two-and-a-half year period, while Ward was still a graduate student at the Ilam School of Fine Arts in Canterbury; and after its completion in 1979, it was submitted as part of the assessment for Ward's DipFA(Hons). Given its first public screening at the Wellington Film Festival in 1980, it documents the daily life of an old Maori *kuia* caring for her son Niki who has been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. It was filmed in the Matahi Valley in the Ureweras, on the East coast of the North Island, the home of the Tuhoe people. At that time, Ward was, in his own words: “twenty-two [years old], a Pakeha”, who “couldn't speak the [Maori] language and didn't know the codes they lived by”.⁴⁵⁴ This chapter will examine the process of making the film and attempt to come to an understanding of what motivated Ward to make this documentary when he had apparently so little prior knowledge and understanding of the subject.

The title of the film lends itself to a multiplicity of readings. It refers to a Maori proverb which loosely translates as: “In spring, at the time of planting, only one man will turn up; in autumn at harvest time, there is no limit to the number of helpers”.⁴⁵⁵ Nairn notes that spring and autumn are metonymically linked to planting/digging and harvest, not just in Maori thought, and that Maori were familiar with the social practice of “skiving off” when there were tough jobs to be done (despite the theory of *whanau* involvement presented by Parekowhai in her article “Where the Green Ants Really Dream”).⁴⁵⁶ It seems an appropriate title in view of Puihi's isolation and the fact that she was doing the hard work of looking after a difficult man with an intellectual

⁴⁵⁴ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 4.

⁴⁵⁵ Translation thanks to Ray Nairn, Auckland University Medical School, his source being: A.E. Brougham and A.W. Reed, eds., *The Reed Book of Maori Proverbs: Te Kohikonga Whakatauki a Reed*, Revised ed. (Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1987).

⁴⁵⁶ Parekowhai, “Where the Green Ants Really Dream,” 9.

disability alone. Certainly, the film evokes a strong sense of isolation, in contrast to the emphasis we might expect on rural Maori community. Helen Martin has suggested that: “Although [the title] has no literal meaning (Ward says it ‘just felt right’), the ideas of growth, youth and regeneration as expressed in ‘spring’ and ‘plants’ are juxtaposed against the implications of the words ‘one’ and ‘alone’. The landscape, the environment, are to all intents and purposes neutral, but to people living close to the earth, depending on nature presenting a benign face, they often seem hostile”.⁴⁵⁷

In his autobiographical account of the making of the film in Edge of the Earth, Ward states that he knew he wanted to learn more about the Maori who lived in the Ureweras, one of the few parts of New Zealand where Maori language and traditions were still preserved in daily life, because he wanted to explore their view of the country he lived in.⁴⁵⁸ Ward’s approach was not, however, to attempt to find “typical” members of the community but to choose two unusual individuals within it who were in some respects outsiders. While his desire to explore and document the world-view of the Tuhoe people, as well as his wish to document a way of life that might soon be lost, ostensibly provided the motivation to make the documentary, there were other more personal, underlying motivations. He is quoted in Alternative Cinema as saying: “I think there are a lot of good things in resurgence in the Maori culture. I wanted to learn about it. I’d grown up in the Wairarapa but never heard Maori spoken. I was interested in seeing another part of the country where the traditions were much stronger. The film grew out of my desire to learn about something else”.⁴⁵⁹ He also admits that he was drawn to the world of the Tuhoe because it was “a world of mysteries”, which his Catholic upbringing made him receptive to and that in seeking to understand that world, he was also seeking to learn more about himself.⁴⁶⁰ The interest in exploration of personal identity informs much of Ward’s subsequent work as a filmmaker, and when I interviewed him some years after the making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*, he reiterated that he was interested in living in the Maori community for two years because that was part of who he was since he is a New Zealander and the Maori population is a

⁴⁵⁷ Helen Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," Alternative Cinema 12.3&4 (1984): 12.

⁴⁵⁸ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 10. Ward’s interest in the Maori world-view stems from his childhood to some extent – although he had never heard Maori spoken, he grew up only a short distance away from Papawai Pa, the seat of the Maori Parliament. (Lynette Read, telephone interview with Vincent Ward, 17 December 2003.)

⁴⁶⁰ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 6.

major shaping force on New Zealand culture.⁴⁶¹ Those sympathetic to such a venture may see Ward as one of the first of a new wave of Pakeha filmmakers to take a serious interest in Maori culture; those less sympathetic can see it as the working-out of an old-fashioned Romanticism in search of exotic otherness. Herzog's and Wenders' films about remote tribal peoples have polarised critics in the same way. Ward would return to similar territory in later projects (*Map of the Human Heart* and his current film in progress).

Ward discusses the process by which he came to choose Puhi and her relationship with Niki as his theme in his DipFA dissertation. He was interested in making a film about some aspect of Maori culture, but decided that since he knew so little about the topic, he would need to do a great deal of reading – both fictional and historical, and view many films in order to reach some understanding. The *Tangata Whenua* series was a source of information but, according to Ward “like other films, it bore little relationship to what I was envisaging”.⁴⁶² He was initially unsure whether the film would be a documentary or a drama. Typically, he spent a long time making the decision, on complex, intuitive grounds.

His first approach to the Maori community was a visit to Ruatahuna, the heart of the Tuhoe, but the visit was unsuccessful in that he went alone without knowing anyone in the area, and was consequently “greeted with suspicion”. Realising that he needed introductions and contacts, he then visited a number of Maori in Wellington, but once again, this led to nothing. He finally contacted some of the people involved in making *Tangata Whenua*, specifically Michael King and Keith Hawke who were very helpful in suggesting contacts who could help him begin the project. Of those suggested, Sam Karetu, senior lecturer in Maori at Waikato University, and John Rangihau, a Tuhoe leader, gave their support. Karetu arranged for Ward to stay with an elder at Waikaremoana, and Rangihau invited him to visit a landcourt at Waiohau.⁴⁶³

Ward made four trips in the course of his research, travelling more than 6,000 miles. The first three journeys were “concerned more with general research and background

⁴⁶¹ Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 November, 1997.

⁴⁶² Vincent Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” DipFA (Hons), University of Canterbury, 1979, Section on Pre-Production, Research Period 20 January – 11 July 1978.

⁴⁶³ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, Research period 20 January -11 July 1978.

material, as well as to find the possible elder that the film would centre around". He stayed with Eva Rickard for several weeks and found her very helpful in explaining what he needed to know and in introducing her to people who might be suitable as the subject of the film. Ward was interested in the spiritual aspect of Maori culture, particularly, "planting by the moon and associated rituals, *Kai te aki*: spiritual guardians manifested in the form of animals, prayer as efficacy (protection) and dreams, visions and ancestry (*Te Matakite*)". As the research progressed, however, Ward realised that the spiritual aspect would need to be restricted to those aspects relevant to the person being filmed, "in order to maintain a style that was largely visual in form", and that many things would not be able to be shown since he would be restricted to depicting only the physical manifestation of spiritual matters.⁴⁶⁴

He felt that the choice of central person would be "critical", and from the beginning, set out to find a Maori elder living with one dependent, preferably someone who lived in relative isolation and spoke predominantly Maori since: "It seemed more likely someone in this situation would have preserved more of a way of living that existed in the past". His initial meetings with *kuia* in the Urewera district were unsuccessful in that none of the old women he met "could express that world of spirits and ancestry in a way that I was able to grasp".⁴⁶⁵ There was one old woman, however, whom his contact refused to visit, saying that Ward would not want to meet her and referring to her as "the burdened one". Ward was naturally intrigued, and was eventually taken to meet her. His account of their first meeting expresses his frustration at his inability to communicate with her. "The old lady had a friendly, worn face, but to me, she was closed like a book in a foreign tongue. She felt uncomfortable stumbling through the little English she knew and so we sat in embarrassed silence [...]. I felt so much like an alien in the Maori world, and useless because my inability to communicate made my visit seem pointless. I left after a few minutes, not wanting to intrude on her further".⁴⁶⁶

Despite the unpromising nature of the first visit, and Ward's feeling that after three months of searching, he had almost given up on the idea of finding a suitable subject for the film, he continued to visit Puhi, taking her gifts of spring potatoes and fishheads, which she liked. On these visits, he was never invited inside her house, possibly, he

⁴⁶⁴ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Aims.

⁴⁶⁵ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 7.

thought, because she was embarrassed by the mess, so for some time he did not realise that she did not live alone. Her son, Niki, then aged forty, had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, but there were a number of other explanations for his condition, including that he had been thrown from a horse and landed on his head.⁴⁶⁷ Niki had spent some time in a mental hospital but was eventually released into the care of his mother. His behaviour was problematic in that he rarely spoke (although he was able to use his hands in an expressive way to communicate) and he suffered from occasional outbursts of violence, which mostly took the form of smashing the floorboards of the veranda with an axe. In addition, “Niki didn’t get along with many people in the community because he got drunk easily and became aggressive, and would sometimes sneak around the houses at night peering in the windows”.⁴⁶⁸

Aims and Approach

The decision to make a film about the family was not made, according to Ward, until after he had been living with them for four or five weeks.⁴⁶⁹ Initially he did not see Puhi’s “uneventful life” as being a suitable subject for his film.⁴⁷⁰ Eventually he realised that “it is seldom that we see a handicapped Maori person on film, and it seemed important to record how this old Maori woman coped with this problem. The delicate relationship between mother and son was soon to become my prime concern”.⁴⁷¹ He moved into an old hut on a hill overlooking Puhi’s house and lived there from mid July until late August of 1978. During this time, Ward got to know Puhi and Niki well and was able to work out what he wanted to put on film. He spoke at a number of community gatherings, attended several *tangis* and Ringatu church services, and organised many of the practical details for shooting the film such as completing film tests to decide on the film stock to be used, testing the cameras, and organising accommodation for the crew. Lastly: “Most important of all, Puhi agreed to the making of the film”.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷ According to Bay Takao, who looked after Niki for some time after Puhi died. (Lynette Read, interview with Bay Takao, 16 April 2000.)

⁴⁶⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 12.

⁴⁶⁹ Ward quoted in Diana Ward, "That Personal Quality," *Photo and Audio* 1.11 (1980): 45.

⁴⁷⁰ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 7.

⁴⁷¹ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, Research period 20 January-11 July 1978.

⁴⁷² Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, 11 July-24 September 1978.

Ward might seem to have selected the most difficult of all the possible documentary topics in the area. He also was unconcerned about potential audience appeal – he trusted his own interest in the subject. Before shooting on the film could begin, there were a number of problems to be solved. The first of these was power, since it would be necessary to light interiors, but the nearest source of power was about three miles away. It seemed that some kind of generator would be necessary, but although a small generator would have been inexpensive to run, it would have been very noisy. Ward wanted to retain the quiet atmosphere of the location for sync filming, but also to use a power source that was economical. As a solution, “a power system was specially devised, using twenty car batteries mounted on a trailer”. The batteries were recharged overnight at the crew’s place of accommodation”.⁴⁷³

Lighting also posed a problem, as Ward wanted the lights to be rigged in a semi-permanent fashion, so they would not interfere with filming, but it would have been impractical to use light stands in the limited space inside Puhī’s house. As a compromise, windows and doorways (natural lighting) were used to provide the “key” light, while quartz halogen lights provided the “fill”. It was possible to set up lights in the kitchen as Puhī and Niki tended to move in very clearly defined spaces within the area. However, in practice, it was not always possible to make use of this style of lighting, as “capturing a particular moment often meant speed and necessitated filming from the first accessible position”.⁴⁷⁴ A 16mm camera was used, a more complex technology than the small digital video cameras that might be used today.

Ward’s initial treatment for the film differs in its approach from the final script in several significant ways. Firstly, instead of focussing on Puhī calling on the *marae*, it begins with an old man planting kumaras by the moon, followed by a series of images from the “private lives of three Tuhoe elders and their families”.⁴⁷⁵ This would seem to be attempting to place Puhī in the context of the Tuhoe community, rather than focusing on her as an individual largely isolated from the community. The rest of the treatment is similar to the completed script, with the exception that there is a sequence where Niki

⁴⁷³ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, 11 July-24 September 1978.

⁴⁷⁴ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, 11 July – 24 September 1978.

⁴⁷⁵ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production, 11 July – 24 September 1978.

speaks about his mother's childhood growing up in Maungapohatu and how at the time of Rua Kenana's arrest, she fled pregnant into the bush, emerging three days later with a new-born child. Her name Puhi, means "Special One" and it was the name given to her by Rua Kenana (known as Rua the Prophet).⁴⁷⁶ The story of how Puhi lived with the people of Rua Kenana deep in the Urewera Ranges, and remained there until the government sent armed police into the community where they shot one of Rua's sons and one of his followers before arresting the prophet, is a dramatic slice of history, which Ward details in his autobiography.⁴⁷⁷ It was however, excluded from the final script in favour of more emphasis being given to Puhi's day-to-day activities and her relationship with Niki, in keeping with Ward's assertion that "The success of the film depends on how well I can record those small gestures, actions and reactions that set up and define the relationship between Puhi and her son. This is not a film of words or narration, but a film of careful observation; a record of that silent milieu where the tones of dependency and interdependency are subtly changing".⁴⁷⁸

This Bazinian focus on "careful observation" has an important place in the history of documentary-making, but it is diametrically opposed to the kind of speed and heightened drama that has become the dominant style of prime-time television documentaries in today's commercial environment. Ward's approach had resonances with that of Bazin who championed the long take and was critical of the fast editing style of many contemporary films. Bazin argued that the use of deep focus (combined with long takes) was superior to montage because it encouraged a "more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress", whereas montage "by its very nature, rules out ambiguity of expression".⁴⁷⁹

Ward consciously tried to avoid the imposition of his own preconceptions upon the lifestyle of the subjects of his film, principally "by remaining a 'learner' rather than becoming an expert". During the initial period when he lived with Puhi and Niki, he

⁴⁷⁶ Puhi was the daughter of one of Rua's "disciples", Tatu, and was married briefly to Rua's eldest son, Whatu, according to Judith Binney's account of Rua the Prophet and his community which includes a photograph of her taken in 1978. (Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin and Craig Wallace, Mihaia: The Prophet Rua Kenana and His Community at Maungapohatu, Revised ed. (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1979) 85.)

⁴⁷⁷ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 17.

⁴⁷⁸ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Pre-Production, 11 July-24 September 1978.

⁴⁷⁹ Bazin, What Is Cinema? 36.

was able to “draft a rough script based upon observable behaviour”.⁴⁸⁰ The problem, as he saw it, was how to film this behaviour, since the need for flexibility was essential. But if one sequence could not be filmed, it was not always possible to use another piece of action in its place to make the same statement. For some sections of the film, he made storyboards, which were particularly helpful when he was not doing the filming himself and wanted to communicate his ideas on how it should be filmed to the cameraman. He also made a list of some of the things he had observed and wanted to say in the film. These were written on a separate piece of paper “so they could be reshuffled and so that each idea could be given separate consideration”. Some examples of this method were: “Niki’s reaction in a city environment; the telephone metaphor – the phone ringing throughout, but never for Niki or Puhi; a woman who has outlived her generation; the body as being less important than the spirit; the body as strength – ankles, determination in cheekbone, worn face, scaly hands, wideshot with bent back”.⁴⁸¹

In his dissertation, Ward states his specific aims in making the documentary. It was not intended to be a study of the *Tuhoe tanga* or a study of Maori community “except in so far as that community reveals more about the two people under study”. Instead, he focussed on the spiritual aspect of Puhi’s life: “Every action is imbued with this sense of the spirit. Each movement and action appears like part of an enormous ritual. The ordinary becomes extraordinary; the most menial task, because of the way it is performed becomes an act of devotion”. Ward refers to Rev J.G.Laughton (longtime minister to the Tuhoe people) who theorised that the ancient Maori religion did not differentiate between “sacred” and “secular” - religion was an integral part of life. Ward cites Puhi’s concentration on the “rituals” involved in preparing meals and the prayers (*karakia*) that she recited for three hours at the beginning of the day, before meals and before giving her son medicine, as examples of the integration of religion with daily life. Puhi belonged to the Ringatu Church founded by Te Kooti, who combined some aspects of the Old Testament Pakeha faith with the Maori rituals. Ward asserts however, that *In Spring One Plants Alone* is not about the Ringatu religion (which as he pointed out, was “adequately” explored in the *Tangata Whenua* television

⁴⁸⁰ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Approach.

⁴⁸¹ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Pre-Production 11 July-24 September 1978.

series) but about spirituality “personified in an everyday context”.⁴⁸² This is again reminiscent of Bazin’s comments about a film like Bresson’s *Le Journal d’un Curé de Campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*, 1950), with Ringatu substituting for Catholicism.⁴⁸³

The second aspect that Ward was interested in when he made the documentary was to show the situation of Niki as a disabled person in a rural Maori community. The subject of how Maori people look after their sick or disabled had not yet been dealt with, in either a film or a book, and Ward was interested in contrasting Maori attitudes with Pakeha treatment of the disabled, which at that time was often to isolate them in a hospital away from their families. He believes that the film “exemplifies a general attitude prevalent among rural Maoris: a disabled person belongs in his own home. Specifically it shows the great lengths one old Maori woman takes to look after her handicapped son”. Niki’s situation was however, by no means an ideal one in that, as Ward points out: “Within the wider community, the son is virtually ignored. He is isolated and he is lonely. No one visits him and in a *marae* situation he is left to himself”. Ward observes that while Niki was totally dependent on his mother and lacking in motivation, he was intelligent and spoke English well, considering his lack of education.⁴⁸⁴ In the film, Ward takes the approach that “actions speak louder than words” and what became therefore “of central importance” was the observation and recording of Niki’s actions and the way he described the situation.

The final aim specified by Ward in his dissertation, was to show the dependency and interdependency of Puhī and Niki’s relationship. Ward was of the opinion that it was too simplistic to categorise Niki as being dependent on Puhī and Puhī as being the caregiver on whom he relied, for Puhī’s “need to be needed” was as great as Niki’s “need”, and that “if Niki died, Puhī would die soon after”. The complexity of their relationship and the ways in which the relationship worked were therefore “the heart of the film”, in Ward’s view. He makes the observation that: “These two have lived with each other for so long that conversation has become virtually superfluous. It is a silent milieu where actions speak the only truth. After they have argued, their reconciliation is not marked by words but by a return to the old order of things. The recriminations

⁴⁸² Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Aims.

⁴⁸³ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol.1.

⁴⁸⁴ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Aims.

are spoken largely to a third person and not to each other”.⁴⁸⁵ Again this lends itself to an approach whereby actions are allowed to speak for themselves, almost in the manner of a silent film. Subtext is hugely important and the viewer is encouraged (or assumed) to be active in reading between the lines. There is no voice-over commentary to explain what is happening.

Ward’s approach to the documentary was to use a *cinéma vérité* or “direct cinema” style similar to that of the Maysles brothers. In the Introduction to his dissertation, he cites their documentary *Grey Gardens* (1976), a film about an eccentric mother and daughter living in seclusion, as exemplifying the approach he wished to take in making *In Spring One Plants Alone*, and identifies a number of features which characterise this type of documentary and which he wished to use as a model.⁴⁸⁶ The first of these is that the filmmakers develop a rapport with the subject of the film. Ward suggests that many television documentaries, through lack of time, do not do this, and in fact there is a school of thought stemming from the *Man Alive* type of documentary, that “all sign of rapport between subject and filmmaker should be removed”. In contrast, Ward believes that, “A personal relationship there and the acknowledgement of it can give a freshness and veracity to the film”.⁴⁸⁷

Another feature Ward wished to emulate was the reflexive realism of *Grey Gardens*. Contrary to the practice followed in many mainstream television documentaries, the subjects were not made to project a persona or to re-enact any sequences in an attempt to create an unreal illusion of life, as though the camera were not present. Instead, “the filmmaker is there as the recorder of an event with a role to play in the action. He acknowledges to the audience that he is present [...]. Nor do the subjects appear to be re-enacting their daily actions”. At the same time, Ward sought to encourage the subject of the film to be as unselfconscious as possible by building up a good relationship with the subjects and shooting lots of footage over a long period of time. Ward quotes Albert Maysles as saying: “The greatest influence on our moviemaking

⁴⁸⁵ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Aims.

⁴⁸⁶ In fact, Ward had not seen *Grey Gardens* before he began work on *In Spring*, but as he had to write a documented account of the making his film for his DipFA, he needed to relate it to existing models, particularly *cinéma vérité* which he had read about. He saw even at the time that it did not really fit the paradigm in terms of its intention. (Lynette Read, telephone interview with Vincent Ward, 17 December 2003.)

⁴⁸⁷ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Introduction.

was an interest in discovering what people are like as we're filming them", a conception of filming as a process of discovery that seems particularly relevant to *In Spring*.⁴⁸⁸

Ward identifies the standard television practice of set interviews where the subject is seated and fully lit as one he wished to avoid for the reason that: "It is often far more interesting when the subject speaks to us in the course of his or her daily routine. Likewise, it is not necessary to light someone unless there is particular visual information that needs to be seen". The additional advantage of natural lighting was that it added atmosphere and gave the audience time to explore the face of the subject. Ward was, however, aware of the disadvantages of using a *cinéma vérité* style: "Once you remove narration, music, set interview, manipulation of the subject and manipulative editing and replace it, in order to get the same effect, with high cutting ratios and long periods of research and shooting, you are left with both an expensive and time consuming project".⁴⁸⁹

Some compromises therefore had to be made in taking this approach to *In Spring*. Ward did, "on a few occasions", ask the subjects to do something for the purposes of the camera. The rationale for this was: "These requested actions were things I had seen them regularly doing before, and without the request I would not have been able to record them". Ward acknowledges that it was not possible to take a completely purist approach, but he says he did attempt "to project their situation as honestly as I could on film. It is based on a continual re-evaluation of their situation over the six month period that I lived with them". Above all, he felt that "the filming has been possible only because time was spent building up a friendship between the people being filmed and myself".⁴⁹⁰

Ward stated in a recent telephone interview that what the film had in common with *cinéma vérité* – in particular, the use of small lightweight cameras, portable sound systems and small crews, which allowed the crew to capture reality "on the hop" – was the result of technology rather than intention, and that the aims of *In Spring* were quite different to those of a documentary such as *Grey Gardens*. He felt that unlike the Maysles Brothers, he intended not to represent social reality, but to "aim for truth in relation to that person and that reality". Granted some viewers would also describe

⁴⁸⁸ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Introduction.

⁴⁸⁹ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Introduction.

⁴⁹⁰ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Introduction.

Grey Gardens in Ward's terms. Ward's method of achieving this was "to obtain veracity and authenticity based on careful observation and recording faithfully what was there and under the surface as well". He does not believe that film can be objective but that it is "subjective filmmaking linked with careful observation and a determination to listen and really hear what people are saying" which leads to "authentic filmmaking". This approach, as he pointed out, is one which is "very intense, but for a small Puritanical country like New Zealand, it becomes too intense".⁴⁹¹

Ward's approach also included a number of goals that did not relate specifically to either *cinéma vérité* or the traditional television documentary. These were: "the preservation of the ambiance" through the use of light, colour and shade; "the realisation of some of the more subjective visions of the subjects within a largely observational framework"; and "a narrative style based on the primacy of the image". Ward directly compares the latter aspect of his approach with *A State of Siege*, stressing that: "this is something that is very important to me".⁴⁹² Indeed, these emphases also apply to his later fictional feature films. In order to create the kind of ambiance he wanted to achieve, Ward used prime lenses to achieve a feeling of stillness. In Helen Martin's review, he is quoted as saying, "The depth and richness of colour come from things like filters, the nature of the environment, filming at the right time of day. It's a matter of seeing it".⁴⁹³ At times, he used a process of "elimination, rather than addition or assimilation". On a very basic level, the living conditions of Puhī and Niki were made more acceptable to a middle-class audience by the control of light and colour, and by Ward tidying up Puhī's house every time they filmed. This was also done to "attain a purity of image" since Ward was attempting to record on film certain intangible things without distraction. The colour of the film was important and Ward aimed for a "muted bluey grey, or golden blue tint". One exception to this colouring was during one mid-winter shoot, the light conditions required the film to be "forced" during processing, resulting in a red/blue bias. On this occasion, in order to film at all, the desired colouring had to be compromised.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Lynette Read, telephone interview with Vincent Ward, 17 December 2003.

⁴⁹² Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Introduction.

⁴⁹³ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 11.

⁴⁹⁴ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Approach.

Production

During filming, the crew was kept to a minimum “because of the intimacy of the situation”, and consisted of Alun Bollinger (lighting, cameraman), who was later replaced by Leon Narbey, Stephen Upston (sound recordist, whose experience had mainly been with Television One), Alistair Barry (production assistant with a number of years experience working on films), and Miles Hargest (still photographer). Crew members needed to be sensitive, dedicated, and prepared to work in challenging conditions. Involved in post-production were David Coulson (production assistant, who had been a fellow-student of Ward’s), Ken Sparks (assistant editor), Christine Lancaster (editor, with some years’ experience working in British television and for TV One), Brian Shannon, who did the soundmix, and Jack Body (music). The initial period of shooting the film was between October 3-13, 1972, but because Alun Bollinger was not available until the following month, Ward decided to do the first shoot himself, with the help of Alistair Barry as assistant cameraman and Stephen Upston as sound recordist. Subsequently, since he had found attempting to do the two jobs of directing and filming too difficult, he decided to do only mute filming and “pick-up” shots himself.⁴⁹⁵

There were a number of problems in filming the old lady, as Ward explains in his dissertation. She was a determined, single-minded character with her own ways of doing things, and in practical terms this meant that Ward felt unable to ask her to wear the same clothes for continuity reasons, and was unable to plan from one day to the next because she had her own agenda. Another problem was that according to her value system, time did not equate with money, and it was therefore irrelevant if the crew had to wait around for hours, or even days, until she was ready to participate in the filming process.⁴⁹⁶ Ward explains: “She was a determined old lady and did things totally as they suited her, in her own time, so we had to mould our shooting around her needs. We were there as guests and as such we were completely dependent upon her goodwill”.⁴⁹⁷ Needless to say, these are not conditions that the usual professional documentary shoot could accept because of time and budget pressures, but Ward seemed to find such challenges creatively stimulating.

⁴⁹⁵ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: Shoot 3-13 October 1978.

⁴⁹⁶ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: Shoot 3-13 October 1978.

⁴⁹⁷ Martin, “In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It,” 10.

He cites as an example of the problems an attempt to film Puhī lighting and carrying candles. Ward wanted to capture this because he liked the strong shadows that moved around when she carried the candle and “visually, it is a very dramatic image”.⁴⁹⁸ However, when the lighting was set up to capture this moment, the old lady blew out the candles, because, in her view, there was no further necessity for them. There were also problems with communication since Puhī spoke little English and relied on Niki to interpret what she did not understand about the filming process. Unfortunately, he enjoyed teasing her and manipulating the situation, and on one occasion, after the crew had explained that the lights were safe, he told her that the lights were explosive devices and she became upset and frightened by them. Later, however, she came to appreciate the value of the lights in helping her to look for things since she was only partially sighted.

While Niki was immediately interested in the technology, and questioned Steve (the sound recordist) about his equipment, Puhī was afraid of the camera, saying, when she first noticed it: “*Kehua* [ghosts] live in that thing”. Ward believes she tolerated the filming because “she enjoyed our company and she liked having someone to drive her about or to fetch and carry things”, but often they could only film for a day before she would decide to go to a *tangi* for two or three days. In addition, she would insist on feeding the crew, and “the more tired she grew, the more *hoha* [grumpy] she became and then she would think someone was casting a spell in her”.⁴⁹⁹

After the initial shooting period, Ward returned to Wellington, only to receive the distressing news that the National Film Unit had ruined all of the film he had shot when it was processing the negatives. The Unit accepted responsibility for the damage, and replaced the film stock free of charge, promising Ward some use of their editing facilities. The positive aspect of being able to use the National Film Unit’s post-production facility was that it enabled Ward greater freedom of distribution, since he had initially made a verbal agreement for Television One to have the New Zealand television rights to the film, in exchange for the use of their post-production facilities. At the time this agreement was made, Ward was uncertain as to whether the film should be screened on television, on the ethical grounds that a television screening to a mass

⁴⁹⁸ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: 1-12 November 1978.

⁴⁹⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 19.

audience “might adversely affect the life style of Puhi and Niki”, and he put off signing a contract with Television One.⁵⁰⁰ The film was eventually screened on New Zealand television, but only after Puhi’s death.

After the loss of the footage from the initial shoot, another shoot had to be re-scheduled in early November. This time Alun Bollinger was cameraman and his “low-key approach improved matters enormously”. There were still however, problems with using the cumbersome camera equipment in such a limited space and it was difficult to get good coverage of a scene because of the necessity of using superspeed prime lenses.⁵⁰¹ After a week the old lady began to tire, and for this reason, the remainder of the shoot was cancelled. Eventually, Ward realised that “the only way to keep her in good spirits was to film less than one week in every seven”.⁵⁰² He would send the crew home and stay on to help her with her chores. As a result, the film that he had thought would take six weeks to shoot dragged on for months, but worse than the tedium of menial tasks to be completed, and the waiting-around, was

the constant feeling of being an outsider, a Pakeha [...]. I was an individual operating outside the community and none of my previous experience equipped me to deal with the situation. Generally the community tolerated me. They were often friendly, but then I’d feel an undercurrent of criticism and suspicion and knew I had made another mistake, although I rarely discovered what it was.⁵⁰³

A further film shoot was scheduled for November 24, 1978 – February 3, 1979, but because Puhi and Niki had temporarily moved to sleeping in the meeting-house while a block of lavatories was being built at the *marae*, Ward decided that there was little to film and postponed the shoot. He waited for two and a half months for circumstances to change, but eventually became discouraged and again postponed the shoot. During this time, however: “Two things had been achieved, firstly I knew the people of the area

⁵⁰⁰ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: 3-13 October 1978.

⁵⁰¹ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: 1-12 November 1978.

⁵⁰² Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 19.

⁵⁰³ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 20.

much better, and secondly, I had filmed two scenes".⁵⁰⁴ The film was sent to Atlab in Sydney (after Ward's disastrous experience with the National Film Unit's processing) and he got back "nine hundred feet of beautifully processed film". He and David Coulson spent several days editing some film excerpts to show to the Education Department, and the Department was sufficiently pleased with it to agree to a further request for finance.

During this period, Ward, who was not drawing any wage for the film, took time out from his own project to work as art director on *Sons for the Return Home*. He comments: "[I was] curious to see if my attitude to the value of the subject matter in *In Spring One Plants Alone* would alter, after my encounter with a much more primitive way of life in Samoa" He came to the conclusion that: "If anything, [the subject] now seemed even more important".⁵⁰⁵ Ward's use of the term "primitive" would today be considered inappropriate, but it must be remembered that in those days it was still a standard term used in art schools to describe tribal forms of art and culture.

By June, Ward was ready to start work on the project again, and scheduled a shoot for June 6-12. The shoot appeared to go well and they had three and a half days of filming before Puhi got a call from her daughter to attend a Maori Presbyterian synod in Ohope. Ward took her there, calling a temporary halt to the shoot. When the film was processed, Ward was disappointed with the results. He felt he had made the wrong decision to force the processing of the interior footage as the colour was poor. Other sequences had technical problems or had been poorly filmed due to the crew's nervousness. Ward comments: "It is a lesson for us all. It is not the amount of footage you shoot but its quality that counts".⁵⁰⁶

The next shoot (July 13-19) was much more successful since "Alun is more relaxed and his camera operating is far superior to any of the earlier filming", and the colours were not forced. Ward felt that they had "the heart of the film", and by this stage, there were now only a few moments left to be filmed. The final shoot was on August 13-29, 1979, and there were a number of technical problems, but they managed to record "some

⁵⁰⁴ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Production: 24 November 1978-3 February 1979.

⁵⁰⁵ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Production: 24 November 1978-3 February 1979.

⁵⁰⁶ Ward, "A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*," Section on Production 6-12 June 1979.

essential footage”. After the crew left, Ward remained to spend time with Puihi and Niki, who stayed in the house he had rented. Ward and Miles Hargest (the still-photographer) were given permission to film a *tangi* and they operated two cameras to get the results they wanted. Although there were still some pickup shots and sounds to be recorded, Ward decided not to return until two thirds of the way through editing, when they would know precisely what was needed. Despite the fact that the shooting for the film had effectively finished, Ward added: “I will see Niki and Puihi again and again. Too often a researcher or filmmaker comes, stays to gather material and leaves, never to return”.⁵⁰⁷

Alun Bollinger recalls that they were never able to work for long – perhaps two or three days a week – because the filming was stressful for the old lady. He remembers one occasion when she said to the crew “Today you’ve taken enough” and they realised that she meant not only that they had shot enough footage, but that she felt they had “taken” from her. She did at least let them know when she felt they were being intrusive or behaving in a way that she found unacceptable. He recalls that one day, the driver delivered her groceries to the gate, rather than bringing them to the house, and “there was a reasonable hike up the drive for her to get the groceries, so when she ordered them, we were keeping an eye out for the van and we snuck out and hid behind the meeting house on the *marae* [...]. We waited for her to go out and get the groceries and filmed her bringing them back, which was the figure of this bent old lady. But she spotted us and [...] she gave us a right bollocking – that all these able young men were hiding behind the meeting-house while she carried her own groceries. It was mostly in Maori, actually, but we knew exactly what she was telling us off for”.⁵⁰⁸

On another occasion, Ward hid her teapot, her “teapoura”, as she called it, in order to film her making tea in the billy, which is what she normally did unless there were visitors. She managed to find it, but Ward hid it again, so as Bollinger points out there was “a bit of manipulation”.⁵⁰⁹ This would seem to contradict Ward’s assertion that, in order to capture the minutiae of Puihi’s world, he decided to “set up the camera and hope that she would walk into the frame”. He felt this would “underline a meditative quality that was inherent in the situation”, and that by filming her in this manner, his presence

⁵⁰⁷ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Production: 13-20 August 1979.

⁵⁰⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁵⁰⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

would not affect the way she behaved.⁵¹⁰ Bollinger agrees that “there were times” when they set up the camera and hoped she would walk into the frame, “especially if there was a particular composition or part of the property and we knew that she would do certain things at certain times of the day”, but “there’s quite a lot of subtly moving camera within the house, like to do the tea-making sequence”. This kind of shot could not be achieved within one day, and according to Bollinger, one of the difficulties of the film was “to get the sort of detail that Vincent wanted [...]. She just went about her business and it was up to us to capture what we wanted. So just the tea pouring sequence might have taken two or three separate shoots”.⁵¹¹

Almost all of the film was shot with a hand-held camera, using prime lenses and Bollinger recalls that it was “a pretty uncomfortable shoot” because the whole film was shot from a very low angle.⁵¹² According to Ward, this was “an intuitive choice”, because he “didn’t wish to look down on [Puhi] at all”.⁵¹³ He explains further that: “The film was literally shot on our knees. I wanted the camera viewpoint to be below the subject’s eye level. Both the use of the zoom lens and unmotivated camera movement seem out of character with the film’s centre. I wanted a static camera which isolated particular pieces of action and allowed the subjects to move in and out of frame”. He was surprised at how successful the latter technique proved to be in close-up, using the example of where a sequence begins with an empty frame, into which a hand appears, gestures, then leaves the frame, only to reappear, gesture and leave the frame once again: “In documentary, when you have no control over the subject’s actions, it is all the more remarkable when that hand reappears within the small somewhat arbitrary window space of the camera frame. The idea behind this use of the camera comes largely from Japanese painting tradition”. Here, Ward is again using his art-school training and applying it to the negative use of space, so that “what is shown is of equal importance to what is not shown”.⁵¹⁴ The emphasis on continuous movement within the frame is, of course, similar to Bazin’s aesthetics (formulated in relation to films such as Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North*, 1922, with its similarly isolated characters). Bazin’s comments in relation to cinematic realism are also applicable to *In Spring*: “Realism in art can only be achieved in one way –through artifice. Every form

⁵¹⁰ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 17.

⁵¹¹ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁵¹² Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁵¹³ Ward, “That Personal Quality,” 45.

⁵¹⁴ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Approach.

of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving and what should be discarded, and what should not even be considered".⁵¹⁵

Another problem the crew encountered was that in such an isolated area, when there were problems with the equipment, it was difficult to get it repaired. Bollinger recalls that the camera had an on/off switch, which stopped working one day, and he fixed the problem by taking the hand grip apart and putting in a switch out of the dashboard of Ward's van.⁵¹⁶ Much of the time, the crew would have to improvise because they were working with minimal equipment. Leon Narbey recalls that, at one point they wanted to get the light on the door-knob, and Ward was trying to find a mirror to get the effect he wanted.⁵¹⁷ Such details were crucial to Ward.

Narbey sees the film's cinematic approach as being similar to the work of Tarkovskij (a filmmaker whom Ward admired) in its emphasis on intimate detail and portrayal of the characters through such details. In his view, Bollinger was particularly suited to work on a film of this nature, because he has "a very strong sense of visuals [...] especially with movement".⁵¹⁸ However, while Bollinger's contribution to the film was considerable, he had limited time to work on the project. He filmed for a period of about five weeks in all, not continuously but spread over several months. With the demands of a young family, he was unable to continue with the project when Ward wanted to shoot more material and at that stage Narbey became involved with the film. Narbey had met Ward while at Ilam, where he had been teaching, and afterwards when he was working as cameraman for CHTV3, Ward borrowed a Bolex from him. Ward showed him two big reels of the then incomplete film, which had been loosely edited by Christine Lancaster. Narbey, a sculptor as well as a filmmaker, had the sensitivity to image and light that Ward needed, and like Bollinger, he was a cameraman who often assisted new directors or unusual projects.

Narbey worked on the film for approximately nine days, finishing some of the shots, such as the heron flying, which Bollinger had attempted to shoot but been unable to. Bollinger was under the impression that Ward wanted to get a shot of the heron because

⁵¹⁵ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 26.

⁵¹⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁵¹⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Leon Narbey, 29 January 2002.

⁵¹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Leon Narbey, 29 January 2002.

“it was part of the environment [...]. We used to see it quite a lot, so we used it”.⁵¹⁹ This proved to be a difficult image to capture. The herons would congregate around the water troughs for the cattle, which were invariably in the middle of a fence line. Ward and Narbey set up a situation where Narbey would get as close to one of the herons as possible, and using a zoom lens, would start the camera rolling, waving to Ward to indicate that he was ready. Ward was on the other side of the trough and would come running towards the trough to frighten the bird so it would fly, hopefully in Narbey’s direction. It was difficult to ensure there was enough film in the magazine, and once the bird flew off, it was very hard to keep it in the sight of the long lens. Contrary to Bollinger’s belief that Ward wanted to include a shot of the bird because it was part of the environment, Narbey believes that Ward wanted to film the heron in reference to the Maori belief of the white heron taking the spirits back to Spirits Bay.⁵²⁰

David Coulson started editing the film, but since it was shot over a long period of time and Coulson had other commitments, most of the editing was done by Christine Lancaster. The pace of the editing in the film is relatively slow - a result of Ward consciously trying to match the subject’s rhythm with that of the film. Ward deliberately repeated some actions, such as Puhī giving Niki his pills, in order to emphasise their ritualistic nature. “By filming the pill sequence in several different ways, I attempted to show variety within seeming repetition [...]. *It is the small gestures, actions and reactions that set up and define their relationship* [Ward’s italics]. Ritual is an important part of that relationship”.⁵²¹ There were problems with editing due to lack of continuity, with Puhī wearing different clothes or with shorter hair, but these are hardly noticeable in the final version of the film. As Bollinger comments: “Once you’re in the editing room and it’s got a flow on, it’s amazing what you can get away with actually, in terms of continuity, if it flows right”.⁵²²

The process of getting the film completed was beset with problems, not the least of which were financial. Although Ward was able to get funding for the film from the Education Department, the Arts Council and the Film Commission, he commented in an interview for Photo and Audio: “I don’t wish to disclose the budget, but I will say it’s a low budget film. It has been very difficult and I’ve had no wage. The film could never

⁵¹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Leon Narbey, 29 January 2002.

⁵²⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Leon Narbey, 29 January 2002.

⁵²¹ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Section on Approach.

⁵²² Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

have been made if I'd waited until all the finance was available".⁵²³ In fact, the film was begun with only one third of the necessary finance, and Ward had to try to get further finance as he went along. An incident occurred which could well have resulted in the destruction of the completed film. A fire in Ward's flat destroyed all of his belongings including all the publicity stills for the film. As The Evening Post reports the story, *In Spring* "escaped incineration by pure chance", due to Ward having left the print of the film in his car overnight.⁵²⁴

Reception

After its release, international response to the film was overwhelmingly positive. The film shared the Grand Prix prize at the 1982 *Cinéma du Réel* documentary festival in France, a reviewer for Sonovision commenting on the strength of the film's visual impact in comparison with many of the documentaries screened in competition.⁵²⁵ It also won a Silver Hugo Award at the 1980 Chicago Film Festival. In 1980, it was screened at the San Francisco Film Festival in the New Directors series, where the director of the festival, Albert Johnson, described the film as "documentary raised to the highest level of cinema humanism".⁵²⁶ Subsequently, *In Spring* and *A State of Siege* toured the USA, and consequently, critical response to *In Spring* in the USA tended to make comparisons between the two films. While the observational documentary style of *In Spring* is naturally somewhat different from the dramatic style of *A State of Siege*, what the two films do have in common, apart from their similarities of subject-matter, are minimal dialogue and reliance on images to carry the narrative. Kevin Thomas, in a review for the Los Angeles Times, wrote that the films complement each other "as profoundly compassionate and beautiful portraits of solitary women struggling to survive in a harsh elemental world". He identified Ward as "the major talent emerging from the burgeoning New Zealand cinema" and drew similarities between the films in their visual style: "Ward [...] avoids conventional exposition and narration to trust his images to express the inner lives of these women". While Thomas saw both films as "poetry", he pointed out that they are also "devastating" commentaries on the society in

⁵²³ Ward, "That Personal Quality," 44.

⁵²⁴ Bruce Watson, "Movie Escapes Thorndon Blaze," The Evening Post 10 April 1978.

⁵²⁵ "Impressions Sur Quelques Images Du Réel (Powerful Imagery of Vincent Ward)," Sonovision April 1982.

⁵²⁶ Albert Johnson, "Focus on Vincent Ward," Alternative Cinema 12.3&4 (1984/5): 10.

which they are set.⁵²⁷ An earlier review in the Los Angeles Times also saw *In Spring* as “an indictment of the fate of New Zealand’s Polynesians”.⁵²⁸ In general, overseas response to *In Spring* was well-attuned to the kind of specialised documentary approach that Ward had taken. Herzog’s “visionary” documentaries about disability, such as *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1968) or *Land of Silence and Darkness* (1971), had no doubt prepared the ground, along with idiosyncratic American documentaries such as *Grey Gardens*.

Critical response to the film in New Zealand was mixed. Some reviewers were enthusiastic - Helen Martin, for example, saw the film as “a rare and special film” and praised it for its honesty.⁵²⁹ “Ward makes of the stuff of everyday lives of these two people, a powerful, rich and moving document. What he dares to do is to show lives as they are lived – no hype, no bullshit, no attempt to make a quick sale out of other people’s lives”.⁵³⁰ Ian Johnston described the documentary as having “a purely aesthetic quality to the images, which gives the film a pictorial strength”, and used the example of the “magical shot” of the two white horses emerging from the mist at the beginning of the film as an illustration of this. He also noted that the sound-track was “extremely sensitive to the mood of the house”, citing as examples, the couple of occasions when significant noises are “highlighted by the camera’s observation of the cats’ reactions to them”, and he praised Jack Body’s minimalist flute music as fitting “perfectly” the mood of the film.⁵³¹ As in the USA, New Zealand reviewers tended to draw comparisons between *A State of Siege* and *In Spring*. Gilbert Peterson, comparing the two films, described *In Spring* as “another visual poem”.⁵³² But Ward’s approach to documentary was very different to that of other local filmmakers, and the use of Maori subject-matter by Pakeha film-makers had started to become politically controversial.

Miro Bilbrough’s close analysis of the film in 1988 is worth examining in detail as it challenges many aspects of Ward’s aesthetic on behalf of attitudes that typify a familiar New Zealand documentary tradition, one which disapproves of certain aesthetic, mythic and *auteurist* aspects of Ward’s approach. Bilbrough’s first attempt to deconstruct the

⁵²⁷ Thomas, "New Zealand Women - Two Portraits."

⁵²⁸ "The Film Biz of New Zealand."

⁵²⁹ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 12.

⁵³⁰ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 10.

⁵³¹ Ian Johnston, "In Spring One Plants Alone," Craccum 31 March 1980: 14.

⁵³² Gilbert Peterson, "Film Portrait a Sensitive Document," Dominion 21 July 1980.

film is to argue that while it utilises *cinéma vérité* techniques, through which the images are assumed to speak for themselves, “the strong private mythology that is such a prominent part in [*A State of Siege*] is again at work [...], shaping and cutting the experience of Niki and Puhi’s life to his own pattern”.⁵³³ In other words, the film claims authenticity, but those claims are suspect. Bilbrough’s essay examines “how a viewer’s response to Puhi and Niki is shaped by the film’s codes rather than sheerly by the subjects themselves” and argues that the absence of voice-over narration and a minimum of interviewing “seeks to efface the filmmakers’ presence in order to achieve a maximum ‘window on reality’ effect”.⁵³⁴ Bilbrough’s critique sets up a straw man as its target since Ward had never denied his own intervention. As he noted in his thesis: “In some sequences, the presence of the crew has been acknowledged in the finished film. This is seen in the occasional comments that the subjects make to the film crew in the course of everyday events. By including these, I have tried to suggest something of the relationship between us; and by so doing show the situation that this film has evolved in”.⁵³⁵

Bilbrough goes on to argue that, “the decision to use a shooting style that simulated the natural low-light conditions of Puhi’s kitchen is an extension of this ideology. The cinematography’s reflection of the subjects’ physical environment becomes a code, signalling to the viewer the credibility of the film’s account, of its adherence to actuality”.⁵³⁶ Again this oversimplifies Ward’s approach. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the decision to use naturalistic lighting was motivated as much by practicalities (such as the limited budget, the unwillingness of the subjects to have their environment transformed and the impracticality of setting up light-stands in the limited space of Puhi’s kitchen) as by aesthetic considerations. Ward was well aware that using naturalistic lighting would have a particular effect in the film – that of adding atmosphere and of allowing the viewer time to explore the face of the subject - but he was not using this style of lighting simply to promote a kind of naïve realism.

Bilbrough implies that Ward sincerely believes in “a perceivable objectivity”, but in his dissertation, Ward states, to the contrary, that he does not believe it is possible to be objective; all he has tried to do is “to project [Puhi and Niki’s] situation as honestly as I

⁵³³ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 18.

⁵³⁴ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 14.

⁵³⁵ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Introduction.

⁵³⁶ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 14-15.

could on film”.⁵³⁷ This is a more nuanced formulation. The critic’s attempt to deconstruct Ward’s film by identifying contradictions founders because he is apparently unfamiliar with the particular mode of documentary sometimes described as “reflexive” which acknowledges the presence of the filmmaker but still seeks to achieve as accurate a representation as possible (an important proviso). In this type of documentary: “Rather than hearing the filmmaker engage solely in an interactive (participatory, conversational, or interrogative) fashion with other social actors, we now see or hear the filmmaker also engage in metacommentary, speaking to us less about the historical world [...] than about the process of representation itself”.⁵³⁸ Elements of this reflexivity are evident in *In Spring* for example, in Ward’s off-camera comments to Niki. Lurking behind Bilbrough’s critique is an uneasiness about the subject-matter (a political sensitivity that had grown in the course of the 1980s), as shown by his comment: “We are not simply watching a disinterested record of a couple whose existence has been excluded and marginalised by dominant middle-class pakeha culture”.⁵³⁹

Bilbrough does acknowledge one strength of Ward’s approach - the fact that the avoidance of voice-over allows the viewer to become “more sensitive to body language as a relatively unmediated source of information about Puhi and Niki”. Bilbrough cites as an example Niki’s hands, which “do the talking, splaying, clenching, stiffening, imaging out the physical and psychological aspects of his ‘illness’ for us throughout the film”.⁵⁴⁰ Helen Martin also vividly describes the hands in the film:

Niki’s [hands], flexing, stiff, tensed, eloquently convey his pain and frustration; Puhi’s gnarled old pieces of leather, working hands, testifying to a life of physical labour [...]. Important in the Ringatu faith is the gesture of the ‘upraised hand’ (that is in fact the translation of the word ‘Ringatu’). The hands are used ceaselessly during prayer. If Puhi’s hands are invaluable to her as manual tools they are also of spiritual significance. Niki’s hands are in perfect

⁵³⁷ Ward, “A Documented Account of the Making of *In Spring One Plants Alone*,” Introduction.

⁵³⁸ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 56.

⁵³⁹ Bilbrough, “In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story,” 15-16.

⁵⁴⁰ Bilbrough, “In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story,” 15.

working order yet in an act symbolic of the pattern of their relationship it is Puhi who peels the wrapping off his Topsy.⁵⁴¹

While Martin sees the way the images are filmed as an example of the “richness and texture that are stunning in their impact”, Bilbrough believes this concentration on the visuals can be a disadvantage since “the cinematography by its very virtuosity can dominate us with its craft, its beauty over its content”. He cites the closing shot of Puhi stooped over, chopping wood in her backyard, with Niki standing close to her but with his back to her, as being “almost too ideal”.⁵⁴² Bilbrough clearly wants to challenge Ward’s basic aesthetic but to do so he falls back upon a less sophisticated notion of documentary realism, strong in the New Zealand tradition, that regards anything too obviously artistic as suspect.

This argument is continued through a discussion of the non-diegetic sound in the film. While Bilbrough praises the use of diegetic sound in the film, as being “lucid and simple” and clearly linked to “a documentary purpose”, he sees the Maori flute music used in the scene where Puhi is labouring up the drive carrying a sackful of groceries as having “an irresistible poetry, that appeals wholly to our imagination. Puhi becomes even older, almost archetypal, like the mysterious outcast crone in a fairy-tale or a medieval wayfarer”, thus distracting the viewer from the “unqualified hardship” of the scene.⁵⁴³ According to Bilbrough’s argument, Ward departs from the true spirit of documentary by mythologising his subjects, thereby detracting from the harsh reality of their situation. Martin has a different interpretation of this aspect of the film. She regards the flute music accompanying the image of Puhi trudging “along a dusty road bent by the years and by the weight of the box on her back” as helping to link this scene to the scene of the heron, with its connotations of death and the afterlife, where the flute is also played on the soundtrack. “The connection is made between the tangi which opens the film and the possibility that the next tangi may be for her”.⁵⁴⁴ Ward would no doubt see the “reality” in which Puhi lives as including spiritual and symbolic dimensions, but Bilbrough’s distaste for the “poetry” and “imagination” that this encompasses appears to imply a more limiting conception of the real – one that arguably had dominated much New Zealand film and literature up to this point.

⁵⁴¹ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 11.

⁵⁴² Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 15.

⁵⁴³ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 15.

⁵⁴⁴ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 11-12.



Figure 3: *In Spring One Plants Alone.* Puhi with axe - an image some Maori critics found controversial.

Bilbrough also claims that due to the absence of explanatory titles or voice-over, the film fails to elucidate aspects of Puhī and Niki's life, such as Niki's illness, for the viewer. Certainly the film leaves many gaps but he seems to imply that this is a deliberate mystification: "Knowledge of Puhī and Niki's relationship to a *marae* that is apparently just across the paddock is withheld [...]. There remain all the whys about the community's involvement or lack of".⁵⁴⁵ He suggests that these information gaps are a result of the "fictionalising aspect of this film, that is responsible for marginalizing information that does not fit into its story", and that the film's representation of its subjects is "shaped by an underlying attitude of nostalgia as much as an objective one. This nostalgic approach (often unconscious) is a difficulty inherent in a European documenting a non-European people and way of life. There is a strong tendency to read the subject culture in terms of the lack of the culture that the director/documentor comes from".⁵⁴⁶ Again, what begins as an aesthetic argument ends as a political critique focusing on racial or ethnic issues.

Bilbrough's arguments need to be examined in the wider context of the fierce debate that developed in New Zealand around the issue of whether an outsider can make a documentary about a Māori community. Those hostile to such criticisms refer to them as "political correctness". Those sympathetic to such criticisms see them as an advance in awareness that will bring an end to the local equivalents of what Edward Said summed up as "Orientalism", the fascination that Europeans have had towards non-European people and ways[s] of life, with all its attendant mythologising.⁵⁴⁷ Michael King in his book *Being Pakeha*, talks about the difficulties he encountered when, with a predominantly non-Māori film crew, he attempted to make a documentary on an issue that concerned Māori/Pakeha relations during the New Zealand Land Wars in the nineteenth century - the story of Te Whiti's passive resistance to the European invaders at the separatist village, Parihaka in Taranaki.⁵⁴⁸ This debate in recent years has reached such a pitch that according to King, "Some Pakeha have the impression now

⁵⁴⁵ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 17-18.

⁵⁴⁶ Bilbrough, "In Spring One Plants Alone: Telling the Story," 16.

⁵⁴⁷ As Said points out, what makes this fascination problematic is that it is a result of "cultural hegemony at work [...] the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures". (Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979) 7.)

⁵⁴⁸ Michael King, *Being Pakeha: An Encounter with New Zealand and the Māori Resistance* (Auckland: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).

that *all* Maori are opposed to Pakeha participation in Maori activities, that a mood of separatism is evolving that will eventually lead to Maori and Pakeha living in their own enclaves”.⁵⁴⁹

In the art world, the issue of non-Maori artists’ borrowing (or “appropriation”) of Maori symbols and motifs has been the subject of much discussion by art commentators such as Rangihiroa Panoho, who see non-Maori artists drawing on Maori motifs as being symptomatic of “the tendency of Western culture to see itself as central and other tribal, non-Western cultures as peripheral”. He states bluntly that: “In New Zealand, the real issue is that these Eurocentric attitudes don’t belong here and are irrelevant to both our location and culture”.⁵⁵⁰ Other art commentators such as Paratene Matchitt have pointed out that it is natural for influences to work both ways, and the work of some non-Maori artists, such as Colin McCahon can be read as paying homage to Maori art forms and culture and should thus be seen as “a public gesture of admiration and respect for Maori culture” rather than “an improper appropriation”.⁵⁵¹

Ward was well aware, when he started making *In Spring*, of the developing debate, in particular the notion that Maori should be left to tell their own stories. While this paradigm seemed to him to assume too easily that “someone of the same race would make a better film than someone of a different race”, he was nevertheless “very nervous” as a result, and knew that attempting such a project was a risky thing to do. He saw his main counter-argument as his ability to bring a fresh perspective to the subject-matter.⁵⁵²

Ward’s motivation for making the film was in part personal. This kind of motivation would seem to lead to precisely to the sort of pitfall that Maori critics have warned against: the risk of the filmmaker projecting the mythology of the dominant culture onto an indigenous people. Like Bilbrough, Cushla Parekowhai also claims that although *In Spring One Plants Alone* presents itself as *cinéma vérité*, it is “an individual fiction and personal mythology”. Parekowhai asserts that Ward “selects those experiences and observations, which according to his own particular cultural values, he thinks will be the

⁵⁴⁹ King, *Being Pakeha: An Encounter with New Zealand and the Maori Resistance* 170.

⁵⁵⁰ Mary Barr, ed., *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992) 133.

⁵⁵¹ Francis Pound, ed., *The Space Between* (Auckland: Workshop Press, 1994) 114.

⁵⁵² Lynette Read, telephone interview with Vincent Ward, 17 December 2003.

most appropriate, accurate and important, whether his selection is relevant or meaningful at all to Maori". To support this argument, the opening images of the film are said to strike Maori as "extraneous, confusing and unrelated".⁵⁵³ Like Bilbrough, Parekowhai is a thoughtful critic of the film, but one suspects that the two writers are so eager to score political points that they are not taking time to tune in to the complexities of Ward's film. However, such criticisms from a highly articulate, urban Maori intellectual such as Parekowhai seemed to seriously damage the credibility of Ward's film.

In order to test the validity of Parekowhai's criticisms of the film, and to ascertain how the film was received by the Tuhoe people themselves, I interviewed a number of people in the Matahi valley where the film was made. The people I interviewed were Tuhoe who had been connected with the making of the documentary in some way. I had been generously given introductions to people in the area by Barry Barclay, and was accompanied on the trip by one of my Maori students, Jillian White, and her partner Eruera Morgan who spoke fluent Maori. When I showed the film to Maui and Kero Te Pou, who lived in the Matahi valley and had had some contact with Ward while the film was being made, their responses were very different from those of Parekowhai who asserts that the opening *tangi* sequence is confusing because it obscures what we are supposed to be seeing, the individuals placed in a context shared by others.⁵⁵⁴ Filming a *tangi* is always problematic and special permission is required to do so. For a non-Maori filmmaker to attempt to do so certainly requires sensitivity. However, the response of Maui and Kero Te Pou, as well as that of Helen and Toka Tewara (local schoolteachers), was that far from treading on Maori sensibilities, Ward had followed protocol by asking permission and had filmed the scene in the only way it was possible to film it without being offensive – to film the individual mourners turning away from the scene of the burial after the grief was over.⁵⁵⁵ The focus of the scene is therefore not the burial but the mourners' reactions.

Parekowhai also castigates what she assumes to be Ward's use of the bird mythology associated with the *tangi* in his depiction of the heron in flight. An ancient proverb alludes to the rare white heron that raises the spirits of the deceased to heaven. The

⁵⁵³ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 7.

⁵⁵⁴ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 7.

⁵⁵⁵ Lynette Read, interviews with Maui and Kero Te Pou, 15 April 2000 and with Helen and Toka Tewara, 16 April, 2000.

heron in the film, however, is an ordinary blue heron and it also apparently flies in the opposite direction to heaven. In the light of Bollinger's and Narbey's comments about the reasons for the inclusion of this shot, it seems that Ward was motivated by the notion of the heron as part of the everyday environment of Puhi and Niki, as well as by Maori symbolism; but, as Narbey pointed out, practical considerations intervened - it was difficult to get any kind of shot of the heron, and the rare white heron does not exist in this part of the country, only the more common blue heron. The footage was interpreted as being simply a wonderful shot by local Tuhoe who had viewed the film both shortly after it was made and on more recent occasions.

Another criticism Parekowhai makes about Ward's attitude to his subjects is that he "remains largely unaware or possibly does not actually even care" that Niki and Puhi were not local Maori from the *Urewera*, homeland of the Tuhoe but displaced persons from the Chatham Islands, and that for this reason, "their isolation from the community around them is real".⁵⁵⁶ While it seems that Puhi and Niki were isolated from the community, it is not for the reasons that Parekowhai suggests, since according to a number of local Maori interviewed, Puhi was born in the Ureweras, although not at Matahi but further up the valley. She moved to Matahi when the rest of Te Rua's community moved (as discussed earlier in the chapter). She was not thought to be from the Chatham Islands, although it is possible that her ancestors were.

Parekowhai also suggests that Ward manipulated events in order to impose his own world-view on the situation, in the shot towards the end of the film, where the old lady is revealed as hiding an axe behind her back. "Where Ward may have placed the axe in the old woman's hands as some defence against the potential injury Niki could do to her, it is more likely that she regards it as a tool of caring. That the axe is supposed to assume greater symbolic importance, is the film maker's own personal mythology".⁵⁵⁷ However, Ward's description of the event is very different. Before the camera crew arrived, Niki had had an outburst of violence and Puhi had run away from him, which she frequently did when he became violent. Helen and Toka Tewara and Bay Takao (who would look after Niki after Puhi died) confirmed this last fact.⁵⁵⁸ Ward describes the situation when he arrived: "[Puhi] only ventured back to her house when she saw

⁵⁵⁶ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 8.

⁵⁵⁷ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Bay Takao, 16 April 2000.

my van pull up. Niki had thrown her clothes out into the rain and broken her ladder. As we squatted outside with the camera rolling, she hid a tomahawk behind her back and as I spoke with her, she kept glancing nervously over her shoulder to check if Niki was approaching". She told Ward that she was frightened of Niki because he had hit her on one occasion, and the police had been called.⁵⁵⁹ Her response to the violence of the situation is particularly poignant, and illustrates what Ward was trying to achieve in portraying the complexity of her relationship with Niki and their interdependence. "When he do that I told you I run off. I won't stay here. When I see you here, that's why I won't run away. He can't touch me when he see that three men are here [...]. You know Vincent, I like to go away. I like to go away but I know he can't cook the *kai*. That's why I stay here".⁵⁶⁰

Alun Bollinger suggests that some Maori could have a negative reaction to the film because "this elderly woman was effectively left to fend for herself with a handicapped boy [...]. She could have done with looking after. There were some other *kuia* up and down the valley who sort of kept an eye on her, but they didn't get close [...]. There was generally nobody else there for her".⁵⁶¹ This is borne out by the local minister, Eric Caton, formerly of the Waimana Presbyterian church, who made similar comments.⁵⁶² Turei Heke, of the Ngaphi tribe, after watching the film, makes the point, in a letter to Jillian White, who accompanied me to Waimana: "Those old people taught us things that we could never do. Look after our own no matter what. Values that we do not live up to. No doubt part of the reason why the *whanau* of the old lady were upset was because the truth does hurt".⁵⁶³

Clearly, Ward's knowledge of this community was not the superficial one that some of his critics have assumed. He had initially envisaged that the filming of the documentary would take about six weeks, but it dragged on for over two years, during which period he and his small crew lived in the community for weeks at a time. When I interviewed members of the local community who remembered the filming of the documentary, they stressed that Ward's presence in the community had been very unobtrusive and that he

⁵⁵⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 24-25.

⁵⁶⁰ Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 12.

⁵⁶¹ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁵⁶² Lynette Read, interview with Eric Caton, 16 April 2000.

⁵⁶³ Turei Heke, letter to Jillian White, 2000. Alun Bollinger thought that Puhī was not Tuhoe herself, but Ngati Porou, and that she had married into Tuhoe and was living in Tuhoe country. Her son was Tuhoe, but his disability caused embarrassment. Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

had gone to some lengths to run errands and do chores for Puhī in return for the crew's intrusion upon her life. Helen and Toka Tewara, local schoolteachers from Waimana, remember Ward as not the kind of person to take advantage of the situation. Careful not to upset local people, he asked their opinions and consulted them about the film.⁵⁶⁴ While the locals recognized Ward as being different because "he was prepared to live rough", they tolerated him. For them, the making of the film was an unfamiliar activity but not something to make a fuss about. Ward clearly did his best to fit in but what he may not have fully appreciated was the fact that Puhī, who was steeped in traditional Maori values, took it for granted that strangers to the community must be cared for. She would therefore have put her own feelings aside when it came to looking after Ward and his crew, insisting on cooking for them, for example, whether or not she felt they were imposing.

Barry Barclay cites clear instances of non-Maori insensitivity to Maori values, for example when a BBC film crew came to New Zealand to make a documentary on the Maori situation. The producer, who wanted to interview an important spokesperson on a particular Maori issue, refused to let her friends sit with her while she was being interviewed.⁵⁶⁵ He also cites occasions when non-Maori crew were insensitive to Maori customs when eating at a *marae*, not being trained to respect the call of the cooks to come and eat immediately.⁵⁶⁶ It is experiences such as these which have made Maori filmmakers such as Barclay reluctant to utilize non-Maori crew, particularly when filming Maori subject-matter. It is important that such issues should be strongly debated in this country, but Ward's film was clearly a more complex project than others that have come under attack.

One aspect of the film on which commentators, the local people and the filmmaker himself seem to agree on is that, as Ward says: "The film was important because it documented Puhī's belief in the older values in a very fundamental way".⁵⁶⁷ An important aspect of these "older values" was the notion of *aroha*, which Parekowhai recognised in the film: "*In Spring* is about *aroha* and that generosity of spirit which one old *kuia* has for those around her".⁵⁶⁸ The success of the film in documenting Puhī's

⁵⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Helen and Toka Tewara, 16 April 2000.

⁵⁶⁵ Barry Barclay, *Our Own Image* (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1990) 12.

⁵⁶⁶ Barclay, *Our Own Image* 71.

⁵⁶⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 23.

⁵⁶⁸ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 8.

traditional values is at least in part attributable to the *cinéma vérité* techniques that Ward utilized. The film was made at a time when this traditional way of life was fast disappearing and it is arguable that if Ward had not made the film when he did, it would have been too late. Kero Te Pou commented that it was perhaps Puhi's choice to live this traditional way of life that explains in part the isolation in which she existed. "She probably didn't have too much family around. They all left and didn't want to come back to this kind of life".⁵⁶⁹

Ward showed sensitivity to both Puhi, and to members of the Tuhoe people at Waimana, by taking the film to show her individually, and then to show the community, before the film was screened publicly at the Wellington Film Festival in 1980. He also refused to allow the film to be screened on television while the old lady was still alive. Helen and Toka Tewara screened the film twice at the local *marae*, and on both occasions they say it was a moving experience for the audience. While the old people were surprised in the *tangi* scene to see the *ururpa*, they were not upset, because the camera recorded individual people, many of whom had since died, and it was very moving for the audience to see them again on screen. Helen recalled that everyone cried because: "It was so real: a very good portrait of the whole atmosphere and the whole way of life". She said that they always knew that Puhi was dedicated to Niki, but when they saw the film, they realised just how devoted she was. Helen and Toka pointed out that if the film had not been right, the people in the area would have been the first to complain, and they believe that, "[Ward] did a good job [...], a professional job. He was a real genuine guy".⁵⁷⁰ The local Tuhoe whom I interviewed, had their own way of reading the film and their own use for it, in that while they stressed the importance of the film as the documentation of a traditional way of life, they equally valued it as a record of individuals whom they had known and loved.

That the film had a profound effect on Ward himself is evidenced by Alison Carter, one of Ward's co-writers of *Edge of the Earth*. She believes that the film was "a sort of profound [...] experience for him" and "probably something that really changed a lot of things for him". The project was a huge challenge because of ill health and his feeling of being an outsider to the community, as well as problems with funding and filming difficulties. In addition, it was a difficult time politically to make a film of this nature,

⁵⁶⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Maui and Kero Te Pou, 15 April 2000.

⁵⁷⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Helen and Toka Tewara, 16 April 2000.

and Carter believes that the film “tested him in every way”.⁵⁷¹ In his book, Ward discusses the impact of some of the strange incidents that occurred while they were making the film and adds: “It seemed to all of us that we were at the intersection of two different worlds. And if we stood in one world, and Puhi in the other, then Niki seemed to have a foot in each, precariously straddling the divide”.⁵⁷² He also speaks of the strong affection he developed for Puhi: “My father’s mother died when I was very young, so Puhi was the only grandmother I had known. She’d taken me into her family with the philosophical acceptance that age sometimes brings. I was close to my own mother, but I sometimes resented her judgements and always I felt the need to earn her respect. Puhi didn’t judge and with her I could simply be”.⁵⁷³ He sees the experience of making the film as having a lasting effect: “I had been young and confused when I first came to Te Urewera, and in almost three years I had learnt much more than I had thought possible. Puhi had given me a gift that was fundamental yet intangible, a precious kit that had been woven in pain, in love and care. Wherever I have been since I have carried it with me”.⁵⁷⁴

According to Alison Carter, Ward was away overseas when the old lady died, and was unaware for some time that she had passed away. When he found out, he went back to Matahi to look for her grave but could find no trace of it. Some years later, when he was in the process of writing Edge of the Earth, he asked a group of Tuhoe elders to critique his account of Puhi and Niki before it was published, and as he read them the story, when he came to the part telling of her death, he suddenly started crying. Carter attributes this display of emotion over the old lady to the fact that “with Puhi, Vincent could just be himself. To her, the success of his work was immaterial. At the end of the day, he was simply ‘my Pakeha with the blue van’”.⁵⁷⁵

In retrospect, Ward describes his approach to the film in this way: “It wasn’t staged. It used an unusual combination of *cinéma vérité* and a stringent visual style. It was intended as a document and a character study, not as a popular film. It’s not a particularly accessible film, its worth was not necessarily immediate. It’ll be just as valuable in ten years time. I have no need to push it. I believe in it”. The fact that the

⁵⁷¹ Lynette Read, interview with Alison Carter, 6 August 2002.

⁵⁷² Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 24.

⁵⁷³ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 29.

⁵⁷⁴ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 29-30.

⁵⁷⁵ Alison Carter, "The Other Edge of the Earth," Listener 12 November 1990: 105.

critical response to the film in New Zealand was mixed did not unduly worry him. “I wasn’t fussed if not many people saw it. I thought it had a value that had nothing to do with me”.⁵⁷⁶ His assessment of the film has certainly been borne out within its immediate area. Carter notes, in reference to an annual film festival held in the Urewera district, that *In Spring* is still the film “that all the old people in the area really want to see. So in a sense, it has struck that chord, every year, that’s the film they want to look at”.⁵⁷⁷

Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that Ward brought his highly individual approach to documentary, as he had done to drama, not only in terms of theme (a woman on the periphery of society) but in terms of style (the primacy of the image). Because such a style requires the viewer to read between the lines, there are clearly opportunities for unsympathetic critics to claim they see signs of racism or other unpleasant forms of ideology or myth lurking in the cracks. Ultimately Ward is a Romantic filmmaker, but his form of Romanticism is highly sophisticated – in documentary as in drama – and any valid critique must do justice to his painstaking, complex approach. One way to understand the debate around his film is to see it as based upon different conceptions of reality (or in this case, Maori reality). Arguably, certain aspects of Ward’s world-view lined up in a powerful way with those of Puhī or the Tuhoe, particularly in terms of *aroha* and the spiritual dimension. Obviously other views of Puhī and Niki would have been possible – no single documentary can exhaust its topic, only claim at best to have caught an important dimension of it.

Ward’s *auteurist* approach (already emerging clearly from his two major student films) reflects both a particular view of the world (his Romantic concerns with extreme subjectivity, with outsiders, and with an expanded sense of the real that incorporates forms of spirituality) and a particular sense of style (close up details, heightened awareness of light and colour, long-held shots that gradually reveal) – that is, a style based upon nuance and suggestion rather than explicit statement. The similarities between *In Spring* and *A State of Siege* – despite their very different genres – give credence to Renoir’s notion that an *auteur* only makes one film in his career.

⁵⁷⁶ Ward quoted in Martin, "In Spring One Plants Alone: A Matter of Seeing It," 12.

⁵⁷⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Alison Carter, 6 August 2002.

The world-view of *In Spring* is also reminiscent of Werner Herzog, and indeed, according to Timothy White, Ward had seen and expressed considerable interest in Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972) while they were still film students at Ilam.⁵⁷⁸ In "Where the Green Ants Really Dream", Parekowhai had linked the two film-makers in a negative sense, for attempting to deal with indigenous subject-matter by projecting their own personal mythology "thinly disguised as something else" onto an indigenous world-view".⁵⁷⁹ By contrast, later critics would compare Ward's work in a more favourable sense with that of both Herzog and Wim Wenders for achieving "that particularly German quality of 'innerlichkeit' (visionary 'inwardness'), first identified and refined by Romantic literature".⁵⁸⁰ Don Watson, of the New Musical Express commented that *Vigil* "has a density that is characteristically European. The power it calls from the damp landscape is reminiscent in the best possible sense of vintage Herzog. In fact, it has precisely the sense of quirky semi-surrealism that is so sadly lacking in that director's *Where the Green Ants Dream*".⁵⁸¹ Ward himself sees his work as "hooking into a similar vein" to that of Herzog and Wenders.⁵⁸²

Herzog is the more obvious comparison as a director who, like Ward, has a "penchant for shots describable in terms of the sublime. In this regard not only does he present vistas that suggest infinite expanse, eternity, and the giganticism of nature [...] but he also returns again and again to icons of the sublime such as mists and clouds".⁵⁸³ While this comment seems to have more resonance with the images in *What Dreams May Come*, there are some echoes of the sublime in the dreamlike, ethereal images of the heron or the white horse appearing from nowhere in *In Spring*. Like Ward, Herzog is perceived as a director, who

will go to any lengths, overcome the most impossible obstacles and hazard unthinkable forms of physical danger in order to create those visions and dreams which are the lifeblood of his artistic soul. Like an artist in the age of romanticism, an image to which Herzog most consciously aspires, despite disclaimers, Herzog seems to believe in the rarity of the true aesthetic vision, in

⁵⁷⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁵⁷⁹ Parekowhai, "Where the Green Ants Really Dream," 6.

⁵⁸⁰ Jones, Projecting a Nation: New Zealand Film and Its Reception in Germany 12.

⁵⁸¹ Don Watson quoted in "Vigil Wins Praise," Auckland Star 16 February 1985: B4.

⁵⁸² Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997.

⁵⁸³ Carroll, Interpreting the Moving Image 295.

the ability of the artist to create objects which will shake up his/her audience through their very uniqueness, allowing the audience to see beyond the vista of the ordinary and commonplace. Like the romantic artist, Herzog adheres to the notion that ‘never before seen images’, that art, can only be created through sacrifice and suffering. And finally, in keeping with romantic ideals, Herzog seems consciously to cultivate the presupposition that the artist and his/her work can be readily identified with the person creating those forms.⁵⁸⁴

As Corrigan points out, however, the production of each of Herzog’s films seems to generate “at least one story of suffering and anguish, which may or may not be true”, but which serves to mythologise the director.⁵⁸⁵ The above description implies a more extreme and confident approach than one would expect to hear Ward expressing, but clearly there are similarities. Herzog’s documentaries are as relevant to the comparison as his dramas. Ward’s autobiographical account of the making of *In Spring* with its stories of the film almost being destroyed by fire, the director’s ill-health and the huge challenges involved in making the film might be seen by a sceptical reader as serving a similar purpose in the myth-making process.⁵⁸⁶ At their best, however, both Ward and Herzog achieve the ambitious goal of linking everyday and spiritual realities. We may turn once again to Bazin for a vivid formulation of this project. The context was the fact that artists had always been torn between two opposing impulses:

one, primarily aesthetic, namely the expression of spiritual reality wherein the symbol transcended its mode; the other, purely psychological, namely the duplication of the world outside [...]. The great artists, or course, have always been able to combine the two tendencies. They have allotted to each its proper place in the hierarchy of things, holding reality at their command and moulding it at will into the fabric of their art.⁵⁸⁷

In Spring is one of the most successful New Zealand attempts to combine these two tendencies, and what ultimately shines through is not only, as Parekowhai fears, the “personal mythology” of the film-maker, but equally the *aroha* and faith of an old

⁵⁸⁴ Timothy Corrigan, ed., *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 29.

⁵⁸⁵ Corrigan, ed., *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* 30.

⁵⁸⁶ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 22.

⁵⁸⁷ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* 11.

woman who challenges by her example the values of today's self-seeking and materialistic society.

Chapter 5

Vigil

Ward's involvement in the process of making *In Spring One Plants Alone* further convinced him that: "Filmmaking for me is to do with exploring who you are and where you come from. Weaving stories from these experiences to take people on some sort of journey".⁵⁸⁸ *Vigil*, his first full-length feature film, was grounded in his own experiences and background. This chapter will discuss changes in Ward's approach which marked his development from student filmmaker to professional; it will also examine the unusual process of making the film, focussing on the development of the initial script to its final version, and the contributions of the cast and crew. This detailed record of writing and production will be a special feature of this chapter, offering a particular perspective on Ward's aesthetic and providing additional evidence of his status as an *auteur*. I shall also consider the give and take between the New Zealandness of *Vigil* and its mythical or archetypal elements (which some would describe as universal). Lastly, the chapter will examine the importance of this film to the subsequent directions of New Zealand filmmaking.

The film was released in 1984, four years after *In Spring One Plants Alone*, and it may be seen as the third of a trilogy of films that began with *A State of Siege* and *In Spring*, all focussing on strong female characters as the main protagonists. Ward has said: "This film feels like the completion of the other two – I feel my ideas are clearer and I've brought them to fruition".⁵⁸⁹ *Vigil* grew partly out of Ward's experience in making *In Spring*.

I felt that there were two films to be made while I was making this documentary – one was the documentary, and one was a drama. More than anything, it was the feeling there, which I wanted to translate into a feature film – the feeling of claustrophobia, of paranoia, and, at moments, of genuine human warmth,

⁵⁸⁸ Ward quoted in Carl Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," *New Zealandia* (1989): 40.

⁵⁸⁹ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 39.

because the people were very isolated and very lonely, and so those moments of warmth, although they were short, were very intense.⁵⁹⁰

The other source of inspiration for the film was his own childhood on an isolated farm (an aspect which has been examined in Chapter Two).

In *Vigil* I wanted to recreate my childhood perception of the world I had inhabited. I wanted to see a small, intense child on a farm by himself, combating fierce nightmares and fantasising victories over imaginary foes. At the same time I wanted to convey how a child seems to see the real world in oblique glimpses, and like a detective gathering clues, has to work out what is going on about him. For a long time, I just kept notebooks, writing down ideas, or characters, or images, trying to find a story. Gradually the child began to form, and it turned into a girl.⁵⁹¹

The Scripting Process

In terms of reaching an understanding of Ward's aesthetic and working methods, it is worth examining the process of scripting the film in some detail. While the story was based on an original idea by Ward, Graham Tetley was brought in to help develop the script, initially to write some dialogue. When Tetley first became involved (through a mutual friend of his and Ward's, Philip Tremewan), Ward had begun to develop the characters of Ethan and Toss, but, according to Tetley, "he wasn't working from that [character-oriented] point of view. He was working with a series of images, and he had cards with a series of images that he had drawn himself".⁵⁹² Some of these images were of Ethan with a deer over his shoulder, Ethan calling the deer, Ethan with the hawk flying by and Elizabeth practising ballet and doing the "vertical splits". Tetley saw Ethan as a kind of "Laurentian figure" and comments that: "It was very hard to get past that sort of figure that just comes out of the landscape and bellows, you know. Quite an old-fashioned figure I think, in some ways". The characters of Birdie and Toss were quite undeveloped at this stage, although Ward had some images of Birdie being brought home across the ploughed field in a wheelbarrow, and of Birdie sitting on top of the tractor. He clung to these images as though they were visions he had received –

⁵⁹⁰ Martin, "Vincent's Vigil," 16.

⁵⁹¹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 69.

⁵⁹² Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

they were the only solid basis for the project. The characterisations and the linking narrative were (in a literal sense) secondary. At a subsequent meeting, Ward expressed his liking for the detail of the sample dialogue Tetley had written and they discussed films that Ward admired. Tetley recalls that he mentioned in particular, *Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973), the films of Buster Keaton, Wim Wenders and Werner Herzog (particularly *Aguirre the Wrath of God*, 1972 and *Fitzcarraldo*, 1982).⁵⁹³

When it came to starting work on the script, Tetley remarked that: "I didn't know what I was doing for quite a long time really. I would write scenes here, scenes there, and I had no idea about the overallness of the film at that stage".⁵⁹⁴ Ward's method of script-writing was:

to begin with clusters and constellations of images – there were two nightmares, for example – and the scripting was like detective work, deciphering these images and letting them build. It was like being in a mist or fog through which you catch glimpses of things and try to grab hold of them and work out what they're about [...]. I was constantly trying to find out what the story was about. It was a process of clarification – which is not to say I didn't know what I wanted to say. You start with a number of experiences you've observed and which fit into a view of the world which you want to put into the film, and there are a range of characters which are receptacles for those ideas.⁵⁹⁵

Even after Tetley became involved, Ward and Tetley continued working with images to a large extent. Ward had to proceed intuitively, and script developments that might seem logical (according to narrative logic as spelled out in script-writing textbooks) would be overruled at once if he did not feel intuitively that they were true to the story (if one can call it that) that he was seeking to bring into focus. The image of the tractor "was always there" and the notion of things having "a life of their own became a really important line that we worked around".⁵⁹⁶ In Draft Two, for example, Birdie says to Toss, in relation to the tractor: "You see, everything has a spirit of its own. It sends out

⁵⁹³ Roger Horrocks remembers screening *Spirit of the Beehive* (Victor Erice, 1973) for Ward and Bollinger at Ward's request, before they began filming *Vigil*. There are indeed echoes of Erice's film in *Vigil*. *Spirit* has a girl as central character and there are several similar scenes (such as the girl using blood as lipstick).

⁵⁹⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁵⁹⁵ Ward quoted in Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38.

⁵⁹⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

little miniatures of itself that hit and explode on your retina [...]. Flash! And just when you think you know what it's all about, it takes off in the other direction, like a rat up a drain pipe."⁵⁹⁷

Tetley found it difficult to work on a project that had “essentially no narrative” and very little dialogue and describes it as “the hardest script I’ve ever had to work on, but the best, in terms of the process”. One of the ways in which Tetley found to proceed was to write poems without scenes before he wrote the scene. While this was a unique experience for him, he felt that he had learnt a great deal from doing so, because

you’re looking for mythic content the whole time [...]. Birdie you know, is Daedalus [...]. For me, anyway, it’s the touchstone of whether you got it right or not [...]. We wrote the film out, at a certain stage, as a folktale ‘Once Upon a Time’, about twenty five pages, and that was really interesting because that started to tell us about what was happening with structure and [whether] we actually [did] have things down that we said were there.

Tetley cites as examples of the archetypes they wanted to use in the film: Ethan as a “hugely mythic figure, with the hawk and calling the deer [...], and the whole animality of the sexuality perhaps – there’s a feeling of something coming out of the earth, and the idea of the stranger”.⁵⁹⁸ Ethan’s car was always envisaged as being like a shark, and the notion of his driving into the farm and smashing the gate relates to his animal sexuality.

For Tetley, who at this time had had little experience of writing feature film scripts, the process of working on *Vigil* for two and a half years was a valuable learning experience. Over that period he developed a very good working relationship with Ward, who was happy to leave him to do things on his own, and in the final drafts, to let him “have a go at structure and shape”. Tetley was also involved in the shoot as an assistant to Tim White, and to help Ward with any writing that needed to be done on location. Later, Ward invited him to watch the film being cut, which Tetley felt was a “wonderful” opportunity for him as an inexperienced writer. “The thing I learned about cutting was

⁵⁹⁷ Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Second Draft Screenplay” (Wellington: Vincent Ward Productions, 1982) 13.

⁵⁹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

just how much goes on the floor. That shocked me, a week's shoot on the floor, and you realise it's your fault as a writer".⁵⁹⁹

The sometimes very long speeches he had written for the film needed to be much shorter, and he learned that "it doesn't matter what you're doing [...], in a film, there's only one main character. We'd gone ahead and I had been thinking that what we were doing was making this current and this story that moved towards a logical conclusion that was to do with the dynamics between four people – four co-equals – Birdie, Toss, Ethan, Elizabeth".⁶⁰⁰ This was reflected in Draft Two of the screenplay, which includes four scenes before the opening proper, described as The Old Man (a scene of Birdie working on the metal hawk in his hut at night), The Hunter (Ethan hunting deer in the early morning), Elizabeth (Liz making bread for breakfast) and The Child (Toss coming into the kitchen before breakfast to tell her mother that she wanted to accompany her father on his work around the farm that day). The opening of the actual film is a long-shot of Justin working on the farm at the edge of the cliff, followed by scenes of the other characters around the farm. Each of the four characters is given equal screen time, but significantly, Justin, who figures only briefly in the film before his death, is seen initially only in long-shot as a distant figure dwarfed by the cliffs. Ward comments that:

I felt that each of the characters had his (or her) own story. When Graeme Tetley and I were writing the script, it was a battle in the early stages as to which character would emerge as the central one. Even though it turned out to be the child, all three (Toss, her mother and grandfather) had something in common: they were all going through a period of incredible change in their lives [...]. It was probably because of the mother that I had the film set in the mid-1960s instead of, say the 1930s, because the 1960s was a time when women were undergoing all kinds of upheaval, social, political and sexual.⁶⁰¹

As pointed out by Tetley, there is significantly less dialogue in the film than in the early drafts. (This had been the case also with *A State of Siege*). Initially some of the backstory of the film was made explicit through the addition of minor characters but these were later dropped. In Draft Two for example, there was a scene between the mourners at Justin's funeral where one of the mourners explains that Justin had little to

⁵⁹⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁶⁰⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁶⁰¹ William Dart, "Interview with Director, Vincent Ward," *Rip It Up* March 1985: 92.

smile about because he was “mortgaged up to the hilt and still [had] a pile of debts left over”.⁶⁰² Later in the screenplay, there was a conversation between two linesmen working on the roadway. The purpose of this scene, where one of the characters discusses his sexual exploits, was perhaps related to the theme of Toss’s reaching sexual maturity, but in terms of advancing the plot the scene provided the vehicle for Toss to steal a shovel which she later uses to dig when she is constructing a “shrine” for her father. These minor characters were later dropped from the film. The theme of Toss’s burgeoning sexuality was developed through several scenes in Draft Two of the screenplay, such as the scene where she posed half-naked in front of a mirror in the old pigsty. When Birdie interrupted her, she hastily put on her father’s old jacket, and when Birdie asked why she was wearing it, she told him it was to provide protection against “Ethan’s silent bullets” – an echo of the “silent bullets” Nicky referred to in *In Spring One Plants Alone*.⁶⁰³ This vivid scene was retained in the film but in a truncated version. In the following scene, in the second draft, where Birdie and Toss were feeding the geese, they discussed at some length the fact that Toss was growing breasts; and in an earlier scene, Toss noticed that the stallion in the field behind them had an erection. She questioned her grandfather about it and asked him if it’s “like a man’s”, and later if it’s “like yours?”.⁶⁰⁴ This scene was dropped from the final version of the screenplay, making the sexual aspects more subtle (or perhaps more obscure).

Other scenes that were included in Draft Two but not in the film included a long conversation between Ethan and Liz in which the latter talked about her life on the farm with Justin, a scene which was no doubt intended to explain Liz’s motivation for starting a relationship with Ethan. Later, she asked Ethan to take her riding and there was a scene with Liz riding bareback behind him, evidently relishing her freedom. The scene where Birdie and Toss barricaded themselves in Birdie’s hut so they did not have to leave the farm was much longer in Draft Two, and was divided into several scenes. In one of these scenes, Ethan broke a window of the hut and was injured. Elizabeth commented: “Well, looks like first blood to them”, a reference to the working title of the film, *First Blood, Last Rites* (subsequently changed because a *Rambo* film was released with a similar title).⁶⁰⁵ The ending of Draft Two was also somewhat different

⁶⁰² Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Second Draft Screenplay,” 28.

⁶⁰³ Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Second Draft Screenplay,” 74.

⁶⁰⁴ Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Second Draft Screenplay,” 45.

⁶⁰⁵ Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Second Draft Screenplay,” 126.

to the film in that, just before Birdie finally came out of the hut, he imagined seeing a military band from World War I playing outside the hut, and thought he was back in the war. Ethan's truck was then seen leaving the farm, Toss's differences with her mother were resolved and she snuggled up to Liz, while the old man, who had been chasing the runaway tractor, finally caught up with it and urinated into the tractor radiator (a shot which according to Tetley was modelled on another film and was Ward's way of paying homage to that filmmaker). The last shot in the script was of Birdie standing on the bonnet of the tractor, cursing at the sky. Such scenes were so different from the final version that they provide a dramatic example of the fluid way in which the film evolved. Though no less vivid in their own right, such scenes came to be seen as dispensable. Some useful information was lost as a result, but intensity was a more important criterion.

Draft Three was significantly different from Draft Two. This was the result not only of Ward and Tetley's on-going dialogue but of input from others. Ward is a filmmaker who constantly bounces his ideas off collaborators. He is slow to adopt new ideas, but interaction with others is an important part of the process by which he becomes sure of what he himself wants and intends. As a typical example, there was an interesting exchange at this stage between Ward and Roger Horrocks to whom Ward had given the script. Horrocks's comments also serve as a summary of how the script looked at this stage in its development:

The script is most successful when it is creating images, and scenes in which individuals are doing something alone (or are together-but-alone). It is less successful when evoking the emotional give-and-take between people. This is not to say that the scenes of interaction between people are unsuccessful – they include many powerful moments – but this is clearly the aspect of the script that needs more development [...]. By contrast, the possibilities of image and symbol have been very thoroughly developed. At times they are even a little over-developed.⁶⁰⁶

Horrocks suggested that the relationships between characters would benefit from being “workshopped”. He made comparisons between Ward and Tetley's script and the films

⁶⁰⁶ This is from an undated letter by Roger Horrocks to Vincent Ward (from the records of Horrocks's correspondence with Ward, after the film-maker had asked him to comment on a second draft of the film).

of Ingmar Bergman or Carlos Saura (*Spirit of the Beehive*), but pointed out that in Bergman's films, in contrast to Ward's script, "the human relationships are so richly developed that the images and symbols are not too insistent". Horrocks added that he hoped his suggestions for development "will not be misinterpreted as a desire for more 'realism'. In my opinion, New Zealand films have generally been so 'realistic' that they have lacked emotional depth and mystery. I am delighted to find a script that moves away from realism towards emotional depth". He went on to make suggestions about how the scriptwriters could develop the relationships between the characters, ending with the comment: "My main suggestion, in terms of each of these relationships, is to condense the later section of the film, and to provide more scenes – more room for shifts of emotion and decisions to build intensity – in the middle part of the film".⁶⁰⁷

Ward was frequently in the situation of being an unorthodox filmmaker receiving what is basically orthodox story-telling advice from friends and assessors. He welcomed and was open to such suggestions, but never changed a detail until he felt it was in keeping with his own underlying vision. In fact, his and Tetley's draft did move basically in the direction that Horrocks and no doubt others were suggesting, giving a better proportion to the narrative. Ward was, however, very reluctant to ease back on the symbolism.

In Draft Three, the first twelve scenes were omitted and the film began with Toss at the breakfast table, Liz kneading bread, and Justin outside burning stillborn lambs. Rather than a long discussion between Toss and Liz where Toss explained that her father had promised she would be able to accompany him on Saturday, Toss simply slipped out behind her mother's back to go with her father. However, after Justin had been killed and Toss was trying to explain to her mother what had happened, Ward and Tetley retained Toss's remark from Draft Two that there were three goats and they were "like the Holy Family" (ignoring Horrocks's suggestion that this could sound "unconvincing and pretentious").⁶⁰⁸ Other scenes surrounding the death, which will not appear in the final film were retained from Draft Two. These included the scene where the ambulance arrived to take Justin's body away and the scene where Ethan came back to the farm to explain that the death had been accidental. In this scene there was a long conversation between Ethan and Liz, who appeared surprisingly chatty, given her

⁶⁰⁷ Horrocks, undated letter to Vincent Ward.

⁶⁰⁸ Vincent Ward and Graham Tetley, "First Blood Last Rites: Third Draft Screenplay" (Auckland: Vincent Ward Productions, 1982) 23.

initially hostile reaction to his unexpected re-appearance. Ward and Tetley did change the next scene, which was originally one in which Elizabeth handed Ethan some of her husband's clothes (a gesture which Horrocks saw as too sudden, "considering the intimate nature of the gift"). In this draft, Liz was about to burn Justin's clothes, but at the last minute rescued a jacket which Birdie picked up, intending to use it for himself. Later, he gave the jacket to Ethan, and Liz was incensed that he had done so. This seemed more in keeping with her hostility towards Ethan and resentment that Birdie had hired him behind her back and seemed to be using him as an ally against her. Another significant change in Draft Three was that towards the end of the film, the length of the scenes in which Birdie and Toss were holding siege in the Birdie's hut was greatly reduced, although the ending with Birdie urinating on the tractor engine was retained. After reading Draft Three, Horrocks congratulated Ward on the changes and commented that: "The overall rhythm of the film seems to me much better proportioned. It moves confidently from start to finish".⁶⁰⁹ The film had strengthened its narrative structure in orthodox terms, while retaining its symbolic richness. It was clear, however, that the intensity of the images remained far more important to Ward than psychological verisimilitude. He was always prepared to take shortcuts or make leaps in the interests of maximising that intensity, in the hope that sympathetic viewers would be able to fill in the gaps.

The changes made to Draft Four were relatively minor ones, but many of the scenes were condensed – the length of Draft Four is only one hundred and twenty-two pages, in comparison with one hundred and thirty-one pages of Draft Three. (One hundred and thirty-one pages would be considered a conspicuously long film script as the industry average is around one minute of screen time per page.) At this stage, more specific information was included, such as a detailed drawing of the overall set design of the buildings in the valley (presumably drawn by Ward). There was also now a prologue to the screenplay:

She must watch him. He must come no closer.

She must watch him and disarm him.

She must disarm him and expel him from the valley.

No-one else will.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁹ Horrocks, undated letter to Vincent Ward.

⁶¹⁰ Vincent Ward and Graham Tetley, "First Blood Last Rites: Fourth Draft Screenplay" (Auckland: Vincent Ward Film Productions, 1982).

The inclusion of this poem signalled that the story had now become Toss's story – she, not Liz, was the “she”, Ethan was the important man, and Birdie became secondary. The poem also related more closely in spirit to the final title of the film, *Vigil*, than to its working title, *First Blood, Last Rites*. The point of view of Toss did indeed become central to the structure of the finished film, with an unusually high proportion of subjective or “watching” shots.⁶¹¹

The opening of the script had now become more concise and the credit shots came up as Justin was burning the still-born lambs. There were a few important changes made to the scenes following Justin's death. For example, when Toss was trying to explain what happened to her mother, all she said was “three goats”.⁶¹² Ward had decided to tone down the symbolism of “the holy family”. When Ethan appeared, carrying the body of Justin, Liz did not, in this version, accuse Ethan of killing him. Ethan simply said, “He fell”.⁶¹³ The scene of the conversation between the four anonymous mourners after the funeral had now become a dialogue between Birdie and some of his old “mates”, which further developed the character of Birdie, who up to this point had had little screen time. A number of the scenes in the middle section of the script had been compressed, for example, the dialogue between Toss and her grandfather about the stallion's erection, and some scenes, for example where Liz watched Ethan shearing, had been dropped altogether. The scene with the two linesmen was included unchanged from Draft Three, but it now came earlier in the script.

Towards the end of the script, some scenes had been considerably condensed and some dropped altogether, such as the dialogue between Liz and Birdie when one of Birdie's old friends was on the telephone. However, an important new scene was introduced into the script – a scene where Toss was constructing a shrine to her father in an old car, and accidentally set the interior of the car alight. The “siege” scenes had been further condensed and the scene of Ethan breaking some of Liz's crockery, which was present in earlier drafts, had been omitted. The ending of the film was significantly different in Draft Four. Now the military band, consisting of Birdie's old mates - which Elizabeth saw (indicating it was no longer a figment of the old man's imagination as it was in earlier drafts) – came to play outside Birdie's hut, causing Birdie to break the siege.

⁶¹¹ The word ‘vigil’ carried a variety of associations, but ‘vigilance’ was clearly one of them. In keeping with many other aspects of the film, the word also has religious associations.

⁶¹² Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Fourth Draft Screenplay,” 8.

⁶¹³ Ward and Tetley, “First Blood Last Rites: Fourth Draft Screenplay,” 9.

They got the tractor going and towed Birdie's hut through a line of washing which caught fire, and headed off across the paddock with the burning washing in tow. The ending did contain some elements of the ending envisaged in Draft Three, such as Birdie urinating on the engine's motor and shaking his fist at the sky, but the final shot was of the camera moving "away and up and up and up into the air until we can see away over the hills to the sea and the distant horizon".⁶¹⁴ Draft Four was the final version of the script, and Ward commented that: "The film didn't change drastically in shooting. We lost about ten scenes, and it became more crystalline and economical" (a very interesting phrase to describe the qualities Ward sought).⁶¹⁵ It is clear, however, that the choice of ending remained a problem. In this draft, Birdy still figured prominently (as a kind of Lear figure). The ultimate version would complete the shift of emphasis to Toss.

While the successive drafts of the screenplay dealt with some of the narrative weaknesses, there were still unclear aspects that raised the question: To what extent should an unorthodox film-maker like Ward, with his strong interest in images, symbols, and the deeper layers of the mind, concern himself with conventional narrative expectations? Even in its final form, *Vigil* left itself open to criticisms. For example, Matthew Aitken's article in *Illusions* concludes that "in *Vigil*, while scenes have a moment-by-moment power that is immediately apparent to the audience, this power fails to build into a cohesive overall narrative and is lost in the hollowness of the film overall".⁶¹⁶ Aitken acknowledges that the film uses a point-of-view structure, in which we are led to strongly identify with the characters - particularly Toss, but to a lesser extent Liz.⁶¹⁷ In the first part of the film, this is effective in establishing several important points. "Through extensive subjectification, Toss has been identified as the film's main character. Through identification with her we have learnt that she was fond of, perhaps even idolised her father, and that she sees a link between his death and Ethan's arrival in the valley". Aitken contrasts the depth with which we are shown her developing relationship with Ethan with the lack of insight the audience has into the character of Liz. The result is that in the scenes that follow the "beans to God" sequence, where the audience begins to be aware of Liz's reaction to Toss and Ethan's

⁶¹⁴ Ward and Tetley, "First Blood Last Rites", 122.

⁶¹⁵ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38.

⁶¹⁶ Aitken, "Sightlines on the Usurper," 9.

⁶¹⁷ Aitken, "Sightlines on the Usurper," 4.

growing familiarity, “the audience is denied any insight into the emotional forces which motivate her character”.⁶¹⁸ Aitken argues that after the sex scene between Liz and Ethan which Toss observes, the remainder of the film is almost entirely shot from Toss’s point-of-view, but there is insufficient justification for the audience to understand why Toss has apparently reverted to her original animosity towards Ethan. He sees this as “a serious flaw in the overall structure of the film”. Aitken is also critical of the scene where Toss gets her first period, describing it as “at best tacky and to many, somewhat offensive”. As for the film’s ending, he concludes: “As a result of the collapse of the film’s internal narrative drive with its lack of a dramatic climax, the last scene, of the departure for the farm, is unexpected. We have no way of knowing what Toss’s feeling are as we watch her walking away, her face remains impassive; and rather than concluding decisively, the film’s ending is hollow, lacking emotion and meaning”.⁶¹⁹

Aitken’s arguments are similar to Horrocks’s earlier suggestions, based on standard assumptions about character motivation and narrative proportion. Horrocks had written:

The middle section of the film - from scene twenty-five where Ethan reappears, say to scene sixty-four, where Ethan and Elizabeth are now lovers - covers too much too rapidly. There are a lot of deep and fascinating shifts of emotion in this part of the film, but they need more space to breathe, more room to grow [...]. Because the relationships between Elizabeth and Ethan and Elizabeth and Justin are not developed very far, Elizabeth may remain a vague and unsympathetic character. I think viewers (especially women viewers) would want to see her presented more fully in some respects.⁶²⁰

Similarly, Aitken commented: “Liz’s anger culminates in her offering herself to Ethan. While this action could be justified if we had been led to identify more closely with Liz emotionally, we get not real idea of why sex with Ethan will be cathartic for her [...], rather, the immediate effect created by the build-up to this scene is that she has been motivated by jealousy of her daughter, and a wider impression of what motivates Liz’s character is lost”.⁶²¹ Ward acknowledges that it was difficult to “find a balance”

⁶¹⁸ Aitken, "Sightlines on the Usurper," 7.

⁶¹⁹ Aitken, "Sightlines on the Usurper," 8.

⁶²⁰ Horrocks, undated letter to Vincent Ward.

⁶²¹ Aitken, "Sightlines on the Usurper," 7.

between the scenes shot from Toss's perspective and the scenes that she was not part of. "It was hard to find those shifts and to make them work. To go for that subjective thing with Toss and the harsh reality [of some of the other scenes]".⁶²² A justification of Ward's approach could, however, be based on his liking for subtle nuance and narrative abbreviation. There are hints in previous scenes - Liz's lack of emotion at Justin's death, her rediscovery of her ballet tutu, her resolve to leave the farm - which could indicate to an alert viewer that her relationship with Justin had been unfulfilling personally and that his death may have been a release for her. That she is the one who takes the initiative in the sex scene would then indicate she is starting to think about what she wants for herself, and this is consistent with her later decision to leave the farm and go back to her former life in the city. What distinguishes Ward's approach is not a lack of character motivation but a tendency to rely upon subtle implication - the narrative rhythm is unorthodox and the emphasis on subtext is very heightened.

The change of point-of-view from Toss to Elizabeth in the section of the film leading up to the sex scene may account for some of the difficulties Aitken identifies. It is not difficult, however, for the viewer to accept that there has been a change in the dynamics of the relationships between the four protagonists over the course of the film. Formerly, Birdie and Ethan were allies against Elizabeth and Toss; then Toss formed an alliance with Birdie and Ethan, which seemed to exclude Elizabeth. Then, Ethan and Elizabeth become lovers, and Toss and Birdie were left to form their own alliance. The prospect of having to leave the farm raised the level of conflict. These stages or shifts of alliance were clear enough; what was unorthodox was the management of transitions. Ward seemed impatient with the usual narrative rhythms, preferring at times to jump and contrast where another director might have preferred to gradually develop relationships. Aitkin's criticism of the scene of Toss's menarche matches Horrocks's warning that: "I can't help feeling that the onset of Toss's first period needs as much preparation as possible, if its timing is not to seem contrived", but Ward may characteristically have liked the surprise and suddenness.⁶²³ Aitkin finds the ending of the film "hollow" because Toss's feelings are not made explicit to the viewer. However, the *mise-en-scène* of the last sequence - where Toss has taken off her father's balaclava, and is dressed in clothing more appropriate to a girl than the boy she could have previously

⁶²² Vincent Ward, Lecture to Film Students at Auckland University, rec 29 March, cassette recording, Auckland, 1985.

⁶²³ Horrocks, undated letter to Vincent Ward.

been taken for, sitting apparently contentedly at the back of her grandfather's hut as it is towed away from the farm – indicates acceptance on a number of levels. On one level, she appears to be reconciled to the idea of leaving the farm. On another level, she seems to have arrived at a new acceptance of her father's death and her burgeoning womanhood. The ending works in imagistic or symbolic terms, but clearly leaves some viewers behind. Ward's emotional universe is consistent and distinctive but challenging. Horrocks's own comment was: "While I feel that the finished film retained some of the narrative problems, I was astonished by the value that had been added to the scripts in the process of realising them. Vincent has such an extraordinary sense of image and sound that the scripts for his films give only a shadowy sense of what will be communicated by *mise-en-scène*".⁶²⁴

At the stage where the second draft of the script had been completed, Ward needed a producer for the film, and approached John Maynard. Maynard had an unusual combination of film and visual arts expertise. He had been an art gallery director before becoming a film producer, including the foundation directorship of the Govett Brewster Art Gallery, known for the strength of its commitment to contemporary art. Prior to taking on the *Vigil* project, he had produced a handful of artistic films and political documentaries, including two feature films – *Skin Deep* (1978) and *Strata* (1980) – directed by Geoff Steven. Maynard's contacts were with the more art-oriented members of the new generation of filmmakers that had emerged in the 1970s, and he was making a reputation for himself as "the *auteurs*' producer". He was clearly motivated by cultural values more than commercial ambitions, and had given up his career in the visual arts to pursue the far less secure path of filmmaking in a small, emerging industry. He was attracted to the script of *Vigil* both by its quality and its potential audience impact (although it was clearly never going to be a commercial hit). According to the producer, he was drawn to Ward because he had "always worked with people that I thought were talented. I've never had any doubts about following my judgement ... I've got a good sense of what inspires audiences".⁶²⁵ If Maynard was looking for *auteurs*, he had certainly come to the right person. While he was convinced of the director's potential, there were significant differences in their approach. Maynard likened the director's scriptwriting method to "constructing a twelve-storey building on

⁶²⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Roger Horrocks, December 2003.

⁶²⁵ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

its side, only to hoist it vertically by rope, detailing all the parts of it before looking at the whole structure.” Ward also commented: “While John deals in broad strokes, I’m obsessive about detail”.⁶²⁶ This combination, however, while it occasionally led to conflict, proved to be so successful that after *Vigil* was completed, Maynard went on to produce Ward’s next film, *The Navigator*. *Vigil*’s budget was just under two million dollars and Maynard was successful in finding funding for the film from the New Zealand Film Commission and the Film Investment Corporation of New Zealand. This would, however, prove to be a lean budget for a film made in a spirit of perfectionism.

Production and Post-Production

The cast of the film, particularly Fiona Kay who played the part of Toss, contributed a great deal to the film’s success. Finding a suitable child actor proved to be time-consuming, and over two years Ward visited several hundred schools looking for the face he had in mind. He sought “an expressive child, in some ways untouched rather than sophisticated, imaginative, with an unusual presence”.⁶²⁷ He finally found Fiona Kay to play the role, although “she was a bookworm, a scrawny city kid who hated walking barefoot on the grass and read insatiably between every take – unlike the tomboy I had in mind”.⁶²⁸ That she bore more than a passing physical resemblance to Ward has often been commented on, and he subsequently wondered if he had really scanned the faces of 40,000 schoolgirls “unconsciously searching for my clone”.⁶²⁹ Frank Whitten, who played the role of Ethan, was also involved in the casting of the children, as was Maya Dalziel who stayed on the set to look after Fiona Kay. When Ward eventually came up with a short list of actors to play Toss, Whitten ran workshops with the children. He recalls Fiona Kay as having “this incredible quality of stillness, of listening, and doing it in a very true way [...]. She had the ability to be very natural and was an example to us all”.⁶³⁰

Ward had to spend a great deal of time coaching Fiona since she appeared in almost every scene of the film, but he described her as “very bright and astute, with an inner strength that helped her last the distance in sometimes difficult conditions. The work

⁶²⁶ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 70-71.

⁶²⁷ Merrill Coke, "Ward, Vigil Set for Cannes," *The Evening Post* 8 March 1984: 15.

⁶²⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 73.

⁶²⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 75.

⁶³⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.

was also emotionally tough, and towards the end of the shoot Fiona became so tired she was often close to tears”.⁶³¹ As a director he was “tougher on her than [...] on any professional actor or actress. If I didn’t like what she had done I would tell her it was junk. And if she was upset about anything, she kicked me in the shins”.⁶³² Despite this, Elizabeth McRae, who worked as a voice tutor for the film, and was on the set for part of the shoot, believes that one of Ward’s strengths is that he works very well with children and “was wonderful with Fiona Kay”, following up the relationship he had developed with her on the film by keeping in touch with her by phone even after the shoot had finished.⁶³³

McRae was asked to tutor Bill Kerr, an Australian television actor who played the part of Birdie, since Birdie was supposed to be of Irish descent yet had spent time working with Maori. Frank Whitten also needed to work with Elizabeth in order to regain his New Zealand accent since he had spent much of his professional life in England. McRae’s summary of Ward as a director was that: “Vincent demanded perfection”. He expected Penelope Stewart, the young woman cast as Liz, to practise ballet for a sequence in the film, and was disappointed when she did not seem to be focusing sufficiently on her role. Frank Whitten, on the other hand, responded well to this kind of approach, practising running downhill carrying a dead sheep over and over, and attending a training workshop to learn shearing. McRae recalls that Ward talked “most intimately” with the actors about what he wanted, and her impression was that “he had every single frame in his head before he started shooting”.⁶³⁴

For Whitten, the role of Ethan in *Vigil* was his first role back in New Zealand after almost twenty years in England. When he was given the script, he responded to it partly because he came from a farming background himself and partly because “it was like a fairy-tale. Although it was deeply embedded in the realities of living in this country, it also had a kind of mythic quality about it”.⁶³⁵ For the role, Whitten was required to put on quite a lot of weight and muscle, which he did by going to the gym for three months before shooting began. He also learned falconry and how to ride and shear a sheep.

⁶³¹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 75.

⁶³² Ward quoted in Brent Lewis, “Kiwi Fruit Springs from a Hard Terrain,” *The Guardian* 24 January 1985.

⁶³³ Lynette Read, interview with Elizabeth McRae, 20 November 2001.

⁶³⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Elizabeth McRae, 20 November 2001.

⁶³⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.



Figure 4: Ending of *Vigil*. An example of Ward's storytelling through the use of mise-en-scène.

His account of working with Ward offers a vivid description of the special demands made on an actor: “He [the director] is extremely single-minded, he knows exactly what he wants and you have to reach out for that”. Because the script was “extremely ambitious and would be very difficult to achieve”, Whitten knew Ward was “trouble”, but he trusted him on the basis of having been impressed by his earlier work. He also felt there was a personal link with Ward because “we did share the thing of both coming from a farming background and being that peculiar transplant that ends up in the arts”. For him, the experience of working on the film was challenging because the character of Ethan like the other characters in the film was “quite frightening to play. It was a responsibility to try to come first of all near, as near as we could to Vincent’s image of what he wanted. And then [...] to be able to make the transition from yourself into that person, to draw on as much of yourself as exists in that character, but then also to go beyond that”. He added the memorable comment that “the dialogue was so spare it was fantastic to play, because you knew [...] when these people had to speak, whatever they said came from a big well”. He described some of the things he was required to do for the role as being “pretty scary”, such as having the responsibility of carrying Gordon Shields, the person who played Toss’s father, who was not an actor, over his shoulders when they were up high in the hills. Whitten recalls that “there was one moment when he just realised that he was totally in my power in the sense that if I fell, he would fall”. Working with Ward was a challenging experience. “You think to yourself, this is absolutely intolerable, he can’t expect us to do this. But you achieve that, then he goes one step further. And I found that admirable in a way [...]. He wasn’t putting us in a position of personal danger, but he expected courage on every level”.⁶³⁶

Whitten describes the process between an actor and such a director as “a mystery [...]. You become like lovers in a way, you have a shorthand [...]. And an actor always has to put forward the proposition. That is their job, to act, not take an action. And Vincent would say no. And then you would come up with another one, and he would say no. I must say, sometimes it was quite difficult to discover exactly what he wanted”. This process was similar to Ward’s scriptwriting – he was more clear about what he did not want than what he did. Whitten cites as an example of an actor’s input into the film the gesture that he used to calm Toss’s suspicions of him when she came to his hut:

⁶³⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.

He shows her his world, the world that he has, the magic that he creates. And from her point of view, the world is obviously quite frightening, it's an act of courage for her to be there. A lot of the imagery in the piece is quite religious and so her view of him was probably like the angel of death or something like that. And so for me, within the scene I was just looking at the practical things that he does which I don't think were particularly conscious. He's not trying to seduce the girl or win her over or anything [...]. But for a man who's used to working with animals, he recognises fear and signs of suspicion. And so I was just looking for a particular gesture to do with calming down, because you can calm an animal down if you stroke their forehead. You can do it with human beings as well [...]. I mean this was all in my head, and this is what I mean when an actor goes through with a proposition. And then her instinct was to bite the fingers.⁶³⁷

This scene is a very powerful one. Toss's complex response lends itself to a simplified sexual interpretation (which is what Liz later takes from it).

One scene that Whitten recalls as being difficult was the lovemaking scene between his character Ethan and Liz. It was scheduled very late in the shoot and it was a painstaking scene to film, since it had a relatively large number of shots. Both Whitten and Penelope Stewart, who played Liz, were nervous about the scene and talked about it a great deal beforehand. When it came to playing the scene, they were given very few cues, but Whitten feels that the scene's intimacy is evident in the finished film, and that "it's quite beautiful when you look at it".⁶³⁸ Graham Tetley comments that the sex scene was "hugely hard to write", but for him, "the nub of it was to throw the seduction onto Elizabeth". There is however, "a sort of excitement for both of them in it, but all that stuff is very subdued really because no-one admits to anything".⁶³⁹ This scene is one that has sometimes been seen as being unconvincing in the way Elizabeth offers herself to Ethan, and criticised by feminist critics as having been filmed from a male point-of-view, but Ward's response to these criticisms is: "I tried to portray earlier on in the film that she's attracted to this guy, but doesn't want to be. There's an internal

⁶³⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.

⁶³⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.

⁶³⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

struggle going on – her battle isn't with him, it's with herself".⁶⁴⁰ Once again, Ward's reliance upon subtext and subtle implication has both strengths and dangers.

For his role as Ethan, the guidance Whitten got from Ward as a director was sometimes "very direct" but "film-making itself is such a painful process. A lot of the choices an actor will make are in relation to requirements from the sound department, the lighting department [...], it's such a democratic process". What Ward wanted the role of Ethan to be was not, according to Whitten, "an obvious macho" character, but someone who was more like Clint Eastwood - more ambiguous, because Whitten perceived the story as being "a fairy-story. The characters really could have come from any time".⁶⁴¹ Tetley saw Ethan as "the magician, the sexual being that comes out of the landscape", and his association with hawks, along with his bearded and hooded appearance - and Toss's dream of him as a medieval knight jousting with her father - all convey a sense of mystery and a link with the medieval world of magic and fairytale.⁶⁴² Ward's inspiration for Ethan's character came "from literature rather than from reality". The name of Ethan Rua, according to Ward, was a combination of Ethan Crowe in a story by Edith Wharton, and Caspar Rua in a story by Joseph Conrad set in South America - both larger-than-life characters rather than realistic ones.⁶⁴³

A perceptive critical reading of the film by Katherine Goodnow sees Ethan as a kind of archetypal stranger whose arrival, "as in many narratives, [...] triggers a process of change".⁶⁴⁴ She describes him as "a mocking stranger" who rejects "any sentimental association with the land, or any belief that God will solve one's problems [...]. The stranger also makes it clear to the daughter that life on this farm is nothing compared with the wonders of the larger world that he has known".⁶⁴⁵ The process of change that is triggered by the arrival of the stranger is, firstly that "the stranger transforms the position of the grandfather". Through Ethan's amused attitude to Birdie's underground cave and his contraptions, "the grandfather is revealed as 'an old fool', and it is this breaking of the grandfather's power that allows the mother to move the family away from the farm. The mother and daughter are transformed as well through the meeting

⁶⁴⁰ "New Zealand Film: Vincent Ward," *Craccum* 19 March 1985: 14.

⁶⁴¹ Lynette Read, interview with Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002.

⁶⁴² Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁶⁴³ Ward, *Lecture to Film Students at Auckland University*.

⁶⁴⁴ Judith Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* (Norway: University of Bergen, 1994) 99.

⁶⁴⁵ Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* 107-08.

with the foreigner. Through sexuality, the widow's grief for her husband is ended [...]. For the daughter, the father is exorcised through the stranger's loosening of her belief that the vigil in the hills must be continued".⁶⁴⁶ Such a reading in terms of depth psychology fills in many gaps and thus bypasses the kinds of motivation problems that may trouble viewers at a literal level.

Ward's obsessive concern for detail informed his quest for the right location, during which he travelled 18,000 miles along the length of the North and South Islands before he finally found "a horseshoe-shaped valley in Taranaki" that seemed to fit his imaginings of what one reviewer would later describe as "the farm from hell".⁶⁴⁷ Ward describes the Uruti valley as being

a lonely and eerie location, the ground littered with dead sheep and the sky filled with hawks. The valley walls were crumbling because the farmer who owned the land had used farming loans to cut down and burn the trees that held the cliffs up. It was the perfect environment in which to convey how the harsh pragmatism of the farmer, killing and maiming everything that moves, except his beloved sheep, sets him forever against nature – and how nature has its revenge.⁶⁴⁸

The disadvantage of the location was that there was no farm in the valley and over \$100,000 had to be spent on constructing buildings and landscaping hedges, trees and lawns for the sets.

While the location may have been perfect to convey Ward's concerns in the film, it was a very difficult one for cast and crew who were on location for sixteen weeks, ten of those for the actual shoot. Ward knew that it would be a difficult shoot and warned the crew that: "It would be the most miserable place on earth [...], for three months they would be soaking wet most of the time, and they could expect no entertainment because we would be so far from any town". Sure enough, he and the cast and crew "were cold, miserable and up to our knees in mud, and it was impossible to keep the wardrobe clean and dry. Even when the sky cleared, rain machines were used".⁶⁴⁹ (This was on of

⁶⁴⁶ Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* 122.

⁶⁴⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 71.

⁶⁴⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 72-73.

⁶⁴⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 75.

those rare film shoots where rain was actually welcomed.) As in the case of Ward's previous films, the project demanded an unusual level of commitment.

The crew reacted in various ways. For Bridget Ikin, who worked as production manager on the film, the experience of working on the film "was horrid, the most miserable production I've ever been on and I hope not to experience it again".⁶⁵⁰ Part of the reason for the cast and crew's discomfort was that the film was shot in midwinter, and there was no sun in the valley for most of the day. Ikin describes the location as "a cold, bleak, frosty gully" and comments on the difficulties of working conditions caused by the fact that "we were working in very primitive little workers' huts that had been carted onto the site as the Production Office". Most of the crew stayed in caravans that were cold and bleak in the middle of winter, and they watched the day's rushes in an old community hall with little heating. She feels that Ward had chosen the location "for his own needs, and he'd really chosen something that had a particularly fierce and unfriendly feeling to it".⁶⁵¹ Maynard, on the other hand, was quite philosophical about the difficulties of working on such a location. He was present every day of the shoot, and concedes that working on the film was "hard work", and the conditions were "wet and cold and muddy, but that's making films [...]. You just put on your gumboots and a swanni and a rain hat and forget about it". Despite the conditions, "there was a lot of joy in the results of it".⁶⁵² Ikin concurs that it was exciting to see the rushes each day and that the cast and crew were aware that "[they] were working on something which was distinctive and that Vincent was a special filmmaker", but for her, "it just wasn't much fun". Both Maynard and Ikin were highly dedicated (and have since had distinguished careers in the film business) so their acknowledgement that this was a difficult location should probably be seen as an understatement of the actual conditions.

Ikin was concerned for other crew members: "Vincent just pushes people so hard. Even if people felt like they started in good spirits, and they were a fantastically talented group of people, by the end of it, they just all couldn't wait to leave".⁶⁵³ Ikin found Ward to be so "single-focused on the task at hand as if that was all that mattered to him"

⁶⁵⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁵¹ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁵² Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁵³ The New Zealand film industry is not unionised (although some years after *Vigil*, it did develop codes of practice.

to the detriment of his relationships with the crew.⁶⁵⁴ Ward however, sees this as a necessary evil and believes he has to be tough to make a film “that stands apart”. In an interview for *The Guardian*, he was quoted as saying: “I want the most singular result. Sven Nykvist [the famous Swedish cameraman] once said: ‘A cameraman is judged by whether he can produce the result that the director wants’. That applies to any member of the crew”.⁶⁵⁵ Ikin’s experience was compounded by the difficulties of not having worked as a production manager before. She had got involved with the film partially because of her association with Maynard, who had asked her to do the job, but during the shoot, she felt she was being criticised for “feeling her way” into the role and felt demoralised at the end of the film. Although for Ikin the experience of working on *Vigil* was not one she wished to repeat, she realises, looking back on the experience, that: “To do good work you have to work very hard [...]. Everything comes at a price and if you want to do exceptional work, then you put in one hundred and ten percent of your energy and time and sometimes that can be at the expense of people around you. In Vincent’s case, the personal search to do the best work with the crew from that story was his. His drive was inspiring, [as was] his single vision [...]. When I look back on it, and think how obsessed he was [...], that’s what you have to be and do, to do the quality of the work that came out”.⁶⁵⁶ Fortunately Ikin did not abandon a film career, and subsequently produced Jane Campion’s award-winning *An Angel at My Table* (based on Janet Frame’s autobiography), among other films.

Timothy White was the first assistant director on the film and believes that Ward wanted him to work on the project because “we were a team that had worked well together [on *A State of Siege*] and while he mistrusted some aspects of the way I operated, he also respected some of what I brought to him”.⁶⁵⁷ Unfortunately the project heightened the differences of approach between the two filmmakers. White became involved after the script had been developed and while “it was of such an idiosyncratic nature, someone with my [sense of] logic was not really the [right] person [...]. In terms of helping realise it, I did what I could. I wasn’t a first assistant by nature, although Vincent had respect at least for my sort of organisational instincts, if not procedural experience”. White describes the production as being a “modest” one,

⁶⁵⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁵⁵ Vincent Ward quoted in Lewis, "Kiwi Fruit Springs from a Hard Terrain."

⁶⁵⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁵⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

“with a lot of people quite dedicated to the vision of an exciting young director. They’d seen or heard of his work. The script was clearly distinctive and even from the written work, it was clearly strongly visual”. He links the difficulties of working with Ward to the challenges posed by the location: “Vincent pushed things to an extreme in terms of [the] locations and physical demands that are made of people”. He explains that initially “your levels of tolerance are high”, but after a few weeks, the cast and crew’s patience started to be stretched. White is aware that Ward’s “obsession for detail can get the better of him and jeopardise important things”, but at the same time, concurs with Ikin in his view that obsession for detail “is the difference between someone who is good and someone who is great”.⁶⁵⁸

Because the location was so isolated, everything had to be brought into the valley, and as Ikin recalls, the logistics of getting supplies at short notice in such a remote location were difficult, “even [for] simple things, like a new lens, which, if you’re filming in the city, you just go down the road and hire. It had to be got from Auckland on the bus and there was only one bus a day and it had to be met at a certain time and you had to drive to meet it”. Mobile phones were not yet available and each telephone call Ikin made had to be a toll-call. Walkie-talkies were used on the set.⁶⁵⁹ The set was created by transporting some existing buildings to the valley, such as the two Railways Department huts used for Birdie, and the farmhouse. A great deal of additional construction was done on site. This proved to be time-consuming and Ward, the art director, Kai Hawkins, and the Art Department had to begin work on the site three months before shooting started. Because Ward lived on location while the sets were being constructed he was able to make any changes that were needed immediately. As usual, he was involved in all the details of the set, including overseeing the colours of the wallpaper in the house, and choosing trees, on at least one occasion uprooting a tree from the side of a road.⁶⁶⁰ Ward remembers “the leading hand of the construction crew building the set, knee-deep in mud, screaming at the damp, claustrophobic walls of the valley, answered only by an endlessly mocking echo”.⁶⁶¹ Ward has always been frank about the difficulty of his locations, and – with what some would see as Romantic idealism – is also inclined to see them as contributing to the authenticity or intensity of his films.

⁶⁵⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁶⁵⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999.

⁶⁶⁰ Ward, Lecture to Film Students at Auckland University.

⁶⁶¹ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 72.

This made him reluctant to compromise. “The set had a medieval feel, as if we were seeing it through Toss’s eyes after she had been influenced by *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. When it was not looking how I imagined it should, I waited until the crew was away and went into one of the sets and destroyed the interior with an adze and crowbar. This pointed act of finality might have sent some art directors into a fury, but Kai Hawkins shrugged tolerantly”.⁶⁶²

Ward knew visually exactly what he wanted. White remembers that the crew “had the onerous task of trying to shoot the movie to avoid sunlight. So whenever it was overcast or raining, we were outdoors shooting and whenever the sun shone, we were inside shooting interior scenes”. The weather was very changeable and they “very quickly learned that we only had weather for about half an hour in any direction, especially coming from the south or the west”.⁶⁶³ Alun Bollinger, who was the director of photography on the film, points out that although “generally, when the sun came out, we went inside”, there are a couple of sequences that are shot “with very watery sunlight [...] but we picked a time of day so it’s only ever backlit, like the old man with his invention on the pond. That’s one of the sequences shot with soft, not hard sunlight, but soft back bits, so the hills are still dark behind, but they’ve got this soft rim, so there’s a little bit of optimism there”.⁶⁶⁴ Stuart Dryburgh (later the director of photography on *An Angel at My Table*, *The Piano* and *Once Were Warriors*) was the gaffer on the shoot, and the high quality of his work contributed to the quality of light being such an important part of the film, according to Bollinger. The camerawork in the film is relatively static which is due in part to the desired pacing of the film and to the care with which it was composed. Bollinger makes comparisons between the cinematographic style used in *Vigil* and European cinema, and points out, that unlike Hollywood cinema, where a big event, like blowing up a building is needed to create a climax, “with a film like *Vigil*, you pace things down [...], you get a sense of the slower time and more a sense of suspense. You can do the smallest thing to create a shock, like drop a plate, so it can become much more realistic [...]. You don’t have to blow a building up, you only need to drop a plate”. He believes that “it’s a harder thing to do

⁶⁶² Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 73.

⁶⁶³ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁶⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

in some ways, [it] takes less resources, but more basic film-making skills”.⁶⁶⁵ This description again suggests the Bazinian aspect of Ward’s aesthetics.

Graham Morris, the sound recordist on the film, had been trained in England and was one of the first freelance sound recordists in New Zealand. When he arrived in New Zealand in 1973, the New Zealand film industry was in its pioneering stages and from work on *Sleeping Dogs*, which was the first of the modern era of New Zealand films, Morris was involved in helping develop the industry into a fully professional one. It was through Maynard that Morris met Ward and became involved in the production of *Vigil*. He recalls that on their first meeting, Ward attempted to give him some idea of what he wanted to achieve by showing him some stark pictures of “bleak, simple situations”, which he felt epitomised the concept and feel of the film. Ward wanted the sound to be as “atmospheric” as possible, which Morris understood to mean that he wanted to heighten the impression that they were always literally present in this lonely valley - not by having everything “close-miked” but by recording the actual sounds of the environment. That is, ambience was crucial. Fortunately for Morris, the location was very remote, so there was little extraneous noise, but they did have some problems with the trickling noise of the river which ran through the valley, and they had to place sacks and sandbags in strategic places to try and minimise the sound so it would not be heard in every shot.⁶⁶⁶

Getting what Morris describes as “useable sound” was a necessity at that time in the industry as the addition of sound in post-production was used much less often than today. (In contrast, for Ward’s next film, *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* almost all the location dialogue was replaced with studio dialogue in post-production.) In *Vigil*, because Ward wanted to shoot outside only when it was raining, it was difficult to get useable sound due to the rain hitting the microphone. Ward’s comment was: “If it’s not raining, we can’t shoot because it looks too dry, and if it is raining, we can’t shoot because we can’t use the sound, so I can’t shoot the film”; but Morris solved the problem by putting pieces of woollen blanket around the microphone to soften the sound of the rain hitting it directly.⁶⁶⁷ To get the best possible sound, it was important

⁶⁶⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

⁶⁶⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Morris, 28 August 2003.

⁶⁶⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Morris, 28 August 2003.

for Morris to work closely with the actors and to develop a close rapport with them. He found them generally very cooperative despite the challenging conditions.

The sound equipment used on the film was the standard for that time – a Nagra 4 recorder, Senheiser microphones, Audio Limited radio microphones and a mixer. The radio microphones were seldom used, but Morris recalls they were necessary for one wide shot of two people walking through the landscape. Ward wanted sound that was “close but distant”, which Morris understood to mean that he wanted sound that could be clearly heard but matched the very wide shot. As Morris points out, “the reality of location recording is that you don’t have that much control necessarily. Sometimes you’re lucky to get what you get, let alone try and record it in a special way. If you want to mike things loosely, to give them a wide distant feel, you increase all the background noises, but in the end you’re stuck with getting the best you can and doing what you can afterwards with post-production”. On another occasion, when Ethan had to drive the Valiant “ute” up the long driveway to the house, Ward instructed Morris to “make the vehicle sound threatening”. The difficulty was that since it was just a six-cylinder car with a very quiet engine, it did not sound threatening at all, but Morris promised to do what he could. He points to this incident as an example of Ward “not being the most practical person I’ve ever worked with. He certainly knew what he was after, but he struggled I think with the practical side of actually organizing it”. Morris adds, however, that the director “had this vision, and that’s good, we were there to do what we could [...], that’s how it should be. There can be a problem in being too practical about filmmaking - you lose the concept”.⁶⁶⁸

It was seldom, however, that Ward gave specific directions in terms of recording the location sound, and Morris gained the impression that during the shoot Ward was more interested in the visuals than the sound. (He would make up for this in post-production.) When they were filming the scene where Liz and Ethan were having a conversation behind a door with a stained glass window, Ward and Bollinger were having “a very intense conversation” about the look and feel of the shot and Morris had to remind Ward, who had forgotten, that there was also dialogue. Morris comments that since there was so little dialogue in the film, what was there was significant so it was

⁶⁶⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Morris, 28 August 2003.

important that it remained clearly audible, even if the sound sometimes had to be actively degenerated in order to make it sound distant.

Unlike some members of the crew, Morris recalls the shoot as being “intense” but also “very enjoyable”. There were a few tense moments, for example, in situations where there was a long lens shot and the RTs played up (as they tended to do) and there was no means of cueing the actors except by using hand signals. The assistant directors became “a bit tense” and some shots were lost due to a lack of communication. These were, however, isolated incidents, in Morris’s recollection. He perceived Ward as someone who treated the film with the greatest seriousness, requesting that the crew wear clothes that fitted in with the landscape – drab-coloured parkas, rather than brightly-coloured ones – and when one of the actors was required to fall in the mud, even going so far as to show how to do it by falling in the mud himself.⁶⁶⁹

Ward spent a much longer time on the sound editing of the film than most other New Zealand filmmakers had done up to this point, and he is quoted as saying in a 1984 interview: “Sound for me is very very important. Often there is a special sound that I like and a scene will evolve from it; it’ll suit the storyline and the flow of the film [...]. In practical terms, I had a very good sound recordist and boom operator on location, but I also like to manipulate the sound track a lot”.⁶⁷⁰ The sound design for some scenes became highly complex - the soundtrack to the jousting scene, for example, had sixty different tracks.⁶⁷¹ He has also described the soundtrack of the film as being “highly selective” or subjective:

I demand that each sound contributes to the film: to the emotion or the feeling or atmosphere of a scene. For example, I minimised the use of bird song to keep the sense of landscape stark and bare. There’s not a lot of talking in the film. This reflects the kind of people they are, isolated, inward-looking people who each inhabit their own world and have their own, idiosyncratic view of things. This makes any conversation that does occur all the more pertinent. It’s communication which always carries an underlying sub-text, currents of feelings, which are expressed obliquely rather than overtly. It’s an aspect of

⁶⁶⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Morris, 28 August 2003.

⁶⁷⁰ Martin, "Vincent's Vigil," 17.

⁶⁷¹ Ward, Lecture to Film Students at Auckland University.

Vigil that enhances the sense of enigma and mystery and keeps the viewer working.⁶⁷²

In other words, Ward is a director who regards every image and every sound as a wasted opportunity unless it not only moves forward the narrative but also conveys mood and theme and has aesthetic interest. It is the intensity of this attention to details that makes the production of his films such a challenging process. Clearly, Ward has also had to learn – as his projects became more complex – how to clearly communicate his aesthetic preferences to technicians who had to interpret and reconcile them with immediate practical problems.

The overall feel of the sound in the film was inspired by Ward's visit to Chartres Cathedral. He has described the acoustics of the cathedral, strongly reminiscent of the valley in which the film was set, as having a "profound impact" on him. "Characteristically, noises were soft and muted, but certain sounds became amplified, and those close by were extraordinarily clear, like drops of water falling into a still pool. That's how I wanted Toss to hear the world: muffled, unclear, then suddenly rent by the scream of a hawk or the thud of a knife into wood, sharp and lucid, reverberating down the valley like the echoes at Chartres".⁶⁷³ Jack Body's sparse musical score also makes an important contribution to the film's soundtrack, sometimes functioning as sound effects or as echo effects for the dialogue. The vividness of the film's soundtrack has been noted by critics such as Nicholas Reid:

Few films have *Vigil's* acute ear for significant natural sounds – the bleat of sheep, rattle of stones, or suck and squelch of gumboots in the mud. The loud click and ringing reverberation of each cartridge as Toss plays with the rifle. The loud, immediate boom (rifleshot or thunder?) when Toss walks on the cloud-bound 'tops'. The hollow, distant boom (the land talking back?) when Birdie stamps on the rise to show Ethan where his contraption should go. And the scream of the hawks when Toss first puts on the balaclava.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷² Martin, "Vincent's Vigil," 18.

⁶⁷³ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 72.

⁶⁷⁴ Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday* 110.



Figure 5: Elizabeth sewing tutu in *Vigil*. An example of careful composition in Ward's films

Visual Style

In terms of the development of Ward's aesthetic, the film is clearly linked to *A State of Siege* and *In Spring* in its focus on female protagonists and their inner journeys, but its style differs. Although there are still some remarkable long-running takes (such as Toss's run down the hill after the death of her father), the style is less Bazinian, more heightened in other ways. Ward explains this difference as follows: "[*Vigil*] is not as still or as silent. It moves faster – I'm trying to make something more accessible, although I don't feel under pressure to do this. In the other two films, the rhythm of the characters was the rhythm of the film, whereas in this one, there's more action, less of the ritual of *Spring*, less of the introversion of *A State of Siege*".⁶⁷⁵ At the same time, this is action in art film, not Hollywood terms. In another interview Ward adds: "The earlier films were more intended as character studies without any strong view to the market-place. The feature, although it's predominantly about a single character tells more of a story. Although the story is still very much of one person's experiences, it's much broader than the other films, far less austere and I think it's more accessible".⁶⁷⁶ Clearly he was more aware of issues of accessibility because a much larger budget was at stake, but at the same time he resisted the labeling of a film as either "commercial" or "non-commercial" because "that tends to stereotype what you are allowed to make".⁶⁷⁷

Changes in his thinking about filmmaking were also signaled in his comments in an interview for *Art New Zealand*, just after the release of *Vigil*. He said of the links between his visual style and painting that:

In painting you're always distanced from your subject matter. The more beautiful the surface of the picture, the more it operates like a window-pane and separates you from the content. Coming from a painting tradition you know you can create 'beautiful' images, but in fact you have to be a part-time iconoclast, so that the characters can live and breathe. You have to break the lovely surface of things; smash your fist through the pane of glass and pull the people out from behind it. Particularly with documentary, I often reject images because they look too beautiful – they look too much like a Caravaggio or a Vermeer, say. You often get this with European films – they draw very heavily on a painting

⁶⁷⁵ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 39.

⁶⁷⁶ Philip Tremewan, "Vincent Ward," *Onfilm* (1983): 14.

⁶⁷⁷ Tremewan, "Vincent Ward," 14.

tradition and because of this you find you are more interested in their beautiful surfaces. The characters don't live, and swear and sweat. American film has more immediacy, less poetry. It draws more from a tradition of newsreel and photojournalism. In New Zealand, we're neither in one tradition or the other. You have to try and forge a different tradition which inevitably has elements of the two. It's a blank canvas. The rawness of the country, its lack of tradition or conversely its mish-mash of inherited, diluted traditions are your material.⁶⁷⁸

Given the comparisons often made between Ward's work and European art films, this would seem to contradict his own emphasis on the "primacy of the image". The comments seem to represent Ward's own advice to himself to focus more strongly on storytelling, now that he has embarked upon larger-scale feature films. The irony is that he articulates the idea here through another visual image – "smash your fist through the pane of glass" – which is taken directly from the end of *A State of Siege*. He is making his way towards a greater emphasis on narrative but still sees it in terms of "a blank canvas". He commented, in the Pressbook prepared for the release of *Vigil*: "I'm basically interested in human qualities rather than specific social or political situations. The important things for me are stories and characters. What happens between people and how the film progresses is important; the country in which the film happens is almost irrelevant".⁶⁷⁹ In the interview for *Art New Zealand*, he goes on to say: "My interest is in people's individuality and the way they perceive things [...]. And what separates them out from other people, rather than the wider social fabric that holds people together".⁶⁸⁰ Story-telling is here being defined in terms that do not lose touch with his earlier interests. Individuality, subjective perception, and separateness are qualities that one might associate with the kinds of narrative in Expressionist films. Ward was explicitly distancing himself from the growing tradition of New Zealand feature films in the wake of *Sleeping Dogs* (films with a strong emphasis on the "social" and the "political", the American sense of journalistic "immediacy", and New Zealand nationalism).

Despite this emphasis on narrative there are still many arresting images in *Vigil*. Tetley asserts that for Ward the "painting image is very strong. He works from images" - for

⁶⁷⁸ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38-39.

⁶⁷⁹ *Vigil Pressbook* (New Zealand Film Commission, 1984).

⁶⁸⁰ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38.

example, the shot of Elizabeth sewing the tutu, which Ward spent much time setting up, taking things out of the shot to refine the image. Tetley saw it as a beautiful image but “you can’t make a Vermeer in a day”.⁶⁸¹ Ward did not deny his emphasis on the visual: “My first interest, where I get my greatest pleasure, is from images and imagery. Imagery that is centered around people and often centered around the way people see. But more and more I find I admire the art of story-telling and the art of just being able to tell a tale through images on film – trying to use cinema to tell someone’s story in as effective a way and as economically as I can”.⁶⁸² The experience of making a full-length feature film for international distribution, and working with Tetley as co-writer, had clearly heightened his interest in rhythm, action and economy.

Helen Martin has detected an expressionist influence on the style of *Vigil*:

The self is mirrored in external objects (Toss in tutu and gumboots). The use of colour conveys the human passions (the gun lit up in red as Toss empties out the bullets). The arrangement of objects suggests dramatic relationships and tensions (Toss watching Ethan and Liz through blurred glass). The space between things tells as much about their tensions as the things themselves, (the view from the hunter’s hut of the farm huddled in the valley). The visual image provides metaphoric expression to human feeling, (the robust, unbreakable spirit of the old man seen as he drives his hut away). Nature is shown as a force which is both mythical and archetypal (the wind wrenches Toss’s memorial to her father from the mud and whisks it heavenwards).⁶⁸³

The film has recurring images that carry both psychological and symbolic force – such as hawks, blood, the gun, Toss’s stick, the family Bible and so on – but Ward is afraid that this may be construed by critics as an intellectual approach: “I’m aware of the painting tradition’s reliance on symbols, and of the problem of communicating visually without using heavy-handed symbols like Bergman does in his early films, and which I despise [...]. I try to use symbols only when they’re seen through my characters’ eyes, rather than objectively, but sometimes they’re ambiguous”.⁶⁸⁴ He also notes that the imagery of the film is a deliberate mixture of European and “kiwi” elements. Toss’s

⁶⁸¹ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁶⁸² Tremewan, "Vincent Ward," 13.

⁶⁸³ Martin, "Vincent's Vigil," 17.

⁶⁸⁴ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38.

dream of her father and Ethan jousting combines elements of both medieval English culture and Kiwi culture in that the weapons used by Ethan and Toss's father are a possum chain and a shovel – typically New Zealand farming implements.⁶⁸⁵ Ward is clearly concerned with emphasising not only the subjective nature of his images, but also the mysterious and original ways in which they are used. He seems to be concerned to distance his work from a familiar New Zealand prejudice that “symbolic” art is likely to be over-intellectual and excessively European.

New Zealand /Universal Elements

This leads to the question: in what sense then, can Ward be seen as a “New Zealand” filmmaker? He said of *Vigil*:

[I did not] consciously set out to make a New Zealand film. I don't find I easily identify with the style or tradition of other films made in New Zealand. A lot of films here come out of a realist tradition, a colloquial realism, tempered by American genre films – my interest lies elsewhere. I'm looking for pockets of the outside world which match my own interior vision. I like to pare things away.⁶⁸⁶

He saw himself “first of all as a filmmaker and then as a film maker who films in New Zealand and happens to know a little bit about the country because I grew up here”.⁶⁸⁷ Despite these assertions, *Vigil* seems on the face of it to be Ward's most specifically New Zealand film, with its reticent farming characters, its ubiquitous sheep, its tractor (with a mind of its own), and the isolated farm setting. These are familiar local icons. Some of the scenes in the film - the father docking the tails of the sheep and burning the stillborn lambs, for example - are based on Ward's own recollections of growing up on a farm. The autobiographical nature of the film has been discussed in Chapter Two, but it is worth emphasising that Ward drew deeply not only on the literal details of his childhood but on deep-level emotional patterns. In *Edge of the Earth*, he relates Toss's character to his childhood fantasies about having a female companion he could play with, based in part on his sister and in part on his girlfriend. (Interestingly, his sister, Marianne Chandler, denies that Toss was based on either her or her elder sister, Ingrid,

⁶⁸⁵ Ward, *Lecture to Film Students at Auckland University*.

⁶⁸⁶ Mitchell, "Vincent Ward: The Eloquence of Isolation," 38.

⁶⁸⁷ "New Zealand Film: Vincent Ward," 14.

except possibly for the ballet tutu which Toss wears in the film, since they both had ballet lessons as children. She sees Toss's character as being more like Ward as a child.⁶⁸⁸) Arguably, the character of Elizabeth was based on his mother's "estrangement from the land" and her "sense of isolation and frustration at this strange new country".⁶⁸⁹ Ward also acknowledges a New Zealand slant to the film's theme of childhood - "a common theme in New Zealand writing", which he attributes to "the relative newness of the national identity". He adds: "Maybe we are attracted to the theme because New Zealand is so remote that when we venture into the world outside we do so as innocents".⁶⁹⁰

Nicholas Reid argues that while the themes of childhood and the onset of adult sexuality are "large and universal", the film invites a New Zealand reading:

With the possible exception of *Bad Blood*, this is the first feature-film to convey the sodden reality of rain-soaked hill-country. Such landscape, an everyday reality for much of New Zealand's rural population, is carefully avoided in films that aim to foster the racier, more attractive image of manageable green fields [...]. More significantly than this, however, *Vigil* uses the techniques of poetry (image and heightened sound) to probe deep into the central myth of rural, pakeha New Zealand. Here are a people, perched upon an alien land not yet invested with ancestral legends. They vigorously proclaim their self-sufficiency, their secularism, their freedom from belief, while the land in fact dominates and controls them.⁶⁹¹

Certainly there are many images of the natural environment in *Vigil* that remind us of this McCahon-esque strain in New Zealand painting - trees whose shape has been distorted by the wind's constant buffeting, muddy fields, and barren hills suffering from years of erosion - reminders of the pioneer's constant battle against a hostile environment. As Liz exclaims despairingly, "We can't stop the hills caving in".

Merata Mita ascribes Pakeha filmmakers' interest in depicting "the white man or woman at odds with his/her environment" as part of a "white neurosis" and points out

⁶⁸⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999.

⁶⁸⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 70.

⁶⁹⁰ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 70.

⁶⁹¹ Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday* 117.

that in contrast to the colonial anxiety expressed in the depiction of threatening landscapes, “Maori films are driven by identity, resolution and survival”.⁶⁹² The ferocity of the elements in *A State of Siege* and the harshness of the landscape in *Vigil* would seem to lend itself to this kind of postcolonial reading. As Jonathan Rayner comments: “The voracity and antipathy of Ethan [...] embodies the land’s adversarial character towards those seeking to settle and exploit it”.⁶⁹³

Sam Neill and Judy Rymer have no hesitation in including *Vigil* as an example of their thesis that a sense of “unease” characterises New Zealand cinema. They focus not so much on *Vigil’s* narrative or themes as on its general mood, conveyed through a menacing landscape that functions “as a metaphor for a psychological interior”.⁶⁹⁴ Although Neill and Rymer do not make European links, it is clear that this New Zealand tradition could serve as a vehicle for Expressionist forms of art. This kind of psychological reading seems more appropriate to Ward than to other New Zealand filmmakers. He himself insists however, that his sense of landscape is animistic rather than simply metaphorical: “Perhaps I’m a Romantic, but for me, this land has a real, living presence. You can see it in the Maori names – mountains are named after real people. We were filming in Uruti and the nearest town was Urenui – one means ‘big penis’ the other means ‘little penis’. Urewera, where we shot *Spring* means ‘bird’s penis’”.⁶⁹⁵

If, as New Zealand reviewer Brent Lewis suggests, *Vigil* is “firmly rooted in the country’s national cinema” and concerned with “the New Zealanders’ quest for an identity”, this is a more complex notion of national identity than the “man alone” version evident in earlier New Zealand films such as *Bad Blood* (although the character of Ethan does have some resonances with that tradition).⁶⁹⁶ On those occasions when Ward has been willing to discuss his work in national terms, he has been at pains to stress the complex or changing nature of the culture:

In the past five years, [New Zealand] has moved from an essentially pioneering society obsessed with the values of necessity to a society which has values other

⁶⁹² Merata Mita, “The Soul and the Image,” *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, eds. Jonathan Denis and Jan Bieringa (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1992) 4.

⁶⁹³ Rayner, “Paradise and Pandemonium,” 43.

⁶⁹⁴ Neill and Rymer, *Cinema of Unease, A Personal Journey by Sam Neill*, 1995.

⁶⁹⁵ Dart, “Interview with Director, Vincent Ward,” 92.

⁶⁹⁶ Lewis, “Kiwi Fruit Springs from a Hard Terrain.”

than bread and butter. I think it extraordinary that a country can be divided and people get their heads split open over a visit of a rugby team from a country thousands of miles away. That wouldn't happen in many other countries but shows that New Zealand is now a country whose values are not purely concerned with shelter and produce. This sort of a society is more open to new ways of seeing.⁶⁹⁷

Ward is referring here to the protests around the Springbok tour of 1981 - protests which, incidentally had strong support from the New Zealand film industry, as evidenced by films such as Merata Mita's *Patu!* (1983). Ward's discussions of New Zealand identity thus stress its complex and changing character, and he is obviously concerned to probe beyond social surfaces. His themes - the story of a girl coming to terms with physical changes, with the sudden death of her father and with the arrival of a stranger who creates family tensions - are the stuff of many myths and fairytales, and we might describe his basic approach as seeking the archetypal within (or beyond) the local.

The fact that the film can be read as easily from an international as from a traditional "New Zealand" perspective perhaps accounts for its critical (if not commercial) success overseas, particularly in Europe. It was the second New Zealand film (after Sam Pillsbury's *The Scarecrow*, 1982) to be invited to the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival and the first New Zealand film to be selected for competition at Cannes. The founding director of the Directors' Fortnight, Pierre-Henri Deleau, on his visit to New Zealand, described the film as "a masterpiece", but the opinions of the critics at Cannes were divided.⁶⁹⁸ The film was subsequently shown in a number of other European countries as well as in Australia and the US. A review in *Variety* commented: "Ward's landscape is archetypal New Zealand, but universal as well [...]. The remarkable quality of the film is the way it gives fresh resonance to universal themes".⁶⁹⁹ The Pressbook of *Vigil*, put out by the New Zealand Film Commission, contains a number of selected reviews published shortly after the film's overseas release which demonstrate the ability of the film to be read either as a "New Zealand film" or as a generic art-house (or *auteur's* film). David Robinson, of The Times, London,

⁶⁹⁷ Ward quoted in Lewis, "Kiwi Fruit Springs from a Hard Terrain."

⁶⁹⁸ "New Zealand Director Gains Cannes Recognition," Evening Post 13 February 1984.

⁶⁹⁹ "Vigil," Variety 2 May 1984.

described Ward as “a rare visionary. The hills and bogs and mists of the remote sheep country (from which Ward himself comes) take on a primeval majesty and terror which touches the passions and the subconscious of the people who inhabit them”. Leading French critic, Louis Marcorelles of Le Monde, commented on *Vigil*'s affinity with silent film: “*Vigil* takes us back to the genius of silent cinema, to the mute faces where existential anxiety seems to drown itself, to the fantastic landscapes where anything can happen and where nothing is certain”. In contrast to these comparisons with international cinema, Francois Cognard of Starfix, a French monthly magazine focused on the uniquely New Zealand nature of the film, placing it in context with other recent films from the same country: “With *Vigil*, one gets to know the real character of a young cinema industry, one which is not happy to reproduce American stories, but prefers to look into its own country and to find stories which are both realistic and poetic”.⁷⁰⁰

German reviewers tended to see the film as an example of *neuromantischer* (neo-romantic) film. Stan Jones commented that although German critics did not appreciate “the particularly Pakeha significance of the futile struggle with the watery wasteland” or of Ethan as an example of the New Zealand “Man Alone”, many critics pointed out the film’s “constant interaction between external landscape and inner fantasy” and (as previously discussed in Chapter Four) linked it to the notion of *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness) associated with Romantic literature.⁷⁰¹ Lauren Jackson noted that the reaction of German critics and audiences to these “elements of the German traditions of Expressionism and ‘Innerlichkeit’” in *Vigil*, was one of “delight [...]. Nearly every German critic marvelled at the tremendous strength and power of Ward’s imagery” which was seen as being “both menacing and mythical”. She added the telling comment that reviewers often described the landscape as “exotic”, just as: “New Zealand’s rural landscape must have seemed just as foreign to Vincent Ward’s mother when she arrived here as a German-Jewish refugee and became the wife of a farmer.”⁷⁰² The film was sometimes spoken of as a kind of German or European film that just happened to have been made at the other end of the world. For example, a review in the Hamburg Tageszeitung concluded that *Vigil* was “a story from the other end of the

⁷⁰⁰ Vigil Pressbook.

⁷⁰¹ Deb Verhoeven, ed., Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Feature Films (Melbourne: Damned Publishing, 1999) 156.

⁷⁰² Jackson, "The Film Connection," 100.

world – albeit seen through European eyes”.⁷⁰³ These divergent readings could be seen as evidence that Ward was beginning to develop his own personal style of filmmaking – one which combined his experiences of growing up in New Zealand with a European Romantic sensibility in an original synthesis.

Summary

Despite its much larger budget, cast and crew that required a more co-operative approach, *Vigil* consolidated Ward’s *auteur* status. In order to make the film, Ward needed to find sympathetic collaborators who shared his vision and were willing to accommodate his ideas, since he was not only intimately involved in the process of scripting the film, he was also involved in every aspect of production – finding locations, working on the sets, casting, working closely with the actors - as well as being actively involved in post-production. He demanded a great deal of the cast and crew, and most (but not all) of the cast and crew members responded positively to his perfectionist approach. The process of working on the film created at least one partnership that lasted beyond the making of *Vigil* – that between Ward and John Maynard, the producer, who proved to be sufficiently sympathetic to the director’s aims and supportive of his methods that Ward asked him to produce his next film, *The Navigator*. (Maynard’s loyalty to the director and commitment to the project would, however, be severely tested during the difficult process of finding funding for the film.)

The critical success of *Vigil* had an impact on the general direction of New Zealand filmmaking. Firstly, as Katherine Goodnow points out, it was “a film that demonstrated to funding bodies the viability of an ‘art-house’ style”.⁷⁰⁴ Secondly, Ward’s uncompromising artistic commitment impressed New Zealand filmmakers. Even Bridget Ikin, according to Goodnow, has described the film as “my only inheritance”.⁷⁰⁵ Thirdly, it has had an influence on the themes and mood of New Zealand films up to the present day. Philip Matthews attributes the “land-mysticism, the heightened almost supernatural vision, the sadness” of recent New Zealand films such as Niki Caro’s *Whale Rider* (2003) and *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, 2003) to Ward’s influence. In his view, *Vigil* and *The Navigator* “remain two of the finest and most influential films of the 1980s”, and he argues that both films “rely, as the subsequent

⁷⁰³ "Am Rande Der Welt," *Die Tageszeitung* 14 June 1985.

⁷⁰⁴ Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* 98.

⁷⁰⁵ Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* 98.

Rain, *Whale Rider* and *Lord of the Rings* also do, on a quality of outsider-suspicion, a feeling of being bound to a place and needing to protect it from change or invasion and, related to that, feeling small and powerless against greater forces".⁷⁰⁶ (Matthew's terms are so general, however, that one could find these themes in many other New Zealand films.) John Maynard has gone so far as to say, "I think New Zealand cinema is before *Vigil* and after *Vigil*". Unfortunately, later events were to show that the direction of New Zealand filmmaking had not changed to the extent that the producer had hoped. Nevertheless, Maynard does put forward a strong case for his belief that: "[Ward] is the most outstanding film-maker that New Zealand has ever produced and he really has an astonishing vision. Cinematically literate".⁷⁰⁷ In a recent article for North and South, he was quoted as saying that Ward was "a living national treasure, astonishing and visionary. He's up there with [Colin] McCahon and James K. Baxter as one of the great artists of New Zealand – with all the complications that come with being one of the great artists of New Zealand".⁷⁰⁸ Appropriately, *In Spring One Plants Alone* and *Vigil* were recently screened as part of a McCahon exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.⁷⁰⁹

While some may find Maynard's comparison of the director with one of New Zealand's greatest and most prolific artist excessive, *Vigil* has, after twenty years, stood the test of time and continues to represent an extraordinary achievement. Although it is slow-paced by today's standards, the motivation of the characters obscure at times, and the narrative structure arguably flawed, it creates an extraordinary visual as well as sound ambiance. None of the best-known New Zealand films has been such a thorough or uncompromising example of filmic art in European terms. (Even *Rain* and *Whale Rider* have remained closer to the narrative concerns of mainstream or Hollywood filmmaking.) Clearly the director had learnt a great deal from the experience of making his first fully-professional film which, along with the successful partnership formed with John Maynard, he would be able to carry over to his next film, *The Navigator: A*

⁷⁰⁶ Philip Matthews, "The Waiting Room," New Zealand Listener 18 October 2003: 53.

⁷⁰⁷ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

⁷⁰⁸ Margot Butcher, "What Films May Come," North and South May 2003: 88. Butcher's article in *North and South* begins: "Visionary Vincent Ward quit New Zealand fifteen years ago, but he remains a New Zealander at heart and he wants to tell our stories". The article depicts Ward as an exiled 'hero' struggling against the lack of film funding available in New Zealand.

⁷⁰⁹ Films in the series (which included Jane Campion's *The Piano* and Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* were selected "as evoking the major themes in Colin McCahon's paintings, particularly the use of nature and landscape to convey an allegorical sense of place". Sarah Salkild, e-mail communication to Lynette Read, 2 November 2004.

Medieval Odyssey. This would retain the strengths of *Vigil* and avoid most of its weaknesses

Chapter Six

The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey

Ward's next film, *The Navigator – a Mediaeval Odyssey*, was a New Zealand/Australian co-production and this fact highlights the far-reaching implications that funding issues can have on the career of a director. After the film's original funding in New Zealand had collapsed, it was necessary for the director and John Maynard, the producer, to move to Australia. Ward's literal move from New Zealand can be seen as metaphorically reflected in the film, which begins and ends elsewhere - in fourteenth century Britain. Contemporary New Zealand is seen through the eyes of outsiders. This chapter will not attempt a close analysis of the completed film – this has already been covered by John Downie's detailed critical response in the Cinetek monograph *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* – but will instead document the difficult process of production which provides many insights into his working aesthetic.⁷¹⁰ The chapter will also consider to what extent *The Navigator*, despite being a New Zealand/Australian co-production and frequently listed as an Australian film, reflects the more complex representation of New Zealand national identity that Ward had begun to develop in *Vigil*. Now that he was virtually forced to pursue his filmmaking career overseas, the issue of 'New Zealandness' remained, but would become increasingly less direct and more a matter of theme and nuance.

The film begins in a village in Cumbria during the fourteenth century at the time of the Black Death. In the belief that they will be able to spare their village from the plague, a group of villagers, led by Griffin, a nine-year old visionary, who has dreamed that they must make a pilgrimage to the 'Celestial City', tunnel their way through the earth and emerge on the other side of the world in twentieth century New Zealand. After a series of trials, they succeed in making their offering to God of a spire for the Great Cathedral. On their return, the villagers celebrate being spared from the plague - all but Griffin, who has contracted the plague from his brother and whose death is the price of the villagers' salvation. The film ends with a shot of a single coffin (Griffin's) that has been cast into the water, drifting away downstream.

⁷¹⁰ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey*.

The idea for *The Navigator* originally came to Ward while he was making *Vigil*. As he recounts,

We were shooting a fantasy sequence involving a joust. And standing on the set, you could see that the horses were the wrong size, the doubles didn't look like actors, and the weapons were made of Styrofoam. It all looked fine on screen, but at the time, it was rather amusing – everything was so different from our perspective. It made me want to do something in which images and events were interpreted in vastly differing ways, depending on the characters' point-of-view.⁷¹¹

The story of *The Navigator* has similarities to *Vigil* in that it is told from the perspective of an imaginative child, Griffin, and like *Vigil*, the story had its genesis in the director's own experiences. In addition to the "joust" he recalls an event that occurred while he was hitchhiking in Europe. He tried to cross the busy *autobahn*, where there was no speed limit, but could only get half-way across. It occurred to him that someone from the Middle Ages might feel the way he did, stranded on the median strip of a motorway, and the notion of a film introducing medieval villagers to the twentieth century as a way for a contemporary audience to view the familiar in a fresh light, started to germinate. The idea took further shape when Ward read about two Papua New Guinea highlanders who were on a cargo boat that stopped at an Australian port. They spent half a day of their one day's shore leave trying to cross the busy dockside road and the other half trying to make sense of the lift in a building opposite the wharf.⁷¹²

Peter Hughes' article in *Cinema Papers* mentions two other catalysts for the film: Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror* and "the survey released to the press a few years ago which indicated that teenagers were fearful and depressed about the future, and their major fear was nuclear annihilation".⁷¹³ Tuchman's book on life in the fourteenth century draws a number of parallels with the twentieth century, including the calamitous wars that took place in both centuries and the onset of diseases for which there was no known cure – in the fourteenth century, the "Black Death", and in the twentieth, AIDS.

⁷¹¹ Ward quoted in Andy Klein, "The Navigator: Visions of Vincent Ward," *American Film* (1989): 61-62.

⁷¹² Peter Calder, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Four Year Odyssey," *New Zealand Herald* 3 Feb 1989: 1.

⁷¹³ Peter Hughes, "The Two Ages of the Navigator," *Cinema Papers*.72 (1989): 26.

Then, as now, many people attributed the violence, suffering and bewilderment of the period to the 'end times', the beginning of the Apocalypse, as foreseen in the book of Revelation. Indeed, one of the most popular art works of the period was Dürer's series of etchings *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Tuchman believes that contemporary society can readily identify with the people of the fourteenth century: "After the experiences of the terrible twentieth century, we have greater fellow-feeling for a distraught age whose rules were breaking down under the pressure of adverse and violent events".⁷¹⁴

Ward's comparison is not so much between the plague and AIDS as between the plague and the threat of nuclear war. Although some reviewers read *The Navigator* as making an explicit comment on the threat of AIDS in contemporary society in the appearance of the Grim Reaper commercial, warning of the dangers of the virus, which turns up on a television set and is watched uncomprehendingly by the villagers, Ward has explicitly said that this allusion "is not intended to be the major statement in the film at all". He now believes that perhaps he should not have used the commercial because of the dangers of it being "overread". At the time, however, he was unable to resist using "this wonderful AIDS commercial that was shot with medieval death figures, in Australia. It was just too appropriate [...]. I tried to keep it in the background of the shot, rather than alone and direct, so it would become a background statement rather than the main statement. It was meant to be subtextual [...]. The nuclear thing was more important to me, certainly than the AIDS thing".⁷¹⁵ The image of the Grim Reaper in the commercial gained additional emphasis from its similarities with an earlier shot of the Angel of Death flying across the moon, an image which, according to Ward was "actually a replica of an engraving on a medieval cemetery stone in Père Lachaise cemetery, outside of Paris. It's the stone of someone who had died from the Black Death".⁷¹⁶

The script of *The Navigator* was written in the 1980s, at a time when New Zealand had banned American nuclear ships from its waters, in an office not far from where the Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace ship on its way to protest nuclear testing at Mururoa

⁷¹⁴ Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York: Albert Knopf, 1978) Forward xiv.

⁷¹⁵ Russell Campbell and Miro Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," *Illusions* (1989): 14.

⁷¹⁶ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 14.

Atoll in the South Pacific, was bombed and sunk by agents of the French government. Significantly, one of the writers of the film, New Zealander Geoff Chapple, was a well-known anti-nuclear activist at that time. New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance was initially referred to in one of the early drafts of the film by the medievals encountering nuclear protesters on the water, but Ward decided that "that was a very obvious, not a very good way of doing it".⁷¹⁷ In the film, the small band of villagers, while attempting to cross the Auckland Harbour in a dinghy, are almost overturned by what they perceive as a sea monster, which they name a "queenfish" (an obvious reference to the American nuclear submarine of that name). Later they hear the American captain of the submarine speaking on television to his New Zealand audience: "The fact is you still have an alliance with America. This is the real world, 1988. You can't isolate one little pocket of the world and say 'nuclear-free'. Oh, you can try, but there *is* no refuge, no pocket, no escape from the real world". The situation of the medieval villagers living in a small isolated place, being threatened by something larger than themselves which had the potential for annihilation – the Black Death – is paralleled with contemporary New Zealand, also an isolated pocket of the world "fending off a threat that is larger than itself", nuclear weapons, which also had the potential to annihilate the world.⁷¹⁸ Considering the on-going debate about New Zealand's policy of prohibiting nuclear-armed American ships from its ports, and the continuing pressure on this country to join more directly in U.S. military ventures, the scene has a continued resonance for New Zealand viewers in addition to its global implications.

The film's two locations are similar not only in their geographical isolation but also as Ward points out, in that: "[Cumbria] is very steep and mountainous, in some ways similar to New Zealand, quite harsh country which became the romantic Lake District in other times".⁷¹⁹ Jonathan Rayner identifies other parallels between the medieval and contemporary communities in the film: "Both communities and environments appear to be equally threatened. The bemused modern-day foundry workers cast the cross required by the pilgrims out of charity, since their livelihoods are threatened economically (by redundancy) rather than metaphysically (by disease and

⁷¹⁷ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 12.

⁷¹⁸ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 10.

⁷¹⁹ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 10.

judgement)".⁷²⁰ Still other comparisons can be drawn between the medieval miners and the modern-day foundry workers, as Ward points out:

The fourteenth century saw the beginning of the emancipation of working people in general. This was caused by the Black Death, because it brought labour shortages, which in turn meant that people had more bargaining power. So in the film there is a link between the common working people then and now, the medieval miners being at the forefront of the change in working-class conditions.

In many respects, however, the medieval miners occupied a stronger position in society than their modern counterparts: "Medieval miners had a position that other feudal peasants did not have, and by and large, they were called free miners. They had effectively "union" rights, they had mining rights on virtually any land, and they were better paid, and the reason was war was at such a peak. For armaments metal was essential, and for metal you needed miners. So they had a privileged position in society".⁷²¹

Some writers on the Middle Ages, such as Umberto Eco, Barbara Tuchman and Jean Gimpel in The Medieval Machine (one of the source books used to research the film), regard the modern industrial age as actually beginning in the Middle Ages.⁷²² Eco argues that: "The Middle Ages are the root of all our contemporary 'hot' problems, and it is not surprising that we go back to the period every time we ask ourselves about our origin [...]. Thus looking at the Middle Ages means looking at our infancy [...]. Our return to the Middle Ages is a quest for our roots".⁷²³ According to Tuckman, the beginnings of modern thinking also originated in the Middle Ages:

Survivors of the plague, finding themselves neither destroyed nor improved, could discover no Divine purpose in the pain they had suffered [...]. If a disaster of such magnitude, the most lethal ever known, was a mere wanton act of God or perhaps not God's work at all, then the absolutes of a fixed order were

⁷²⁰ Rayner, "Paradise and Pandemonium," 46.

⁷²¹ Ward quoted in Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁷²² Jean Gimpel, The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages (London: Gollanz, 1977).

⁷²³ Umberto Eco, Travels in Hyperreality, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973) 65.

loosed from their moorings. Minds that opened to admit these questions could never again be shut. Once people envisioned the possibility of change in a fixed order, the end of an age of submissions came in sight; the turn to individual conscience lay ahead. To that extent, the Black Death may have been the unrecognised beginning of modern man.⁷²⁴

John Downie's reading of *The Navigator* posits the notion that the film traces the evolution of society from the Middle Ages to the present in that the religious pilgrimages or crusades acted as precursors to later European voyages of discovery and colonisation. "Part of the dialectic intention of Ward's film is to image the opposing, as it were, temporal poles of this geographic and technical evolution within Western culture, in order to trace, with a sense of moral conscience, the implications of a 'navigation' of the world driven by blind faith and appalling diet, to one, perhaps penultimately, based on social discipline, atomic power and satellite guidance".⁷²⁵ This seems an excessively cut-and-dried interpretation, but clearly the juxtaposition of medieval and contemporary in the film does evoke many aspects of the intermediate history. Ultimately, the film appears to leave the viewer with considerable latitude to discover both similarities and contrasts between the two periods. This is one source of its fascination, its mystery.

At the same time the film can be said to project some positive values in two ages of anxiety. In the aftermath of the Black Death, the anticipation of disaster abounded. Similarly, as the survey of secondary students referred to earlier indicated, young people in contemporary society constantly anticipate disaster as a reaction to the prospect of war. Ward's intention was to counter this anxiety by a positive statement. "I believe faith and hope are pre-requisites for action and change, regardless of the odds. Not in the sense of religious hope and faith, but in the sense of faith in the potential of human creativity".⁷²⁶ In the initial stages of the script, he worked on a story about "a brotherhood of men from the fourteenth century who save their village from the plague". It took, however, an extended conversation with his Jewish aunt whom he visited in England and who interrogated him about what he wanted to communicate, for

⁷²⁴ Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* 123.

⁷²⁵ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 10.

⁷²⁶ Ward quoted in Hughes, "The Two Ages of the Navigator," 27.

him to realise that at the heart of the film was the notion of faith – “the basic need to maintain belief in something, anything, no matter what”.⁷²⁷

Scripting and Research

In the early stages, Ward literally ‘saw’ the story, in his usual way, through isolated images such as “a gauntlet-clad hand, an unknown face behind a blindfold, and a spire” and he used these fragments to gradually develop the film’s narrative.⁷²⁸ These visions, combined with others such as images of falling and the moon were eventually used as unifying devices to link the film’s two time-frames. The idea of the story was refined through seven drafts, later ones being co-written with New York writer Kely Lyons, and the final draft with Geoff Chapple.⁷²⁹ Ward worked on the screenplay for two years before going to Britain for casting and further research. He travelled to the north of England to research medieval mining practices and came across hundreds of engravings from sources such as Georgius Agricola’s Re De Metallica, a sixteenth century book on mining, which depicted how miners in the Middle Ages in Cumbria heated the rockface by lighting a fire against it, then doused the red-hot surface with cold vinegar to expose the seam of ore.⁷³⁰ One of the engravings from this book inspired the rock-face cutaway shot of the miners working in the shaft, which, as Ward points out, was also “very relevant to the medieval sense of painting, some of which has got a two-dimensional feel. And in that respect things are placed according to their importance, rather than according to their distance from the viewer”.⁷³¹ Other useful books included The Medieval Machine, which was used as a basis for the digging machine by which the villagers dig through to the other side of the earth; Montaillou, which looked at a medieval French village during an inquisition and was a detailed and accurate record of medieval life, written by the inquisitor; and The Pursuit of the Millenium and English Medieval Histories which give precise details of the lives of weavers and miners of the time.⁷³²

⁷²⁷ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 87.

⁷²⁸ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 89.

⁷²⁹ Calder, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Four Year Odyssey," 1.

⁷³⁰ Ward, Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes 88.

⁷³¹ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 13.

⁷³² Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 12-13.

Ward's intention was not, however, to achieve historical authenticity but as he said in an interview about the film, to try to find as much information as possible, and then treat it creatively.

In actual fact, the houses in the village would be much more likely to be stone-built for warmth. You wouldn't have a wooden house like I've got, where you can see light through the slats, it would be stupid. But I went into this quite consciously [...]. It's also arguable whether there would be coffins on a lake, for sanitation reasons, but that suited me, that was the image I had in mind.⁷³³

These provide good examples of Ward's tendency to passionately research details but then to consciously sacrifice authenticity where necessary to achieve a striking image. He justifies this on the basis that: "I had sufficient material that was verifiable, and more importantly it felt right, given that one's doing a fictional film".⁷³⁴

The way medieval working men spoke and the accent of Celtic medieval English was also researched and several accent coaches worked with the actors at various stages of filming to produce an authentic pronunciation. Ward had decided to use a West Cumbrian accent because it "has a country rhythm and expresses a medieval feeling".⁷³⁵ The problem with this accent was that it was particularly difficult for people to learn – even more so because of the range of nationalities in the cast, which included New Zealanders, Australians and an American. Another problem was that, done incorrectly, it could sound Scottish, which could defeat the purpose of Ward's choosing the West Cumbrian accent so that "audiences would have no preconceptions about it".⁷³⁶ Elizabeth McRae, who had been the voice tutor on *Vigil*, was approached by Ward and asked if she would work with the actors, after the breakdown in the initial funding for the film prevented the English voice coach that Ward had initially approached from coming to New Zealand. This coach did, however, send McRae a tape with Cumbrian accents on it. McRae did a great deal of "phonetic work" with the actors, particularly the American, Bruce Lyons (as Connor), who needed to lose his American accent before being able to produce an authentic West Cumbrian accent. Ward envisaged that Noel Appleby (as Ulf) would be in particular need of voice tutoring, but as it happened,

⁷³³ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁷³⁴ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁷³⁵ Timothy O'Brien, "Success Is Being a Good Liar," *The Dominion* 1 February 1989: 12.

⁷³⁶ O'Brien, "Success Is Being a Good Liar," 12.

Appleby had spent time with Irish workmen and could reproduce quite readily their Irish accent, which was close to the West Cumbrian one. According to McRae, Hamish McFarlane (as Griffin) was “keen to learn” and she spent three to four sessions with him every week. While McFarlane succeeded in maintaining his accent throughout the film, other actors were not able to do so and as a result, in McRae’s opinion, the film was not entirely successful in achieving Ward’s aim that all the actors “sounded as if they came from the same place”.⁷³⁷ Ward countered this criticism by pointing out that: “We rarely get any complaints from English people about problems with the accent. Considering the cast ranged from six-year-old children to 80-year-olds, none of whom were English, that’s pretty good”.⁷³⁸

Not only the physical details of the medieval world were carefully researched, but also medieval notions of the universe. As Peter Hughes notes: “There are three world views mentioned in the film: the notion of the antipodes; the notion of the underworld; and the idea that the world was flat.”⁷³⁹ In an interview with Russell Campbell and Miro Bilbrough, Ward discussed some of these notions, particularly the medieval idea of the antipodes (literally, “the opposite foot”), which inform the film:

The belief, which I think was Greek and inherited by the medievals, was that there was a continent at the top of the world, an exact mirror image. And the medievals believed that here were people who walked on their heads, had one eye in the centre of their forehead and used one big foot as an umbrella against the boiling sun [...]. In a sense, it is this land they discover, a medieval hell as envisaged by Bosch, or perhaps a celestial heaven. A land at the opposite end of the world, only of course it is a land we’re familiar with. The audience ironically has a knowledge [the characters] don’t have.⁷⁴⁰

When the medievals emerge from the tunnel and see what they imagine is the celestial city – “It must be God’s city. There’s so much light” – their reaction is based on the logic that if the earth is flat, it has two sides and if there is evil on one side, good must be on the other. Later they come to believe that what they have seen represents not

⁷³⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Elizabeth McRae, 20 November 2001.

⁷³⁸ O'Brien, "Success Is Being a Good Liar," 12.

⁷³⁹ Hughes, "The Two Ages of the Navigator," 27.

⁷⁴⁰ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 10.

heaven but “a vision of hell”, as Searle describes his experiences when he returns to the village at the end of the film.

Other medieval notions of the world referred to in the film include: “the belief that the contagion of the Black Death was carried by the moon [...] and the placing of spikes on the roof of the house to prevent witches landing on the roof. The placing of a spike on the roof of the Cathedral, of course, was also to ward off evil spirits as well as being a ‘Tribute to God’”.⁷⁴¹ Ward acknowledged the importance of the cathedral spire to the film’s central theme of faith versus scepticism:

The spire, as the pinnacle of the church architecture in medieval times, served no practical architectural function –it was too narrow. Yet it symbolised a mix of pagan and Christian ideas – the aspirations of medieval belief, the use of church towers as military lookouts and the setting up of spikes, so witches flying over would be impaled. In the twentieth century, medieval spires that were the highest in the world are dwarfed by modern buildings, so there is irony and a humorous discrepancy in the way the medievals take their naïve belief, related to mounting a cross on the spire, and fling it in the face of twentieth-century scepticism.⁷⁴²

Ward’s construction of a narrative around his striking central idea (or “high concept”, to use the Hollywood term) of medieval characters coming face to face with the modern world displayed typical strengths and typical problems. The strengths included the way it stimulated his extraordinary visual sense and passion for details. The problems arose from an excess of ideas, intensified by the protracted scripting period. Ward is so strongly drawn to extra-ordinary images and perspectives that it is difficult for him to achieve the kinds of unified impact and narrative focus that characterise Hollywood films (a source of both their audience impact and their occasional descent into banality). Ward’s script for *The Navigator* was astonishingly rich but almost too challenging in production terms. The director’s passion for details would indeed collide with the constraints of production and financing.

⁷⁴¹ Hughes, "The Two Ages of the Navigator," 27.

⁷⁴² Terry Snow, "Performance: Visionary Force," New Zealand Listener 28 January 1989: 31.

Funding

Once the research and initial preparations were completed, Ward and Maynard sought to finalise funding. After the critical success of *Vigil*, they were confident that their next project would receive the support they needed to allow *The Navigator* to be made in July 1986, three years after *Vigil* had been shot. The New Zealand Film Commission had made a commitment to funding the production for over \$1 million, the largest amount given to a single New Zealand film to date, and, according to Geoff Chapple:

That it [the project] won such support was no accident. Ian Mune, in the role of script assessor for the commission called it ‘the best-built screenplay I have read in years’. On the strength of the script and the reputation of its director, *The Navigator* was also the first New Zealand film to win distribution agreements in all the major film territories – the USA, UK, Germany, France, Scandinavia and Australia – before the film was even glimpsed. And producer Maynard rang up record pre-sale deals of \$1.8 million overseas, money which was to be put into the film’s budget.⁷⁴³

The cast designated to play the leading roles in the film – Bernard Hill, a British actor who had played a leading role in *Boys from the Black Stuff*, Chris Haywood, who had won a best actor award in Australia, and experienced New Zealand actors Sarah Peirse and Bill Johnson – gave the proposed film additional credibility for investors.

At first things seemed to go well, but in June, well into pre-production for the film, the budget still had a shortfall of one third, which Maynard and Ward had hoped to raise from New Zealand investors. As Ward puts it (in terms curiously reminiscent of the film itself):

Filmmaking is both an act of faith and a gigantic gamble – a punt taken by financiers, crew, cast and not least by the producer. For a year and a half, John had patiently raised the money, but one component of the financial package, dependent on the New Zealand portion, was always missing. He had been

⁷⁴³ Geoff Chapple, "How It Feels When the Light Goes Out," New Zealand Times 15 June 1986: 5.

negotiating this final deal for three days, when at the last moment, unexpected tax changes scared off our major investors.⁷⁴⁴

The crew, who were already at work building sets and costumes for the films were called together and told by Maynard, “This is the worst meeting I’ve ever had to call, and I think it’s probably the worst meeting the industry has ever seen. The film has fallen over and it has fallen over because of a direct Government policy which discriminates against New Zealand film as a high-risk investment.”⁷⁴⁵ The policy that Maynard was referring to was the National Government’s rescinding of the tax shelter arrangement which had previously allowed some investors in the film industry to gain more than one hundred percent in tax deductions even if the film did not show a profit. In the case of *The Navigator*, which had a projected budget of four million dollars, a substantial private investment was essential, but investors now preferred to invest in other ventures. As Maynard pointed out at the time, *The Navigator* was the only New Zealand feature film planned for that year, and six other planned films had failed to find funding since the tax changes. By contrast, Australian investors in local film earned a one hundred and twenty percent tax deduction and thirty Australian films were in production that year. David Gascoigne, the Film Commission chairman, said of *The Navigator*’s failure to secure private investment finance: “The Inland Revenue Department has generated a climate of fear among corporations contemplating investment in the New Zealand film industry.”⁷⁴⁶ There had been an inflated boom in local filmmaking because of the tax shelter, but in its reaction the government made no attempt to distinguish between serious local films such as *The Navigator* and more dubious projects; it was apparently not concerned about closing down virtually the whole of the local industry.

Maynard stayed on in New Zealand for some months to try and resurrect the finance for the film, but eventually he and Ward went to Australia where they spent another two years trying to find funding. Fortunately, at that time, the Australian Film Commission was looking for co-production opportunities, as a journalist for New Zealand Business commented:

⁷⁴⁴ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 90.

⁷⁴⁵ Chapple, "How It Feels When the Light Goes Out," 5.

⁷⁴⁶ Geoff Chapple, "Taxman Blamed for Film's Woes," New Zealand Times 15 June 1986: 5.

The Navigator did not quite fit their definition – a true co-production involves shared financing and creative control, motivated by story elements that will appeal to both countries' domestic markets. But *The Navigator* was written, produced and filmed entirely in New Zealand. To complete the formalities that ensure the film is certified in Australia as well as in New Zealand – that is so the production costs are tax-deductible in both countries - the film has to have two producers (Gary Hannam was the New Zealand co-producer); shared cast, and all post-production work was carried out in Australia.⁷⁴⁷

The production, which ended up costing \$4.3 million, was eventually funded by a combination of loans from the Australian and New Zealand Film Commissions and by a number of Australian private investors, but some changes had to be made to key personnel. Funding can have far-reaching effects on creative aspects. David Coulson, for example, who had been at art school with Ward, had been approached to edit the film before the New Zealand funding had collapsed: “We had all the gear, we’d had the initial meetings, the pre-production meetings and had a deal in place”. However, once it became a New Zealand/Australian co-production, “the Australians exerted a lot of frustrating control over things. Key [positions] had to come out of Australia”, and as a result, Coulson was not approached a second time - an Australian editor was asked to edit the film instead.⁷⁴⁸ In the course of the project New Zealand also lost two of its leading film producers – John Maynard and Bridget Ikin (his partner, who moved to Australia with him). This was a major loss as Maynard and Ikin had provided the strongest support for New Zealand directors at the ‘art’ (or *auteur*) end of the spectrum – the so-called *auteurs* such as Ward, Campion, and Alison McLean, whose future projects would also be offshore.

Because of Australian quota requirements, Ward was also unable to use the key actors who had initially agreed to work on the film, with the exception of Sarah Peirse and Chris Haywood. Eventually he decided to use a combination of experienced and untried actors; of the latter, the most interesting was Noel Appleby who played the part of Ulf. Ward explains that they found Appleby “working for the city council in the Auckland sewers [...]. He was seventy pounds overweight, suffered from emphysema,

⁷⁴⁷ "Joint Film's the Answer," *New Zealand Business* (1989): 6. Gary Hannam had already worked with Ward and Maynard as the executive producer on *Vigil* and on the Maynard-Geoff Steven production, *Strata* (1983).

⁷⁴⁸ Lynette Read, interview with David Coulson, 16 August 2002.

and had been warned by his doctor that he could die before the picture was finished".⁷⁴⁹ Some of the characters, in particular Connor and Griffin, proved to be difficult to cast. Ward "searched New Zealand, Australia and England for the lean, charismatic actor to play Connor, only to find that Canadian Bruce Lyons" (whom he already knew as he was married to scriptwriter Kely Lyons), "fitted the bill".⁷⁵⁰ According to Ward, the difficulties he encountered in the casting process were related to the type of character Connor was and the boy's view of him:

First of all, he was the leader of the village and he had to look charismatic, and have the presence. He needed a certain intensity to him as an inspired leader to some degree. But at the same time, he's like a newly-married guy you'd see in the suburbs, who's got a small family, and they've got big aspirations in the world but no status [...]. From the point of view of his younger brother he's totally heroic, but in fact he's totally flawed [...], he's also a small-town peasant villager who's got the plague. He's haunted by what he's seen, he's the only eye onto the outside world that we have, and potentially he's a death figure, a kind of Grim Reaper going through the village. It was very hard to find somebody with those qualities.⁷⁵¹

For the part of Griffin, Ward looked (with his usual thoroughness) in over a thousand classrooms over a period of two years, until he eventually found Hamish McFarlane. He was looking for three particular qualities: "He's a dreamer of visions, so he's probably got interesting eyes [...]. He's determined, and I don't just mean determined, he had to look like a nine-year-old who could do a ten-hour day in a medieval mine, probably quite thin and hardy. So I looked for kids who were quite physical. And the third thing was he had to be capable of a little bit of humour and cheekiness".⁷⁵²

It seems that in casting decisions Ward was primarily searching for a particular 'look' and acting ability was of secondary importance. He was asked how he had achieved the authentic appearance of the medieval characters whose faces are "very evocative of that

⁷⁴⁹ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 156.

⁷⁵⁰ Snow, "Performance: Visionary Force," 31.

⁷⁵¹ Ward quoted in Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 12.

⁷⁵² Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 12.

period”, and whether this was a conscious choice. Ward replied by explaining the two different medieval painting traditions:

One is Italian, which is beauty and classical refinement, [...] the other is Flemish, which is a style in which every wart and vein and oddity is emphasised. So one is towards some classical ideal of beauty, and one is to do with exaggeration of character. The film is more to do with the Flemish tradition. I’ve tried to go for people that I thought you could believe would come from this tiny little pocket. The faces would be exaggerated, perhaps inbred.⁷⁵³

This statement indicates that he was still strongly influenced by his art-school training and his interest in a style of imagery that is popularly known as ‘Gothic’.

McFarlane recalls that he and another two boys were picked out of a school assembly and asked to take part in workshops with Maya Dalziel (who had performed the same role on *Vigil*) every Sunday in an old theatre for the next eight to ten weeks. After about six weeks, the choice was narrowed down to about eight or ten boys the same age as him, none of whom had acted before and the process of screen-testing them began. When McFarlane was chosen for the role, Dalziel became his acting tutor, as well as his teacher on the set, as he was unable to attend school for the duration of rehearsals and the shoot. McFarlane describes Ward’s directorial style as “incredibly meticulous [...]. He’s got everything in his head down to the finest detail”.⁷⁵⁴ He felt, as a young actor, that Ward was a very good communicator who gave him specific instructions and never let him feel alone or confused as to what he was supposed to do. As with Fiona Kay (the child actor in *Vigil*), Ward developed a close relationship with McFarlane and followed this up by taking him away to Greytown to stay with his family for a week after shooting was completed. McFarlane comments that everyone who worked on the film found it “incredibly challenging”, partly due to the demands of “a very meticulous director” and partly due to the challenges of working long hours, mainly on night shoots, in difficult physical conditions. He describes *The Navigator* as an “art film” engaged in the process of “painting life” and recalls that: “Everything in each frame was very very meticulously composed. So we spent a long time setting up things and re-shooting things, doing a lot of takes”. The result was that, even although the ten-week

⁷⁵³ Campbell and Billbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 13.

⁷⁵⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Hamish McFarlane, 15 August 2002.

shoot was lengthy by Australasian standards, the cast and crew often had to work overtime to keep to the schedule. In hindsight McFarlane feels that because he was “totally in touch with the character” of Griffin, whom he saw as quite similar to himself in many ways, and because he felt completely comfortable and trusted Ward, the experience of working *The Navigator* was the “Mount Everest” of his life. Even today – he now works as a First Assistant Director - he always compares his film experiences with that initial experience.⁷⁵⁵

After two weeks of intensive rehearsals in an old warehouse in Otahuhu, the cast and crew flew down to the South Island, to Lake Harris in the Southern Alps, to begin shooting. McFarlane was unaware at the time of the dangers of shooting in the middle of winter in such a location but comments in retrospect: “It was, I suppose, quite a big risk, and I think this is why Vincent does get compared with Werner Herzog quite a lot, that he does live up to his taking risks [...]. And they pay off too. If we hadn’t shot it there it wouldn’t have looked anything like it did”.⁷⁵⁶ Ward had chosen Lake Harris because it reminded him of Cumbria. He knew that “the film needed a strong opening and closing and that in purely financial terms the expense of shooting here would prove worth it on the screen”.⁷⁵⁷ However, when it was realised that the lake would soon be frozen over, making it impossible to work there, the filming was brought forward several weeks, which put a great deal of pressure on the art department to have everything ready in time – costumes, props and so on. At Lake Harris, the cast and crew stayed at Glenorchy and had to be airlifted up to the lake itself for the shoot and flown out by helicopter before dark. All the camera and art department equipment also had to be airlifted in by helicopter and it required four or five trips each day to bring in all the gear, which was hung underneath the helicopter in nets. As Ward wryly comments: “It became a running joke with the crew that I chose difficult locations deliberately: ‘Vincent found a new location today, but we’re not using it. You can get there by road’”.⁷⁵⁸ Other difficult locations for the medieval sections of the film were half-way up Mt Ruapehu, and the tunnel scenes, which “were filmed 100 metres underground at Waitomo [...] where access was by rope”.⁷⁵⁹ For Ward, getting the details right has serious implications for the choice of location, putting demands not

⁷⁵⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Hamish McFarlane, 15 August 2002.

⁷⁵⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Hamish McFarlan, 15 August 2002.

⁷⁵⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 157.

⁷⁵⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 159.

⁷⁵⁹ Hughes, “The Two Ages of the Navigator,” 31.

only on himself but also on cast and crew: “To have atmosphere you actually have to see it and to see it you also have to experience it”. He cites the example of the nineteenth century painter Turner, who tied himself to a mast during a storm in order to be better able to capture it on canvas: “To portray those elements you can’t be below deck”.⁷⁶⁰ Certainly the location at Lake Harris was “another world where the crew and actors would experience the visual ‘atmosphere’ Ward required – intense cold in the biting winds and waist-deep snow”.⁷⁶¹

Some scenes were shot in Auckland, including the motorway scenes in Wairau Rd on the North Shore and the foundry scenes in Penrose. Several of the Auckland locations created difficulties of a different kind for crew and cast. An old sewage pond in Takanini was used as a location for the footage of the submarine and a number of people who had to work in or around the pond became sick. The sewer shots in the film were shot in an actual sewer in Newmarket, and for the cathedral, the exterior used was St Patrick’s cathedral in Wyndham St, and the interior, St Matthew’s cathedral. There were also problems with some of the studio sets. The spire of the cathedral that McFarlane’s character has to climb in the film was specially constructed and a stunt person used for Griffin’s fall from the top of the spire, but in the last weeks of the shoot the spire collapsed, and the last closeup shots of the film were shot amongst the fragments. Ward’s comment was penetrating: “I suppose it was curiously appropriate that I was shooting pieces – I always see the close-ups, the details, before the overall pattern”.⁷⁶²

Financial constraints caused by the shoot being over budget and behind schedule meant that eighteen locations had to be changed or cut for cost reasons. Maynard was trying to avoid the production guarantor stepping in and taking over, and worried that the film might never be finished. By contrast, Ward was worried that “it might not be worth finishing”.⁷⁶³ The need to streamline and simplify was a particularly anxious demand for a director with a passionate concern for richness of visual texture. Geoffrey Simpson, the film’s Director of Photography, comments that in terms of Ward and Maynard’s working relationship, “even though they argued and fought all the time, the bottom line was [that] Vincent did know that there was severe time and money

⁷⁶⁰ Tara Werner, "A Mediaeval Craft," *Southern Skies*: 20.

⁷⁶¹ Werner, "A Mediaeval Craft," 21.

⁷⁶² Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 167.

⁷⁶³ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 169.

constraints on the film [...]. Vincent would fight for his vision every inch of the way. Even though John and Vincent would have screaming matches one night, they would kiss and make up the next day and they'd be fine and they'd move forward and we'd get the work done".⁷⁶⁴ Maynard was quoted in a newspaper article by Jonathan Dowling as saying that he saw his priority as being to organise the schedule as tightly as possible "without risking what Vincent wants to do". In his view, their working relationship was unique since: "We're the only *auteur*-director-producer team currently working in Australasia. The rest of the industry is producer- or lawyer-dominated, rather than led by ideas. In Australia, Vincent is seen as self-indulgent, but in France he is called an *auteur* director and he earns raves [...]. New Zealand doesn't see him at all. That's why we're in the position we're in now".⁷⁶⁵ The phrase "led by ideas" in this context presumably refers not to the intellectualism but to the considerable freedom Maynard gave the director to explore and pursue his original creative ideas.

Ward and Maynard had already worked together on *Vigil* and had developed an understanding of each other's priorities, but the relationship between Ward and the rest of the crew was more problematic, in part due to the director's perfectionism. Michele Nayman's article in Cinema Papers cites an example of this as being one of the night shoots where Ward was trying to achieve a particular visual effect. Water was used in order to achieve a translucent look on the road surface, but the hoses had run dry and there was still half a mile of road that needed to be watered down if the sheen was going to be consistent. Many directors would have given up at this stage, but Ward was so determined to get the look that he wanted that he found some buckets and the crew had to water the rest of the street by hand. Ward explains that: "One of the elements of the film I was trying to achieve was a look of reflective surfaces in the twentieth century, so that things would have a translucence, an incandescence, a phosphorescence. I know I pay a lot of attention to detail. It drives everybody mad".⁷⁶⁶

During the shoot, the director began to be aware that there was hostility amongst the crew for which he felt partially responsible.

⁷⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁶⁵ John Maynard quoted in Jonathan Dowling, "Location Report: Medieval Mystery in Manurewa," Onfilm 4.6 (1987): 23.

⁷⁶⁶ Michelle Nayman, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Past Dreams of the Future," Cinema Papers.69 (1988). 30

I knew that my slowness and lack of organization was responsible for some of the problems, but I felt the real cause of this difficulty was my tendency to direct in a monosyllabic and preoccupied manner [...]. I was focused totally on my work, unable or unwilling to notice the effect I had on those I worked with. Those who gave the most naturally felt the most neglected and it seemed as though I was interested in them only when they were useful to me.⁷⁶⁷

Some crew members of earlier films had responded negatively to his directorial style, but their responses had not threatened to de-rail the project. On this occasion the tensions built to a point where Ward became very aware of them. Nevertheless, had he or his producer not been so obsessive, such a film could not have been made. In that sense, both had a “visionary” approach, very different from that of the average director or producer. As Maynard said after its completion: “The only reason we’re here is because of a ridiculous commitment Vincent and I had for the film”.⁷⁶⁸ His and Ward’s determination to make *The Navigator* was motivated by their “shared vision” Maynard had “clearly seen what a good film it could be and what a far-reaching film it could be in terms of an audience as well”.⁷⁶⁹ The director also acknowledged that there was “an element of tunnel vision. Otherwise I wouldn’t have kept going for four years. I would have compromised. I would have turned back”.⁷⁷⁰ Ward’s commitment was such that even after the shoot had officially ended, “he persuaded crew and cast to stay on for two extra weeks of pick-up shots which he paid for himself”.⁷⁷¹ Maynard’s support for Ward makes one aware of the extraordinary loss that this producer’s departure represented for the New Zealand film industry.

Director of Photography Geoffrey Simpson became involved with the film as part of the Australian crew quota. Having already seen *Vigil* and admired its visual aspects, he was familiar with Ward’s work before he read the script of *The Navigator*. On his first meeting with the director, Simpson was asked what he thought of the script and he replied: “It’s visual poetry”. He believes this “struck a nerve” with Ward. He was subsequently hired to do the job and shortly afterwards flew to New Zealand to begin pre-production. When he realised that “the script and the money equation didn’t work

⁷⁶⁷ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 173.

⁷⁶⁸ Dowling, "Location Report: Medieval Mystery in Manurewa," 22.

⁷⁶⁹ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

⁷⁷⁰ Calder, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Four Year Odyssey," 1.

⁷⁷¹ Brent Lewis, "F&F Special Report," *Films and Filming*, 413 (1989): 11.

and there was going to have to be some scenes that went”, he made some suggestions about what could be cut out of the script, in particular the scene of Connor attacking a bus with nuns on board, and flying through the front window of the bus, on the basis that it would be very expensive to light and was not necessary to the storyline. Initially Ward was very resistant to this suggestion, but he realised eventually that it would be preferable to put the money into something “more achievable”.⁷⁷²

Despite the budget constraints and difficult conditions, Simpson felt that working on the film “was a fantastic learning experience”. For the whole crew, their efforts were “above and beyond the call of duty” and they put in “one hundred and twenty per cent’s worth of work”. They did so because they “knew that it was something special and it was going to be a landmark for New Zealand”. The Australian crew members appear to have been very supportive of the idea that this was basically a “New Zealand” project. Simpson recalls there was a feeling among the crew that

even though it was a difficult shoot and Vincent was very demanding, [...] there was something quite extraordinary happening and we were making a film that was unique and original and was going to make its mark on the world [...]. Some people would have had arguments with Vincent [...], we all had arguments at various stages, but I think we all knew where Vincent was coming from. He had a vision and was passionate about it and, even though a lot of those things weren’t achieved - his vision wasn’t achieved - we tried as best we could to support him, even though we were doing it through gritted teeth.⁷⁷³

It is noticeable that almost all the key members of Ward’s team used the term “vision” in describing the particular quality of the film and his approach as a director.

In Simpson’s view, the feeling that the film was special came from the originality of the material – nothing he had seen in the cinema “had come close to it” – and from the strength of the film’s visuals: “You could tell from the script that Vincent was particularly interested in the visuals”. He recalls that Ward paid “fantastic attention to detail” and “was very particular on the look of a lot of the objects in the medieval period”. All the Art Department details and background information “were very very well researched”, and during production many of the visual details unearthed by Ward

⁷⁷² Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁷³ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

and the researcher he had hired in England to collect material from museums, were carefully applied. “Literally everything from nuclear submarines to Hieronymus Bosch paintings and Cumbrian miners’ oil lamps and the tools that they used” were hung around the walls of the Art Department during the film’s production. Not only the Art Department came under his careful scrutiny, for Ward also “had very clear ideas on cast and performance”. Simpson recalls that during the shoot, Ward “seemed to be pretty happy with the performances after only a few takes”, which he attributes partly to time constraints and partly to the fact that Ward had done a great deal of research to find the actors he wanted. McFarlane spoke of numerous takes, but this may have been his subjective impressions, or perhaps due to the fact that he had never acted before.⁷⁷⁴

Overall, the Director of Photography enjoyed the process of working with Ward: “I prefer to have a director who’s got some idea and then you find that the two of you inspire each other and come up with something that’s great for both of you as individuals [...]. That combination of working with someone who has a strong visual sense is terrific for a cinematographer. You can really push the boundaries and go further and further”. During the pre-production process, Ward explained in detail what he wanted by showing a number of images so that Simpson felt confident that he knew what to do. On the actual shoot, however, he was allowed “a pretty free rein” in the realisation of Ward’s intentions and in dealing with the practical day-to-day problems that arose. The difficulties of working within a limited budget meant that “we had to be fairly inventive and work with smaller toys and smaller tools than we would normally”. One problem was the cost of the lighting required for the many night scenes and the crew had to make do with relatively limited set-ups instead of being able to use “bigger equipment and lighting bigger areas and getting more control and more subtlety”.⁷⁷⁵

Visual Style

Although the film was shot in two sections - the medieval one in black-and-white and the modern sections in colour - the footage for the medieval section was actually shot on colour negative and a high contrast process used to desaturate the colour. The decision to shoot the medieval sections in black-and-white was one Ward was definite about, despite the advice of the editor, the producer and the marketing director not to do so.

⁷⁷⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁷⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

Ward explained that: "I always intended it in black-and-white, I'd written it in the screenplay, I thought it would be better dramatically, in terms of storytelling. It was essentially a storytelling decision. And also I thought it would work stylistically".⁷⁷⁶ Ward and Simpson had tested a number of black-and-white film stocks but ended up using colour stock because it made the transitions from black-and-white to colour possible in shots such as where the torch is thrown by the miners down the mine shaft. The first part of the shot is in black-and-white, but as the torch spins around and around, it progresses into colour. That Ward was aiming for a very high contrast look reminiscent of Rembrandt for example, in the black-and-white sections is attested to by Simpson: "It was a visual thing that he liked and he had seen before and really wanted to push it".⁷⁷⁷ The "painterly" look of the film was further achieved by the side lighting used in some shots to create a chiaroscuro effect.

In the contemporary sections of the film, a range of colours reminiscent of medieval painting is used in order to give the sense of the twentieth-century city "as seen through medieval eyes in terms of music and palette".⁷⁷⁸ To reference the colour and lighting, Simpson and Ward looked at illustrations by Georges de la Tour and the work of many medieval miniature painters. According to Simpson, some of the night lighting that was eventually used was radically blue because it was similar to the cerulean blue of the medieval miniature painters that Ward wanted to imitate.⁷⁷⁹ Other elements of the *mise-en-scène* that echoed this blue were the colours of "roadside telephone boxes, police lights and the moonlit blue-grey apparition of a nuclear submarine. By contrast, the fiery colours of the medieval dream of hell, here the modern world with its technological monsters of destruction, are those of Bosch, Brueghel and Grünewald. The fires of medieval torches become the sodium orange lights of the motorway and the glow of metal in a twentieth-century furnace".⁷⁸⁰ Colours were also inspired by "medieval stained glass, as in the cathedral at Chartres, as in the Duc de Berry's *Book of the Hours*, rich blues, gold, blood-red, rich greens". Other sources of inspiration for the look of the film were drawn from medieval woodcuts, and the apocalyptic etchings of Dürer, as well as from a more recent artist, Doré, the nineteenth century Bible illustrator

⁷⁷⁶ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 14.

⁷⁷⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁷⁸ Nayman, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Past Dreams of the Future," 31.

⁷⁷⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁸⁰ Ward quoted in Snow, "Performance: Visionary Force," 30.

and illustrator of *The Ancient Mariner*.⁷⁸¹ (This style of biblical illustration had already influenced *Vigil* and would later influence *What Dreams May Come*.)

The finished product did not entirely achieve these ambitions, in Simpson's view. Although some scenes such as the pouring of the molten cross worked well in terms of rich reds and blues contrasting with the black-and-white sequences, they were "not entirely successful in getting the audience to feel that we were trying to be evocative of a medieval palette" due to time and budget constraints compromising what they had envisaged.⁷⁸² Ward expressed a similar opinion: "I never achieved what I wanted to in the twentieth century [scenes] in terms of colour. I would have needed a shoot about five weeks longer – well, a couple of weeks. It was achievable, but not with our resources [...]. Whereas in the medieval scenes, I think we got there, in terms of style".⁷⁸³

Post-Production

The music soundtrack sought to create a medieval feel in its use of medieval rhythms and modes (rather than the modern major and minor scale). Alison Carter, who was then working as a journalist in Sydney was involved in doing music research on *The Navigator* after Ward had moved to Sydney to try and raise money in Australia. Ward's brief to Carter was that the music should convey "strong passion" and he wanted "natural instruments".⁷⁸⁴ Carter went around Sydney meeting a variety of musicians, from Italian bagpipe performers to Latin American musicians, and Ward eventually settled on Iranian Davood Tabrizzi, who had been classically trained in Iran and had later played with Celtic and South American folk bands, to compose the film score.⁷⁸⁵ The problem with attempting to re-create music from fourteenth century Cumbria was that only fragmentary evidence existed. In Ward's words:

Essentially you're faced with re-creating a tradition and working out what the sources of that tradition are. It's a logical process. What we [drew upon were] six different sources of music: Celtic folk music, Scottish military music, Gregorian chant and plainsong, peasant music to give it that earthy feeling,

⁷⁸¹ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 13.

⁷⁸² Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁸³ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 13.

⁷⁸⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Alison Carter, 6 August 2002.

⁷⁸⁵ O'Brien, "Success Is Being a Good Liar," 12.

nineteenth-century mining music, with squeezeboxes and single male voices, but with a different content – without the strong union feelings and that nineteenth-century sense of the world – and finally a slight Eastern feel, because people came back from the Crusades with influences from the Middle East.⁷⁸⁶

Ward suggested limitations on the type of instruments that were to be used. He banned strings because he in his view they “represented regal music, the lute, and had a sense of refinement which I didn’t want. I wanted percussive music, and music of the air, the flute, vocals, yells, screams, whoops, whistles, anything like that, anything you could blow, bagpipes [...]. I also wanted a lot of Celtic voice, if I could. I often think that what dictates style are the limitations - not the things you use, but the things you don’t use”.⁷⁸⁷ Tabrizzi followed Ward’s brief fairly closely but did utilise cellos for the bass line on occasion, as well as trumpets and the organ to provide a foundation for the other instruments. He and Ward worked together very closely: “We went through every piece, the timing and what it was aiming to do”.⁷⁸⁸ The music on the soundtrack is successful in combining diverse musical traditions to create a vivid sense of period as well as contributing to the creation of the mood of each scene and underlining the emotions of the characters.

The scale of production of *The Navigator* was much larger than that of *Vigil*, which effectively involved only one location and a small cast. Ward compared it to “a military exercise” and commented that: “It’s a real jigsaw of a film [...]. Every other shot is filmed on a different location, although you’d never know it”. The location shots were then matched up with studio locations and visual effects.⁷⁸⁹ A number of complex special effects were required, utilising technology that was not readily available in New Zealand at that time. Ward believes it was particularly in the area of special effects, where an Australian designer was employed, that the film benefited from becoming a New Zealand/Australian co-production.⁷⁹⁰ An example of a scene that was shot on

⁷⁸⁶ Ward quoted in Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 14. These sources were an interesting and thoughtful choice generally in line with recent research on the music of the period.

⁷⁸⁷ A copy of Ward’s notes to the composer indicating his ideas for the film’s soundtrack is included in Peter Hughes, *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey Study Guide* (Canberra: Ronin Films, 1989) 9-10.

⁷⁸⁸ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 14.

⁷⁸⁹ Kerry Jimson, "Vincent Ward," *Agenda*.50 (1989): 9.

⁷⁹⁰ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 12.

location and then matched with studio locations and special effects was the medieval mining machine digging through the earth which

was filmed in a three-storey set in an Auckland studio, then a model was made and painted identically so a computer-programmed camera enabled the studio scenes to be inset in the cliff face. Back projection, handmade moon and clouds being moved separately, thirty different machine sounds, impact sounds and blasts of dusts synchronised with the 'hits' added to the weeks of shooting and many people involved.⁷⁹¹

At the time the film was being made, Maynard stated that: "About half the budget is going on special and visual effects – there are more in this film than any other New Zealand film to date" and for this reason the film was studio-based rather than location-based, unlike most New Zealand films at that time.⁷⁹² It is interesting that New Zealand's largest film project would subsequently be Peter Jackson's medieval fantasy epic, although Jackson would have a vastly greater budget at his disposal, and a newer generation of computer effects.

The work of Australian visual effects designer, Paul Nichola "played an enormous part [...] in getting the powerful images which director Vincent Ward, the perfectionist, demanded".⁷⁹³ Nichola was initially drawn to the script because "it was extremely challenging visually", and he and Ward spent a great deal of time discussing how particular images might be realised. Nichola thought - as did Graham Morris, the sound recordist who worked on *Vigil* - that Ward was not very strong on practicalities: "Vincent was totally void of visual effects knowledge. He'd come up with these really difficult shots because he didn't know they were next to impossible". While some designers may have found this frustrating, Nichola felt that this lack of knowledge or refusal to accept limitations was stimulating. "It meant having to come up with new ways to achieve the effects Vincent wanted".⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹¹ Snow, "Performance: Visionary Force," 30.

⁷⁹² Dowling, "Location Report: Medieval Mystery in Manurewa," 23.

⁷⁹³ Jonathan Dowling, "In Search of the Effect," *Onfilm* 5.3 (1988): 9.

⁷⁹⁴ Dowling, "In Search of the Effect," 9.

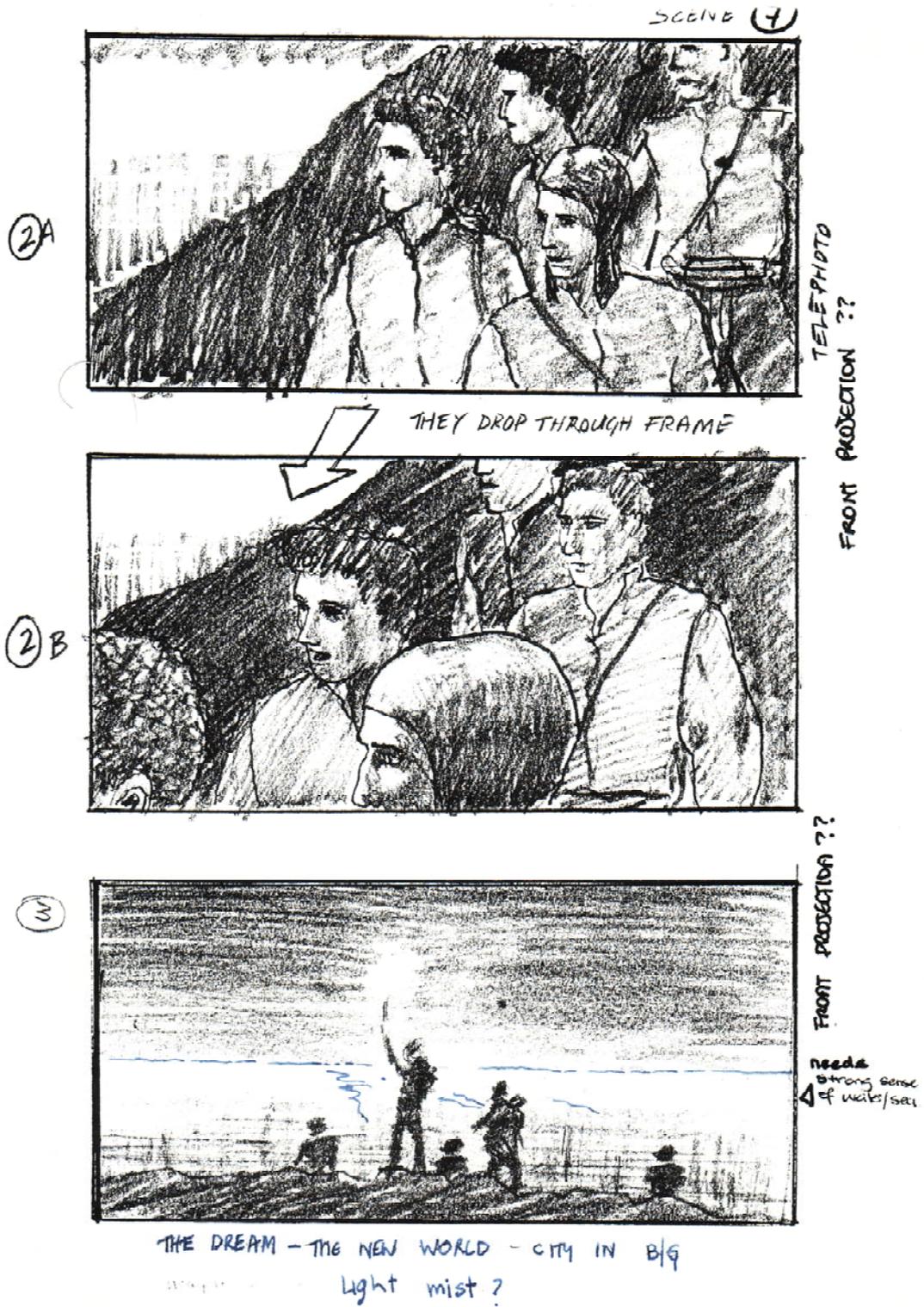


Figure 6: Storyboard of *The Navigator*, Scene 7



Figure 7: Storyboard of *The Navigator*, Scene 25

While the main crew on the shoot worked nights, Nichola and his special effects team worked days, out of “Shed Six”, one of the warehouses on *The Navigator’s* South Auckland production lot, where a number of models – such as the submarine and even a full-size horse - were housed. An important part of the visual effects set-up was the front projection room, where “various shots were merged, matted or combined with three-dimensional ‘additions’ and re-photographed”.⁷⁹⁵ Interestingly, many of the shots of the moon and the water were not based on their natural sources, but were created in the studio. The rationale behind this was that Ward had a great deal more control in the studio. One example cited by Nichola is the way the images of the moon, a recurring symbol in the film, were created.

The moon only comes out like Vincent wanted it (as a full moon) once a month. On a three-month schedule, three cracks at the moon isn’t nearly enough. Also, he wanted to get impossibly close. By having an artist Mike Worrall paint it, we had the moon at our fingertips. And we could create interesting visual effects around it as we needed. Nichola ‘sculpted’ three-dimensional clouds in front of the painted moon and ‘choreographed’ their movements across its face.⁷⁹⁶

It is relevant to draw parallels here between the privileging of studio over location sets in German Expressionist film, for much the same reason – greater control. Fritz Lang’s *Siegfried* (1924) with its enormous studio sets of a forest of carefully constructed trees springs to mind as a comparison. Ward appears also to have relied largely on the kinds of models and matte effects that Lang had employed, whereas later films such as the *Rings* trilogy would shift the creation of effects from the camera to the computer.

The submarine shots were produced using a four-metre scale submarine but the difficulty was trying to get the ‘sea’ foaming convincingly in miniature as the submarine broke the surface of the water. Nichola says that the team “looked at a lot of old movies and archival footage to see what we had to achieve, and then we experimented”. Eventually, they found that a particular brand of dishwashing liquid worked well in conjunction with spraying the surface of the water with CRC. The

⁷⁹⁵ Dowling, "In Search of the Effect," 10.

⁷⁹⁶ Dowling, "In Search of the Effect," 10.

submarine was then filmed “against a black backdrop and moved up and down on hydraulics. The camera was set in an underwater housing”. The result, according to Nichola, was “fantastic. You can’t tell it from the real thing”. The most difficult sequence to achieve was that of Connor tunnelling through the mine, seen in closeup, with the camera pulling back to reveal the mine in cross-section through the earth, and then moving to ground level to reveal a mountain and lake. As Nichola points out: “To do that as Vincent wanted it, in one continuous shot, was possible but it would have been cost-prohibitive”, so they solved the problem by building a twelve metre high ‘rock face’ in the studio and finishing the rest of the shot in post-production.⁷⁹⁷

Simpson adds: “The original script was astounding and we had to compromise in the making of the film as you do in every film, but [in terms of] the vision, it was sixty or seventy percent of what Vincent really had on the storyboards and in his brain”. He is philosophical about the compromises that needed to be made but agrees that Ward is a person who finds it harder to compromise than many directors, and that it was probably “very disappointing” for him to have to drop scenes from the script.⁷⁹⁸ Despite the reductions made in the length of the script, however, the rough cut of the film was still very long – about two and a half hours, and some further scenes had to be dropped.

The Narrative

What Ward was aiming to create in the contemporary sequence was a world that the medievals were seeing for the first time, without any prior knowledge. “The film is a medieval odyssey. It’s the story of people meeting their ancestors, of people meeting their descendants. It’s naïve, [it] involves a suspension of disbelief, is very childlike. I wanted a sense of wonder”.⁷⁹⁹ *Vigil* had also had a ‘childlike’ viewpoint and its narrative had incorporated some mythic elements, but Ward distinguishes between the two films: “[*The Navigator*] is not as personal a film as *Vigil*, because of that adventure structure [...]. It’s a little bit like an old heroic myth, but it obviously takes you places where old heroic myths don’t normally go”.⁸⁰⁰ *The Navigator* is also structured around Griffin’s enigmatic dream, and the meaning of that dream - the mystery at the heart of the film - slowly emerges throughout the journey. *The Navigator* has been compared to

⁷⁹⁷ Dowling, "In Search of the Effect," 10.

⁷⁹⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999.

⁷⁹⁹ Nayman, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Past Dreams of the Future," 31.

⁸⁰⁰ Sally Zwartz, "Vincent: The Odyssey," *On Film* 6.2 (1989): 12.

“a sort of *Pilgrim’s Progress* as Griffin leads the fellowship across the pitfalls and barriers of (to a medieval mind) the terrifying modern world”.⁸⁰¹ In view of the allegorical nature of the film, this is an interesting comparison that lends itself to further exploration and analysis. As in John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the pilgrims in *The Navigator* have to face not only physical terrors (such as monsters) but also spiritual terrors. Ward’s characters also to some extent represent different attitudes, ideas or beliefs. They are not individualised in as complex a way as Toss in *Vigil*. Connor represents the enigma, Griffin the naïve visionary, Martin the philosopher, Ulf the good-hearted superstitious rustic, and Searle the pragmatist. The end point of both journeys is the celestial city, and both sets of pilgrims are rewarded for their labours, although in *The Navigator*, the reward comes at the price of Griffin’s life. The connection with Bunyan is, however, mainly to do with genre or ‘feel’ (the particular mythic atmosphere sought by Ward). *The Navigator* is a *Pilgrim’s Progress* read and re-interpreted by a modern Expressionist artist, an artist who has his own moral values but is no longer able to operate in Bunyan’s secure world of belief.

The film may have fallen short of the director’s vision but this was certainly not due to any lack of planning. The storyboard of *The Navigator*, parts of which were drawn by Ward, shows his attention to detail and meticulous research. The characters are carefully drawn down to the facial expressions and details of their costumes. (See the illustration for Scene 7, p.242). Also included are suggestions for the way the scenes are to be shot, for example via a telephoto lens and front projection (Scene 7) or using a painted backdrop (see the illustration for Scene 25, p.243). There are detailed drawings of settings such as the location at Mt Ruapehu, indicating the direction of the sun and routes in and out of the area. Photos are utilised in one scene (Scene 37), where the villagers, having dug through to the Antipodes, emerge from the tunnel to a scene of city lights, illustrated by photos of what appear to be Wellington lights. In some scenes there are detailed production notes, an example being the scene of the villagers crossing the motorway where the use of colour-coding indicates which sequences will use production vehicles, which will use existing traffic and which will be pick-up shots. According to Terry Snow: “This scene was eventually rehearsed with stunt drivers and filmed on a closed-off portion of Waipuna Rd, Mt Wellington, before being intercut

⁸⁰¹ Eion Scott, "An Allegation of Fantasy," *Signature* 14.3 (1989): 40.

with traffic scenes on the Newmarket viaduct”.⁸⁰² The storyboard of scene 84 where Connor climbs the cathedral spire to place the cross on top includes elevations of the cathedral and exact sketches as to how the cross is to be winched up. Other drawings for this scene indicate suggestions for camera angles. Every film involves a great deal of production planning but Ward’s shot-by-shot storyboard is unusually detailed.

The storyboard also proves that the narrative of the film was carefully thought-out, contrary (at least on one level) to the opinions of critics such as Brian McDonnell who commented: “I feel that (Ward) has the finest visual sense of any of our directors. Unfortunately, this wonderful eye is not matched by an equal facility with scriptwriting or the fundamentals of storytelling [...]. In the final analysis, the film badly needs a writer more able than Ward or his collaborators. One finally gets sick of painterly moments with no coherent structure”.⁸⁰³ Tim Pulleine offered a similar criticism: “*The Navigator* throws up some difficulties in ascribing meaning to its strange concatenation of events. In some respects, the film’s procedures” [such as Griffin watching the television images] “appear rather schematic [...]. Certain passages, however – in particular, the harbour crossing with the white horse in the rowing boat – register as little more than exercises in picturesque surrealism”.⁸⁰⁴ McDonnell sees the story as a parable but is unclear about parable’s final meaning: “Does Ward mean that little New Zealand, like little Griffin, cannot escape the nuclear world, that our anti-nuclear policy is misguided? Does he intend to say with his Totentanz [dance of death] imagery that there is no possibility of beating the AIDS threat?”.⁸⁰⁵

An alternative reading to such “commonsense” readings is that of Russell Campbell who suggests aligning the film with the surrealist tradition, and sees “the very concept of medieval miners stumbling round Auckland” as having “the lunatic impossibility of a flaccid pocketwatch”. He cites the motorway sequence as another example of an incongruous (surrealist) juxtaposition. In other words, “the refusal, finally, of the narrative to submit to rational explication” can be justified as the assertion of a surreal logic.⁸⁰⁶ The film thus explores “an alternative vision” that regards New Zealand’s position on the country’s nuclear-free policy as stemming not from “rational refutation

⁸⁰² Snow, "Performance: Visionary Force," 31.

⁸⁰³ Brian McDonnell, "The Navigator - Badly Off Course," *North and South* March 1989: 128.

⁸⁰⁴ Tim Pulleine, "The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey," *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1989): 145.

⁸⁰⁵ McDonnell, "The Navigator - Badly Off Course," 128.

⁸⁰⁶ Russell Campbell, "The Blindfold Seer," *Illusions*.10 (1989): 15.

of the logic of nuclear deterrence” but from the “gut feeling of revulsion that a nuclear warship provokes”.⁸⁰⁷ Campbell’s comments have the virtue of acknowledging that the film’s narrative has its own kind of coherence and logic (a logic of the unconscious rather than the everyday conscious mind), but they overstate the links with Surrealism. Ward’s creative process was very different from the pure dream sequence of a film like *Un Chien Andalou* (Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel, 1928). One way to explain the difference would be to describe Ward’s method as closer to Expressionism than Surrealism. His film is the detailed and in many respects consistent working out of a fantastic premise, strengthened by systematic historical research yet ultimately interesting because of the opportunity it provides for astonishing images and experiences, new ways of seeing, and extreme emotions. The narrative is a vehicle for this work of the emotions and the imagination. A Surrealist reading of the film is possible (as Campbell demonstrates), but such a reading understates the coherence of the film as “an old heroic myth”.⁸⁰⁸

The narrative requires no more of a leap of the imagination for the viewer than most films belonging to the science fiction/fantasy genre. Alun Bollinger does however make the point that Ward takes huge risks in his approach: “I feel that he’s inclined to throw the story out for the sake of the visuals [...]. Vincent will actually throw away a sequence if he can’t get the right visual for it and I’ve even seen him effectively destroy a sequence because he hasn’t got time to shoot it all [...]. He’ll spend all morning getting the right shot, but he needs five shots to tell the story, so he can’t tell the story”.⁸⁰⁹ According to Bollinger, part of the problem is that a shot in Ward’s view “can’t just tell a story, it has to do more than that, it has to have an emotional or some power within it [...]. The visuals have to have their own power”. If there are weaknesses in the narrative structure in Ward’s films, they stem not from the script, in Bollinger’s opinion, but “as a result of the way Vincent makes the film”. He cites *The Navigator* as a film that has “a wonderful script, but it’s a bit hit-and-miss dramatically”. This is because “there are times when I think that the camera should not be there, it’s telling the wrong story. The shot might be all right but it’s the wrong story at that point in time”. The section of the film where the villagers cross the motorway is an example, in his view, of how Ward privileges the visual effect he wants to achieve

⁸⁰⁷ Campbell, "The Blindfold Seer," 16.

⁸⁰⁸ A Jungian rather than a Freudian reading would seem more useful here.

⁸⁰⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

over the drama. Bollinger believes that this scene should have been shot either from the point-of-view of the medievals or with a very long lens so that the cars were seen as a blur, the way the villagers would have perceived them, being unable to recognise them for what they were. “We should know it’s cars but we should never see it from our point of view. [The point of view] should always be with the characters”.⁸¹⁰

Bollinger’s comments imply a particular theory of the relationship between image and narrative, as indeed McDonnell’s comments reflected his particular assumptions. Both are closer than Ward to orthodox modes of filmic story-telling. It is, however, the unorthodox nature of the narrative and the power of the imagery that sets *The Navigator* apart from mainstream science fiction narrative such as George Lucas’s *Star Wars* trilogy. In *Star Wars* the viewer is dazzled by the special effects, but the images are generally conventional ones that quickly fade from memory. The power (to use an appropriate phrase) is in the story, even though it must rely upon the viewer’s suspended belief with regard to space travel and the existence of alien beings. In contrast, although *The Navigator* is also a heroic myth, its images have such a vivid life of their own that there is more room for viewers to exercise their own imagination and to construct their own meanings from the images. Ward’s approach can also be explained by arguing that for him the story is more difficult to separate from the images than it is in the case of *Star Wars*. The “drama” that interests him is the drama subsumed within *mise-en-scène*, the projection of his *auteur’s* vision. This is not to imply that such a director can do no wrong. In addition, *Star Wars* and *The Navigator* can both be seen as authorial projects, with the differences a matter of style and emphasis (differences that may be defined in terms of textual qualities, or the viewer’s experience, or the director’s production methods). Whether one prefers Lucas’s films or Ward’s, each represents a basically consistent aesthetic, marshalling the possibilities of the film medium in a distinctive and powerful way.

Critical Response

The Navigator was widely acclaimed both in Europe and in Australasia. Like *Vigil*, it was selected for competition at Cannes, and Ward was given a five-minute standing ovation at the Cannes screening. It also won a number of prizes at European festivals and in Australia and New Zealand. Because the film is an Australian/New Zealand co-

⁸¹⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998.

production, in Australia it is often seen as an Australian film, despite most of the talent and locations belonging to New Zealand. Ward himself is adamant that it should be seen as a New Zealand film.⁸¹¹ However, *The Navigator's* status “as the peak achievement of New Zealand’s film culture” has been the subject of debate among New Zealand critics, as Chris Watson has pointed out.⁸¹² He sees it as having been championed locally as a way to advance the case for art cinema generally, as an alternative to the greater box-office success of more populist films such as *Goodbye Pork Pie* (Geoff Murphy, 1980) or *Came a Hot Friday* (Ian Mune, 1984). Watson is interested in the way international awards serve to ensure that when such a film “is screened in New Zealand, that portion of society which would not regularly go to the cinema as part of a popular culture experience will make the effort to attend as part of an elite cultural experience”.⁸¹³ His comment fits perfectly with Maynard’s admission that his marketing strategy for Ward’s films was to gain overseas critical recognition so that the local audience might overcome its cultural cringe. But Ward himself had a different perspective. He refused to accept the idea that ‘art film’ was the antithesis of ‘popular film’ and stated that his aim in *The Navigator* was to reach a wide rather than an art house audience – “not only through the comedy. It’s a tale, and the intention was that you could enter the story at your own level, and draw from it at your own level”.⁸¹⁴ He described the film as “basically an adventure story. It’s meant to be acceptable. Hopefully it can work for a range of audiences”.⁸¹⁵ The film’s references to other genres, particularly science fiction, and its comedic characters such as Ulf, had a potential appeal for young audiences. The relatively large budget of *The Navigator* certainly encouraged Ward to seek a larger audience; and the combination of Cumbria and New Zealand encouraged international distribution. The flaw in Ward’s conception of the film as working on many levels was its failure to work consistently on the level of orthodox narrative (as McDonnell’s, Watson’s, or Bollinger’s response shows).

Some New Zealand critics focussed on the “European feel” of *The Navigator* and compared it to the work of European directors such as Tarkovskij, or to Bergman’s *The*

⁸¹¹ Ward quoted in Calder, "The Navigator: Vincent Ward's Four Year Odyssey," 1.

⁸¹² Chris Watson, "The Navigator," *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives on Culture and Art*.20 (1990): 141.

⁸¹³ Chris Watson, "New Zealand Feature Films: Their State and Status," *New Zealand Sociology* 3.2 (1988): 89.

⁸¹⁴ Ward quoted in Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁸¹⁵ Werner, "A Mediaeval Craft," 20-21.

Seventh Seal (1957) which was also set against the background of medieval responses to the plague; but some also saw this as derivativeness. Scott Murray's main criticism of the film was that

too many images and stylistics in the film are 'borrowed' from filmic predecessors – in particular, Andrei Tarkovskij's *Andrei Rublev* (1966) and *Ivanovo Detstvo* (*Ivan's Childhood*, 1962). The stark close-ups of Griffin, the wheel over the pit, the very contrast of black clothes against white snow, the floundering white horse and the final shouting about 'The bells, the bells' go beyond mere homage to an unnerving preferencing of another's work above one's own. (As well, the staging of several scenes, and the theatrical performances, bespeak the influence of Peter Brook.)⁸¹⁶

It is a common problem faced by art films in New Zealand that they are criticised for being too European (and too derivatively European), and not sufficiently local. Ward's view of national identity is broader, as Brent Lewis notes:

Vincent Ward's vision for New Zealand is still finding form. Far from narrowly nationalistic, it is instead couched in universal terms. 'This is a country that's beginning to have values outside pioneering values, values that are not to do with merely New Zealand colloquialism, but are imaginative and a way of saying there is not just one way of seeing the world, there are a hundred million ways, there are as many ways of seeing the world as there are people'.⁸¹⁷

It is notable that the New Zealand filmmakers Ward associated with shared his distrust of traditional definitions of national identity. The filmmakers in Maynard's stable all tended to challenge mainstream notions of New Zealandness. Ward's choice of setting for the film – a Celtic village in medieval Cumbria in the north of England - arose from his interest in and exploration of the Celtic background of his father's forebears who had originally come from Ireland. He wrote that his father "often spoke of his Celtic origins" and finally, at the age of eighty, went back to Ireland to find where his ancestors came from; but "when he traced the site he found the village had disappeared and the land was now covered with forest. As he searched through parish records, I imagined him uncovering medieval manuscripts and therefore it was his voice I heard

⁸¹⁶ Scott Murray, ed., *Australian Film 1978-1992* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993) 254.

⁸¹⁷ Ward quoted in Lewis, "F&F Special Report," 12.

retelling the story of *The Navigator*".⁸¹⁸ Ward is convinced that, in terms of a New Zealand national identity, all Pakeha New Zealanders

have as much claim to the medieval as the English do, or the French or anyone else. In terms of the majority of Pakehas living in this country, our relationship is as direct as is an Englishman's. We may not have the same buildings here, but we are directly descended. And so therefore we have as much claim on that culture, which is inherent in our culture anyway, as anybody else does [...]. There is no such thing as pure culture. And New Zealand is just the same [...]. Some people assume that Pakeha culture is not a rich thing. This simply isn't true. Although colonial cultures have similarities, each one brought different things with them. They're fed from different roots which they combine with the fresh influences of their new country and its people.⁸¹⁹

This is a sophisticated sense of culture, different from a nationalist rejection of Englishness or a post-colonial suspicion of settler culture. Part of the idea of the film was "to take our distant ancestors and have them discover their descendants, to question what they would make of us, not knowing where they had arrived".⁸²⁰ This conception has a strong resonance for Pakeha New Zealanders at a time when Maori critics see their culture as lacking in richness in comparison with that of the *tangata whenua*. A reviewer in *The Bulletin*, the Australian weekly, made the perceptive comment:

Not even the bundle of honours which the film carried off at the AFI awards can disguise its essentially New Zealand character. Ward comes from a family which has been farming in New Zealand for four generations and it shows. His feeling for bleak snowy landscapes, his choice of a theme bound up in medieval British history and a sensibility which sets out to unite the visual and the literary combine to give *The Navigator* a very un-Australian texture.⁸²¹

If one were wanting to stress the "New Zealand character" of the film – complex but full of familiar associations - one might also relate it to the curious strain in Pakeha art that has seen New Zealand's pioneer situation as medieval, so that artists such as Colin

⁸¹⁸ Ward, *Edge of the Earth: Stories and Images from the Antipodes* 84.

⁸¹⁹ Ward quoted in Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁸²⁰ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 10.

⁸²¹ Quoted in Zwartz, "Vincent: The Odyssey," 13.

McCahon and Rita Angus turned to medieval art as a direct source of inspiration.⁸²² (Angus went so far as to say that “New Zealand is medieval in culture”.⁸²³)

Equally, however, the film’s concerns can not be exhausted by a national frame of reference. *The Navigator* has been seen as Ward’s most overtly religious film. Tim Pulleine, for example, points out the similarities to Tarkovskij “not just in terms of the visual atmosphere and the mixing of monochrome and colour, but even more so when it comes to the inexplicit but pervasive underpinning of religious symbolism”.⁸²⁴ The most obvious religious aspect of the film is the theme of sacrifice, which had earlier appeared in *Vigil* in the sacrifice or offering Toss makes in an attempt to bring back her dead father, and recurs throughout *The Navigator* in Ulf’s desire to make an offering of the “little lady in wood” given to him by his mother before she died. It can also be seen in the cross being placed on the cathedral spire as an offering, and finally in Griffin sacrificing his life to spare the other villagers from the plague. Judith Dale has also pointed out that:

There is a saviour figure. Griffin is the visionary and at times leader of this small company, though less of a man than the others; the imagery of Jesus Christ has always had an other-than-macho, less-than-fully patriarchal aspect, for example, as the ‘lamb of God’. It is Griffin who a-spines, who climbs the sphere to raise the cross, takes up his cross to raise the cross, as a crowd gathers at its foot. In the filmic fiction of this cruci-fiction, there follows a prolonged and excruciating struggle between death and life as he finally fixes the cross in place.⁸²⁵

She sees further allusions to the passion story in similarities between the narrative and the stations of the cross, and in the possibility that Connor represents Judas.

Despite these possible allusions to Christianity, it is important not to interpret the film as a straightforward allegory. The villagers themselves do not have an homogenous attitude towards religion – Martin is interested in the metaphysical aspects of religion

⁸²² Gordon Brown comments: “the late medievalism of [Rita] Angus, [Sidney Nolan] and McCahon reflects the extraordinary focal power exerted on the whole fabric of western culture by the triumph of Italian [late medieval and Renaissance] painting”. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, revised ed. (Wellington: Reed Books, 1984) 71-72.

⁸²³ Rita Angus quoted in Melvin N. Day, *Rita Angus* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982) 49.

⁸²⁴ Tim Pulleine, “The Navigator,” *Films and Filming*, 413 (1989): 35.

⁸²⁵ Judith Dale, “Circumnavigations,” *Illusions* (1989): 44.

but Ulf's beliefs seem more like superstition. As Ward points out: "The miners' religion is not straightforward. They're pagan Christians essentially".⁸²⁶ John Downie elaborates on this idea:

There is no great evidence offered in the film of a highly elaborated or established religious environment; these are marginal people, scraping a bare survival by their wits and inventiveness, creating a proto-industrial community, not an obviously agricultural one, the sort in which, at a later historical date, religious nonconformity might find its natural home [...]. But they do have a notion of a centre (the cathedral), and hold fast to the power of Christianity's symbols.⁸²⁷

If we link the film's religious aspects with the 'medieval' aspects of New Zealand art, it is relevant to recall the complex, questioning nature of McCahon's Christinaity. Like the spirituality of a modern Russian filmmaker such as Tarkovskij, it is strongly intermixed with cultural politics. John Maynard has a broader perspective than those who read *The Navigator* as a religious allegory:

It's a misunderstood film because it's quite complicated. Many people see the film [...] almost entirely as a film about, say faith, in a religious sense. It's not quite as simple as that [...]. It is a film about the power of stories, just how powerful a story can be, and the secret of that film is the telling of a story by Griffin. And the power of that story was enough to save the village, even though he was betrayed by his brother.⁸²⁸

Maynard also links the director's interest in Expressionism with his Catholic upbringing, on the basis that "Expressionism has always been, as far as I'm concerned, connected more closely with Catholicism than say to Protestantism". This is an interesting comment in the light of the origins of Expressionist art – *die Brücke*, which was based in Dresden and *der Blaue Reiter* which was based in Munich – both predominantly Catholic regions of Germany. Maynard's rule of thumb is that both Expressionism and Catholicism are based primarily on emotion, while Protestantism can in many respects be associated with reason. For Ward, as for the Expressionists,

⁸²⁶ Campbell and Bilbrough, "A Dialogue with Discrepancy: Vincent Ward Discusses the Navigator," 11.

⁸²⁷ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 16.

⁸²⁸ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

politics is not simply a matter of parties and elections but also a matter of culture, and it looks towards fundamental issues of life and death.

In an interview for the Catholic magazine, *New Zealandia*, Ward discussed his interest in religion as gradually evolving to become a “very rich resource” for him to explore as a writer. While he was at art school he was interested in films by Fellini and Bergman, but “it had never occurred to me that I would ever make use of Catholicism in my films [...]. I thought that Catholicism and its icons were the very last thing I would ever depict”.⁸²⁹ The change in Ward’s attitude had partly to do with his experience in making *In Spring One Plants Alone*, which he describes as “a harsh experience, but also almost a religious experience [...]. I had a strong sense of [Puhi’s] incredible faith and belief which has sustained her in a life that was frequently difficult”.⁸³⁰ Ward’s changed perception of what filmmaking was about (“exploring who you are and where you come from”) was also partially responsible for his wanting to explore the religious aspects of his own background, as he had begun to do in *Vigil*. Clearly, however, he saw religion as a resource, as a possible language, as an area to explore, rather than as a set of ready-made answers.

The Navigator focuses particularly on Celtic Christianity:

I liked the idea of using more directly Catholic imagery – not through the disturbed psychology of an eleven-year-old girl, but straight out of our own background [...]. The film is consciously built on classic Catholic imagery – crosses, Celtic crosses, forging crosses, the spire, aspiring Gothic architecture and ideas of faith and belief, of self-doubt, of insecurity, of scepticism and cynicism.⁸³¹

Ward sees the differing attitudes to faith of the fourteenth and twentieth centuries as reflected in their contrasting architecture. “The cathedral’s architecture contains implicit ideas of aspiring towards something, of a finger to God”, as opposed to the pragmatism and scepticism reflected in the black mirror-glass boxes of late twentieth-century architecture. He adds that the film explores issues of faith but can not be seen as “a statement of faith”. He was more interested in exploring “those alternations between

⁸²⁹ Ward quoted in Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 39.

⁸³⁰ Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 40.

⁸³¹ Ward quoted in Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 41.

belief and unbelief, faith and scepticism that all believers experience".⁸³² In *Edge of the Earth* the monk's attitudes, which "swing between belief and unbelief" in his retelling of the story of *The Navigator* seem to echo the director's own perspective: "My own religious attitudes are very ambiguous. Religious faith is an enormous leap to make. Somewhere I want to believe in those things, but at the same time in some ways, I'm quite sceptical. So the equation changes all the time for me".⁸³³ All this is very reminiscent of McCahon as the great example of the New Zealand artist who used religious discourse to raise issues of life and death neglected by what he saw as the prevailing local pragmatism and materialism.

The director's admiration for "'transcendental' filmmakers reflects his own interest in looking beyond the purely physical world of action. They include the French Catholic Robert Bresson and the Danish Lutheran Carl Dreyer, noted for their austere contemplation of spiritual themes", or as Ward describes them, "filmmakers who are interested not just in the drama immediately in front of them, but in what is happening on the other side of that".⁸³⁴ In those terms, issues of spirituality lie at the heart of Ward's films. In *A State of Siege* Ward explores the notion of unknown forces that can not be rationally explained. Maori spirituality is one of the primary themes of *In Spring One Plants Alone*; and *Vigil* explores the contrast between the relatively more sceptical and pragmatic view of the world represented by Birdie and Ethan and Toss's mystical, visionary notions - a debate that is continued in *The Navigator*. If Russian filmmakers such as Tarkovskij explored religious themes as a challenge to Communist materialism, then Ward can be seen as challenging the limited horizons of New Zealand society (and film culture).

One aspect of *The Navigator* that represents a departure from his previous work is its shift away from a female central character. The world of *The Navigator* is virtually all male, with the exception of Linnet who plays a very minor role in the film. Dale's feminist reading of the film makes the point that maleness is "normative" for a Christian reading of the film. "The central story, as always, is of phallic erection, here of the cross on the spire". She does however, argue that there is a feminine aspect in the film's subtext: the one woman in the story is "a source of life-not-death in the village

⁸³² Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 41.

⁸³³ Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 41.

⁸³⁴ Denham, "Profile: Heaven's above, a Religious Filmmaker," 41.

more obviously than Griffin”, and the world of the story “is a world of snow and light – earth, air, fire and water – and these, allied with Linnet’s pregnant belly, signify a more ancient feminine to the masculine of storied spire and aspiring story”.⁸³⁵ In addition, as Downie has noted, the male character Ulf has a softer, more feminine aspect than the others: “In a film without any significant female presence, the character of Ulf conveys both a certain vulnerability of the flesh and an openness to emotion as traits of a particular compassion for life. Very much, one feels, his mother’s son, we find him in front of the wooden cross of her grave, dedicating the forthcoming pilgrimage to her memory”.⁸³⁶ Ward has not commented on why he chose to move away from a feminine to a masculine world in *The Navigator* but it is perhaps relevant that the mythic narrative quest has often been based around male heroes (as it is in Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy).

This quest is related by Downie to the Romantic tradition:

[*The Navigator*] has an ambition of theme, typical of Ward’s films as a whole, which relates strongly to ideas of the Romantic Sublime, to an aspiring sense of humanity, in which the human adventure in the world is to be characterised by feelings of exultation, awe and scale – a heightening, a taking to lofty levels – in which intellectuality and spirituality are combined to locate, in the early nineteenth century words of William Wordsworth (a Cumbrian, like Ward’s miners) in *The Prelude*, as ‘something evermore about to be’.⁸³⁷

Downie also argues that the medievals’ notion of the copper cross as “a tribute” and “the human worth at the centre of endeavour” has been lost, and “it is a particular mark of Ward’s romanticism that he views such an evolution as meat for moral argument”.⁸³⁸ It is certainly valid to see medieval subject matter as a Romantic interest, although it seems a somewhat partial historical perspective to relate Ward to Wordsworth. Romanticism has evolved into new forms, including Expressionism, since the nineteenth century. Arguably, these new forms – with their stronger strain of existential

⁸³⁵ Dale, "Circumnavigations," 45.

⁸³⁶ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 17.

⁸³⁷ The quote referred to by Downie comes from M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993) 129. Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 49.

⁸³⁸ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 29.

uncertainty, anxiety, and absurd juxtapositions – can tell us more about Ward’s work than the kinds of “moral argument” characteristic of Wordsworth.

Summary

The Navigator draws on a number of motifs that recur throughout his work. One of these is the white horse (glimpsed briefly in *In Spring One Plants Alone*) which plays an important role in the scene where the medievals cross the harbour by boat, eventually saving Connor from falling after the rope breaks when he is attempting to place the cross on the cathedral spire. As Judith Dale notes, the “apocalyptic white horse”, like “the flying skeleton”, has further significance in recalling “traditional medieval death imageries”.⁸³⁹ Downie also comments on the white horse in *The Navigator*, stressing pagan rather than Christian associations:

Pagan horse worship was common, and held a strong power within Celtic tradition – for example the kings of Ireland were ferried between this world and the next within the womb of the White Mare Epona, and it is this white horse, which is drawn in the chalk at Uffington in Berkshire, England. Ward’s obvious fascination with the animal recalls Tarkovskij’s similar employment of its presence in several of his films, both as an expression of a (literally) unbridled source of libidinous energy, and as a harbinger of separation or death.⁸⁴⁰

In *Map of the Human Heart* the white horse figures both as a real object and as a representation, with the images of the white horse at Uffington reminding the viewer of its historical and spiritual significance. Overall, the meaning of the horse in Ward’s work can not be fully explained by reference to any one traditional frame of reference - it needs to be seen as an object of mystery and fascination that accumulates associations over the range of his *oeuvre*. Such recurring themes are common and are evidence of his *auteurist* approach. Another example is the theme of the navigator, personified here by the boy Griffin who guides the others on their quest, but in the final analysis “sees too much”. This theme is further developed in *Map of the Human Heart* where the motifs of map and cartographer become catalysts for the main action of the film.

⁸³⁹ Dale, “Circumnavigations,” 44.

⁸⁴⁰ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 54.

The Navigator represented a new peak of achievement for Ward. Despite the gaps caused by production problems, the film displayed a scope, richness of texture, and imaginative power that confirmed his status as an *auteur* on the international scene. Its very ambition and density, however, also exposed weaknesses such as his tendency to over-complicate or over-crowd a film. One of the practical consequences of the project – being forced to look for overseas funding – may be seen as an inevitable step in the career of an international artist, but it would also have some disorienting effects on his next projects.

Chapter Seven

Hollywood and Beyond

By the time Ward left New Zealand, his basic aesthetic and his habits as a director had been clearly established. His later films departed from New Zealand source material, and also emerged from very different production contexts. Ward needed larger budgets, but the price for that was some loss of control as an *auteur* and a pressure on him to make films that were more commercial, with a stronger storyline and if possible an upbeat ending. Not surprisingly, each film project became a struggle. This chapter will examine the director's work in the late 1980s and 1990s, from his involvement in the script of *Alien 3* (1992), to his feature films *Map of the Human Heart* (1993) and *What Dreams May Come* (1998), and will briefly discuss the television commercial for Steinlager that he made in 1995. The intention of this discussion is to consider continuities and discontinuities between these films and his earlier work, thereby raising some questions about the advantages and disadvantages of various production contexts for a creative individual such as Ward.

Alien 3

After *The Navigator* a number of Hollywood studios had approached Ward to work on large projects that had affinities with *The Navigator*. One of these was Twentieth Century-Fox who in 1990 invited Ward to direct a sequel to *Alien 2*. According to David Giler, a writer and producer on *Alien 3*, there had been several earlier versions of the script, but the producers wanted something different. They had seen *The Navigator* and approached Ward on the basis that he would be able to offer an original approach.⁸⁴¹ Having read the script, which he did not like, Ward initially turned down the offer. He was then asked if he would agree to work on a new screenplay for the film, starting with "a blank page".⁸⁴² The story was then developed into a screenplay

⁸⁴¹ Interview with David Giler, *Alien 3 Special Edition DVD*, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004.

⁸⁴² Vincent Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002.

with John Fasano, and when the production company requested a different ending, Ward began work on a new version with Greg Pruss.⁸⁴³

Ward's story idea was to link the space age back to the Middle Ages, via

a wooden orbiting vessel about a mile in diameter that was built as a multi-tiered monastery and that, with its inhabitants, had been towed into, and left to rot, in space. Of course it had the barest necessities for maintaining gravity and air, but these were hidden within its husk. So you had a medieval environment akin to Bosch and a group of ascetic monks. They see a star in the East and believe it is a sign from the cosmos that will bring them redemption, when in fact it is Ripley's partly destroyed ship carrying the Alien. The idea was to link the Alien with ancient tales of the Devil and to play off the realities of a biological predator versus a mystical demonic creature out of myth. This becomes more complicated when Ripley finds she has been impregnated by the beast. Again the story played off demonic possession versus being taken over by a purely biological host.

Ward felt the film could

create a medieval apocalyptic landscape both around Ripley and the monks and in her own mind, as she became progressively more 'possessed' by the Alien. I imagined that she would have visions of the Alien along the lines of the Temptation of St Anthony, so it had both a sexual thread and a strand to do with her lost opportunities to give birth. I figured she would feel this would be her last opportunity to have a child. This would have an extra weight to it as she was plagued with guilt over the only child she had ever had who she had not been able to bring up. Subsequently her daughter had died leaving a sense of loss and regret. In taking one calling, she had lost a more human course. So in a sense she was fighting her own demons as well as the beast. I had intended that there would always be a clash between different belief systems – hers and the monks'.⁸⁴⁴

⁸⁴³ Neither of these writers was credited as contributing to the screenplay when the film was released, but Greg Pruss was described as a "conceptual artist" on the end credits.

⁸⁴⁴ Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002.

As Jonathan Rayner points out, the script has many of the hallmarks of Ward's work - "the characteristic elements of religious allusion, individual sacrifice, subjective but incomplete perception and the parabolic significance of personal dilemmas".⁸⁴⁵ In terms of its visual concept, the story has a number of similarities to *The Navigator*, in particular the references to medieval painters such as Hieronymus Bosch. In *Alien 3* however, Ward seems to have returned to his initial interest in telling the story from the point-of-view of the female protagonist, this time a relatively young woman who is bearing a "child". The story had some resonances with *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) and *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976), earlier science-fiction/horror films which were both extremely successful at the box office, and it was possibly this connection that the studio saw as having commercial potential.

At first there was a very enthusiastic response to Ward's ideas, and a considerable sum was spent on constructing sets at the Pinewood Studios in London, but as the film got closer to production, "the producers became nervous about anything with an even faintly religious content. They would feel more secure if it was firstly a group of miners or prisoners, and secondly that it should be on a planet".⁸⁴⁶ Hollywood has gone through cycles when religion was seen as a potential selling point (as it is today, in the wake of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, 2004), but in the early 1990s it was subject matter that induced nervousness. Part of producer Walter Hill's objection to the story was also, according to Nowra, that although Signourney Weaver would be coming in contact with the inhabitants of the space ship, the story would have no sexual tension because they would be Jesuits – not only all males, but priests, and Hill felt that it was necessary for the film to have some sort of sexual tension.⁸⁴⁷ The struggle with producers, investors and other stake-holders was not congenial to Ward who found himself (according to Steve Braunias) becoming "a bit player in the Hollywood process of politics, committee meetings and eyes on the next *Alien* sequel".⁸⁴⁸ Ward sums up the problem as the studio's unwillingness to seriously commit itself to his vision, but he is diplomatic about the dispute with the production company, and in particular with Walter Hill. He describes the rift somewhat euphemistically, as due to "creative differences over the story" and explains that: "Essentially, we started to head off in

⁸⁴⁵ Rayner, "Paradise and Pandemonium," 48.

⁸⁴⁶ Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002.

⁸⁴⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

⁸⁴⁸ Steve Braunias, "Tunnel Visions," *Listener* 10 April 1993: 29.

different directions. The world I wanted the film to take place in was being chiselled away. They wanted more of a penal colony in space, I wanted more of the monastic colony in space".⁸⁴⁹ In a later interview, however, Ward points out that there was a great deal riding on the sequel financially, and the studio wanted to "play it safe".⁸⁵⁰

Despite Ward's assertion to Stan Jones that he does not see this film as his work, he was given sole story credit and some of his ideas were in fact, realised. In an article for the *Listener*, Ward is quoted as saying: "The film as it finished has all the same story points that I'd put into it – the alien inside Sigourney [Weaver] for example – but they didn't solve the suspense. It was less imaginative, and just wasn't the film I wanted to make".⁸⁵¹ Although some of the "surface ideas and images" such as the death of Ripley at the end, and a haircutting scene, were retained in the film, the central idea of an intense, medieval-style religious community was not. Ward "wanted the community of monks to feel as real as possible, along the lines of dissident religious communities who have been forced by their beliefs to separate themselves from those around them".⁸⁵² Some elements of this did, however, survive in the film. The prisoners on the planet have apparently experienced some kind of religious conversion of a fundamentalist, apocalyptic nature, although this does not prevent the almost palpable sexual tension (and the threat of sexual violence from the convicted rapists amongst the prisoners), when they see a woman for the first time in years. Allusions to religion also appear in the soundtrack, especially at the beginning of the film, in a musical score that is reminiscent of plainsong (at the time enjoying popularity in the music industry and within New Age culture). Vestiges of Ward's visual concepts for the film, which he described in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner as "Bosch in Space", inform the look of the film, but Ward feels that neither the "governing intelligence behind them" nor "the plastic qualities of the images" really come through strongly.⁸⁵³ In the end, he felt the suggested changes to his story destroyed the concept he had been working on and left during pre-production of the film. Later, however, as he wryly comments: "My

⁸⁴⁹ Braunias, "Tunnel Visions," 29.

⁸⁵⁰ Interview with Vincent Ward, *Alien 3 Special Edition DVD*, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004.

⁸⁵¹ Braunias, "Tunnel Visions," 29.

⁸⁵² Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002.

⁸⁵³ Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002. Ward notes that it is possible to see some of the Bosch images in a recent BBC documentary on the *Alien* series.

executive at the studio approached me three times over the next ten years to redo a version of my story that was truer to my original intentions”.⁸⁵⁴

Map of the Human Heart

Map of the Human Heart was an idea Ward had started to develop before *Alien 3*. As the Hollywood experience had proved ultimately unsatisfactory, *Map of the Human Heart* represented an attempt to find an international production context that could still give him the kind of authorial control he had known in New Zealand. The basic idea had a number of similarities to *The Navigator* in that it belonged to a recognisable mainstream genre – in this case, the epic romance – while at the same time demonstrating some of the features of the art film, in particular, the emphasis on visual aspects and the film’s strong authorial vision. Timothy White (the Australian co-producer) encapsulated both these qualities when he described the film as “an ambitious art movie”.⁸⁵⁵

Like *The Navigator*, *Map of the Human Heart* juxtaposes an earlier, more “primitive” setting, with a later, more “civilised” one, although arguably it focuses to a greater extent than his earlier films on action rather than the psychological state of the characters. It is, however, a highly unusual story dominated by some extraordinary visual sequences. It begins with Avik, a Canadian-Inuit, telling the story of his life to a young cartographer. As a child living in the Canadian Arctic, Avik had met British map-maker Walter Russell, who was on an expedition to the Arctic. Russell, realising that Avik was suffering from tuberculosis, took him to a hospital in Montreal, where he encountered and eventually fell in love with Albertine, a beautiful half-native Canadian. After they were separated, Avik returned to his people but the process of westernisation had made him unfit for life in the Arctic, and he was banished from the village. Taking up Russell’s offer to go to Europe, Avik became a bombardier in a Commonwealth bomber squadron during the Second World War and met up again with Albertine, who was now promised to Russell. When Albertine realised her true feelings for Avik, Russell took his revenge, and they were once again separated, this time on a permanent basis.

⁸⁵⁴ Ward, e-mail to Stan Jones, 27 May 2002.

⁸⁵⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

Characteristically, *Map of the Human Heart* is set in extreme locations and was shot partly in freezing spring weather on Baffin Island in the far north of Canada. (The other scenes were filmed in Montreal and London.) White has commented on Ward's penchant for difficult locations: "He thinks that you can't have great art without some kind of pain, some kind of sacrifice. Because he is inspired by elemental things, he needs to set his films among those extremes of climate with extraordinary locations and unusual people and faces".⁸⁵⁶ Like *The Navigator*, *Map of the Human Heart* involves a journey from one side of the world to another, but the main protagonist of the film does not find salvation through sacrifice - he rejects the love of his life to return, alone and disillusioned, to the place where he began. The idea for the film came out of Ward's own interests, in this case, his meeting with anthropologist and filmmaker, Arthur Brody, at the London Film Festival. Brody had lived in both Indian and Inuit communities and he told Ward about some Indians during World War Two who believed that they could will enemy planes to crash to the ground. Another of his stories that fired Ward's imagination concerned a tribe of Canadian Indians who "believed that if they lived a good life and set their traps in the right places, they could map their way to heaven".⁸⁵⁷

Ward's intention in both *The Navigator* and *Map of the Human Heart* was to concentrate on story and character rather than to emphasise the 'primacy of the image', but the images in these films are no less powerful. Similarly, critical response has tended to focus on the effectiveness of the visual aspects and the perceived weaknesses of the narrative. This would indicate that while the director may have intended to place more emphasis on orthodox storytelling, his method for developing a script remained the same. Ward's input into the script of *Map of the Human Heart*, which was co-written by Ward and Louis Nowra, a well-known Australian playwright and screenwriter, provides another example of what was now a familiar approach for him.⁸⁵⁸

He asked Nowra, whom he already knew socially, to work with him on the concept for a film based on the notion of an Eskimo who gets lost in the Australian desert. As always, he began with images rather than a storyline, and he and Nowra started collecting prints of paintings and magazine illustrations which they would tear up and

⁸⁵⁶ White quoted in Susan Chenery, "Going to Extremes," *HQ* Autumn 1993: 25.

⁸⁵⁷ Jo Litson, "Map of Vincent's Heart," *More* April 1993: 34-35.

⁸⁵⁸ In the credits for *Map of the Human Heart*, Nowra is credited with writing the screenplay, and Ward the story for the film.

stick on the wall of Ward's basement flat in Sydney, then make up stories based on the images. Nowra recalls that the director was "fascinated by body scarring, for some reason [...] and we were determined that we were going to write an epic love story, because we wanted it to be about love". Many of the images were of paintings by Frida Kahlo whom Ward was interested in because of her scars. Later, the character of Albertine was envisaged as being "a Frida Kahlo figure, but wilder".⁸⁵⁹ Ward already had the title of the film, *Map of the Human Heart*, and they collected more and more images loosely based on the title - of women, paintings they loved, and maps. Thinking the film was going to be set during a war, they also collected pictures of submarines. The resulting eclectic collection of images "didn't make sense and we'd tear down those images that we didn't particularly like, or that didn't particularly inspire us".⁸⁶⁰ Nowra was able to relate to this visual method of approaching a story because, like Ward, he had also wanted to be a painter and he was very interested in art.

The process involved linking images with emotional situations, which eventually were linked up to make a story. After an outline had been completed, they applied for a script development grant from the Australian Film Commission, which enabled them to travel to Canada. From Alaska, they travelled further north, then separated for a time, Ward staying with a group of Inuit on Little Diomedede, an island in the Bering Sea between Alaska and the Soviet Union, and Nowra journeying to the Shishmaref Island in the Arctic. Ward was particularly interested in Inuit art because of its topographical nature: "I think the reason it's map-like is because to survive in that environment, you have to have a sense of what it's like to see the terrain from above, and memorize it so you can pass on information. The same is true of aboriginal art in Australia. An art of a people who dwell in the desert is essentially an art of landmarks".⁸⁶¹ One of the concepts which Ward was fascinated by was the idea of a map drawn on animal hide, and he and Nowra went up to the Canadian Arctic circle, beyond Fort St John, to a settlement of Beaver Indians to research their traditional belief in the map which enabled an Indian shaman to guide his way to heaven. Nowra was interested in the Metis, a French Canadian term for mixed breed Indians, who were a "despised people". He had met a few Metis in Winnipeg where he had travelled on his own, and decided

⁸⁵⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 19 February 2000.

⁸⁶⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 19 February 2000.

⁸⁶¹ Ward quoted in John Calhoun, "Map of the Human Heart," *Theatre Crafts International* 27.6 (1993): 11.

that he did not want the heroine to be full native Canadian Indian, but a mixture of French and Cree Indian, so she would be “caught between two worlds”.⁸⁶²

In Toronto Ward and Nowra interviewed a number of men who had flown in Lancaster bombers during World War Two. Some of the ideas for the film, such as the couple making love on the barrage balloon, were based on the real experiences of the men they had interviewed. One man who had been a cartographer, was asked what kind of things the Inuit would say when they spoke English. He told them about an Inuit youth who had a characteristic phrase he used when speaking to Europeans: “Holy boy, holy boy”, a phrase Ward would later utilise as Avik’s favourite expression.

When they had completed their research in Canada, Nowra decided to go to Ireland, where he had family connections, to start writing the screenplay, thinking that Ward would return to Australia. The director, however, wanted to be involved in the script-writing process rather than to allow Nowra to develop the screenplay on his own - a decision that is typical of Ward’s *auteurist* approach - and he joined Nowra in Ireland. They worked in a hotel, writing out the scenes and putting them on index cards with titles such as “Avik thrown up on blanket”, “Lancaster bomber Dresden”, so that they would be able to rearrange the scenes as necessary. Nowra describes the process as being like a “jigsaw puzzle”, but because it was a visual method and Ward “has a great sense of how an image will work and flow into another, [even though] sometimes that doesn’t make narrative sense”, this way of doing things helped them speak the same language. They never discussed dialogue, according to Nowra, because: “We thought if you could tell it from images then we didn’t need dialogue”. Avik is a relatively inarticulate character who can not express his emotions, and Nowra believes Ward “could identify with that as somebody who could express through visuals rather than through articulation of his thoughts”.⁸⁶³

Funding from the film was to come from Australian, French, Canadian and British sources, but the fact that the film was an international co-production, caused many complications for the producers, Ward and Maynard. (Maynard was later replaced as producer by Tim Bevan, who had co-produced *The Navigator*.) They were restricted as to whom they could employ as crew and cast. Because most of the locations were in

⁸⁶² Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February, 2000.

⁸⁶³ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

Canada, they were required to utilise Canadian crew members, particularly for pre-production and post-production, and Canadian co-producers (Linda Beath and Paul Saltzman), but the Australian funding required that some Australian crew members work on the film. These included an Australian editor and an Australian co-producer, Timothy White. In addition they needed to have a French co-producer (Sylvaine Sainderichin), French actors and a French composer, as some of the funding was to be from France. This kind of complexity is not unusual for a film of its kind, destined for release through the international art cinema circuit. Such a context still permitted Ward to be very much the *auteur*, acknowledged in the credits as producer, director and writer of the story. In practice, however, there would prove to be limits to his control over financial and practical decisions.

White went to Montreal to work on the final draft of the script with Ward and Nowra before shooting began. He realised even then, that the script was too ambitious for the budget. The film soon ran into financial difficulties when the promised French investment did not eventuate and only half of the thirty million dollars the film had been budgeted for materialised. A week after shooting had started in the Arctic, it had already gone over budget, and a completion guarantor was called in. White found himself in the difficult position of being sandwiched between Ward “who wanted nothing but the best” and the guarantor “who wanted nothing but the cheapest”. White felt that although his duty as producer was to ensure that costs were kept down, his priority was to serve the film, so: “It wasn’t just a case of fighting to make it as cheaply as possible. In many ways it was fighting to preserve the integrity of the piece, and resist brutal and destructive compromises”; but like Alun Bollinger, White believes that Ward’s “determination to go to extremes in terms of locations [...], to get a sense of magic, a sense of authenticity” risked ultimately compromising the essence of the story.⁸⁶⁴

Under the control of the completion guarantor, Nowra was summonsed to the shoot to rewrite scenes. Some that were intended to be filmed over six days had to be shot in only one. Nowra felt that the script was severely compromised in some cases, an example being the long section comprising forty-five minutes of screen time following Avik’s story after the bombing of Dresden, which had to be dropped from the script .

⁸⁶⁴ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

This, in Nowra's opinion, considerably weakened the epic narrative structure that they had been working on, based on the model of *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962). To compensate for their inability to use the scenes of Avik escaping from Dresden to France, the director and writer had to concentrate on the love story. Another scene that was omitted in the film was the scene of Albertine riding a horse in Albert Park, standing up as the Metis rode (like her father in the photograph she had of him). This scene was intended to link the child and adult characters and to overcome the problem of casting a sophisticated French actress (Ann Parillaud) as the grown-up version of a wild ten-year old, part-Cree Indian child (Annie Galipeau). White believes that some of the best sequences in the film, like the story of Avik and Albertine as children, which originally ran for seventy-five minutes but was reduced to approximately eighteen minutes of screen time, were cut because they could not be justified as crucial to the storyline.⁸⁶⁵ To attach so much importance to the basic storyline was not in keeping with Ward's emphasis on mood, image and texture.

The presence of the production guarantor brought additional tensions to an already fraught set. Some of the tensions were caused by the people unused to working with Ward, feeling that they were not appreciated, because Ward was "so caught up in his own vision". An exception to this was the child actors who worked on the film. According to Nowra, "Vincent was terribly, terribly good with children, and he realised they only had two or three takes in them, and then they'd become exhausted because they're kids". Nowra believes that the director has such a rapport with children because "there's something about their spontaneity and their lack of barriers that he loves" and that he also identifies exceptionally strongly with children because "they're not verbal". One actor who recognised Ward's talent and his affinities with French *auteur* directors was Jeanne Moreau, who played the part of Sister Banville. Watching him work, she commented: "Vincent, he is crazy, is he not? All the best directors are crazy". Nowra interpreted this comment as indicating Moreau's belief that "he had the ability, like Truffaut and Buñuel, to march to his own internal rhythm, and he wasn't an average director".⁸⁶⁶

By the end of the shoot, when they were filming in London, Ward was "like a marathon runner who had little breath left", yet he found strength in the adversity of the

⁸⁶⁵ Lynette Read, interview with Timothy White, 29 September 1999.

⁸⁶⁶ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

situation.⁸⁶⁷ In an interview with Susan Chenery, Nowra is quoted as saying that Ward “needs opposition, he needs to be against the elements. He is an intensely interior person, an outsider [...]. Nothing will stand in the way of what he wants to get. He won’t compromise”.⁸⁶⁸ As Nowra recalls, one of the very last shoots was a night shoot at the top of the Royal Albert Hall at midnight. The safety netting had been taken off from underneath the camera, in order for Ward to get the composition he wanted looking down from above and there was only a pole in the middle, which would result in a fall of one hundred metres if things went wrong. The cameraman refused to do the shot, so Ward did it instead, roped up on a harness. As Nowra comments, “adversity brought the best out of him” and he was able to get the shot he wanted on the first take, which was fortunate because on the second take (intended as a backup), he hit the pole and destroyed the camera.⁸⁶⁹ His willingness to risk his own safety and possibly even his life to get the shot he wanted demonstrates the director’s total commitment to his vision.

Due to budget constraints, Ward was unable to get all the footage he needed for the film, and as a result, much of the story of *Map of the Human Heart* was recreated in the editing, which was a long, drawn-out process, supervised by Nowra, White and Ward. The first cut was about four hours long, and they hoped that Miramax Films might be able to fund the film for another million dollars to allow them to make the epic they wanted, but this did not eventuate, and the film had to be truncated to one hundred minutes in length. There was also pressure from Miramax, in particular from Executive Producer Harvey Weinstein, to supply a “happy ending” to the film, since the Americans believed the ending was depressing and wanted Avik to be reunited with Albertine. Ward fought for his conception and Nowra believes that it was only his “stubbornness” that prevented the ending of the film being altered.⁸⁷⁰ Phillip Strick points out that the ending incorporates both possibilities in that it includes not only footage of Avik’s death shot from above as he is slowly immersed in the icy waters, but also a sequence, shot from Avik’s perspective, as he lies prone on the ice, of himself and Albertine “heading by hot-air balloon to some unknown Elysium”. This represents a “vestige of a possible alternative ending in which, having accepted his daughter’s

⁸⁶⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

⁸⁶⁸ Chenery, "Going to Extremes," 25.

⁸⁶⁹ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

⁸⁷⁰ Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

invitation to her wedding, he seizes the opportunity to whisk Albertine off into the skies".⁸⁷¹ Albertine's song on the soundtrack, referring to the lovers being reunited in heaven, also relates to both possibilities. The last sequence of the film - which lends itself to multiple readings - returns full circle to the opening sequence of Avik as a child being thrown up into the air, and leaves him "literally in suspension, unfulfilled as orphan, halfbreed, Eskimo, adult, lover, war veteran, or mapmaker".⁸⁷²

Strick's overall assessment of the film was typical of the response of American and European critics who gave Ward credit for having attempted something on an epic scale even if it was not entirely successful: "Like Ward's other works, the film is an evocative visual epic open to many interpretations. His sequences are magnificently framed and seldom predictable".⁸⁷³ American critic, Michael Wilmington's evaluation of the film is similar: "*Map of the Human Heart* had to be a masterpiece to succeed. And since it isn't - since the portrait of the star-crossed, mixed race Inuit lovers in a decades-spanning doomed romance obviously falls short of its own grand intentions - there may be too quick an impulse to dismiss it, to ignore the (considerable) shards and chunks of grandeur that remain".⁸⁷⁴ Another review in *Sight and Sound* described the film as: "An astonishingly ambitious and frequently breathtaking work" which "plays on a map-making allegory - for Walter a map is a battle plan, a guide to conquest and seduction; for Avik it represents the Westernisation of himself and his land". (This is a dichotomy that New Zealanders can understand well. There has been much debate in this country in recent years about cartography as an agent of colonisation.) The reviewer recognized that the narrative structure presented problems but praised the film for its intentions: "Although Ward struggled through numerous re-edits to arrive at a final cut, this still resembles an unfinished work in progress [...]. A wonderful work of art".⁸⁷⁵ *Map of the Human Heart* thus developed the same kind of reputation as Ward's earlier features - a flawed masterpiece.

Critical response to the film in Australia and to some extent New Zealand, was more negative - a response Nowra believes was one of the catalysts for Ward later making his home in United States. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, critics tended to

⁸⁷¹ Philip Strick, "Map of the Human Heart," *Sight and Sound* 3.6 (1993): 58-59.

⁸⁷² Strick, "Map of the Human Heart," 59.

⁸⁷³ Strick, "Map of the Human Heart," 59.

⁸⁷⁴ Michael Wilmington, "Firestorm and Dry Ice," *Film Comment* 29.3 (1993): 51.

⁸⁷⁵ Mark Kermode, "January Video Choice," *Sight and Sound* 4.1 (1994): 58.

praise the film's imagery and point out the weaknesses in the narrative structure, weaknesses which, due to budget constraints, were often beyond the control of the filmmakers. John Downie argued that the disadvantage of "the assertion of the visual/aural dimension in advance of the dramatic" in Ward's work is that this

can reveal a certain blandness, a fear of confrontation and human complexity, an over-reliance on the iconic and the schematic, a giving over of the human richness of story to the allure of mere spectacle, a fact which comes even more to the fore in his subsequent films, *Map of the Human Heart* and, with unctuous sentimentality, *What Dreams May Come*.⁸⁷⁶

An exception to this criticism of the narrative structure of Ward's work was Mark Tierney's review in *The Listener*: "If there's one ability that lifts Ward above most of his contemporaries, it's storytelling. His new film is absorbing from the first and holds you easily for the next two and a half hours".⁸⁷⁷

John Maynard regards the film as being "a personal sort of *novachenka*, which is like a spiritual and narrative take on the history of the twentieth century, of the clash between the old and the new – two world wars and ways of seeing the world. Again, the centre of it was a great romantic idea. It was a spiritual and ambitious movie".⁸⁷⁸ Other critics also focussed on the Romantic nature of the film, but often interpreted Romanticism negatively in its most populist sense. An example was Costa Botes: "Though the cynical might claim that [Ward] is self-consciously living out the romantic ideal of the Byronic artist hero, there is no denying that Ward will literally go to the ends of the earth for an unforgettable image". The reviewer was critical of the depiction of the love story in the film: "What he draws on [...] is a rather hackneyed romantic triangle that seems to be mostly a pretext for elaborating on his story's metaphorical conceits, rather than being a particularly gripping or emotionally involving in itself".⁸⁷⁹ After the film was shown as a work in progress in a non-competing slot at Cannes one critic noted that the weaknesses in the love story stemmed from the cutting out of scenes from the script

⁸⁷⁶ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 29.

⁸⁷⁷ Mark Tierney, "Character and Pace," *Listener* 10 April 1993: 46.

⁸⁷⁸ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

⁸⁷⁹ Costa Botes, "Ward Fails to Find the Heart," *The Dominion* 12 April 1993: 7.

so that “Crucially, Avik and Albertine don’t have enough scenes together as adults to establish their long-term love story”.⁸⁸⁰

John Downie identified Romanticism (in the more profound, historical sense of the term) as “the central gesture of Ward’s film” and described the two landscapes between which Avik, the eternal wanderer, oscillates as versions of the Romantic Sublime:

On the one hand, a wild landscape of primal power, frozen white, within which the ‘noble savage’ can eternally be blessed in his innocence. On the other, a dark purgatorial vision, burning black and red, which blasts the soul, moment by moment, with the curses of experience. In the first instance man and nature in idealised, bound arraignment. In the second, man and history in tormented discord.⁸⁸¹

He goes on to argue that the story is predicated on the notion of “unrequited love – another Romantic leitmotif, more a spiritual than a sexual yearning, which by its very nature can never be resolved or accommodated”.⁸⁸² Such a conceptual framework, close to those we have used in discussing earlier Ward films, seems successful in directing attention to the deeper energies of the film. Yet Downie still ends on a negative note. He feels that despite the film’s “iconographic magnificence”, it lacks “credible dramatic drive” and “intellectual muscle”, and rather than being too ‘arty’ it is “simply not ‘arty’ or ‘artful’ enough”.⁸⁸³ This perhaps sums up the dilemma of *Map of the Human Heart* - it is neither sufficiently intellectual to appeal to an art-house audience nor sufficiently accessible for a mainstream audience.

In terms of its audience, Ward and Nowra were aiming to capture the “serious entertainment market”, that is to make a film “that was accessible, but still unique and special. We were both very conscious of telling a story that would reach people. Film-making is essentially storytelling, and it’s nice to have a big group around the campfire rather than a small one”.⁸⁸⁴ Unfortunately this attempt to cross over from the art film to the mainstream audience did not succeed, and too many reviewers responded like Raybon Kan (in a review for TV3) in finding the film obscure and pretentious: “This is

⁸⁸⁰ David Stratton, “Map of the Human Heart,” *Variety* 1 June 1992.

⁸⁸¹ John Downie, “Seeing Is Not Believing,” *Illusions*.21/22 (1993): 4-5.

⁸⁸² Downie, “Seeing Is Not Believing,” 5.

⁸⁸³ Downie, “Seeing Is Not Believing,” 6.

⁸⁸⁴ Ward quoted in Peter Calder, “Finding His Way,” *New Zealand Herald* 8 April 1993: Section 2, 1.

an Art Film [...]. And as we well know, in an Art Film, we never know what is happening; we never really know what it's about. But we do know, this being an Art Film, that it's supposed to be good for us".⁸⁸⁵

Map of the Human Heart presents an interesting example of the complex issues surrounding national identity. As a multi-national co-production, made while Ward was living in Australia, it could not, at first glance, be conceived of as a 'New Zealand' film in any sense. The locations of the film and its characters are a world away from New Zealand, yet Allen Meek, a New Zealand academic living in the United States when he first saw the film, was profoundly affected by its relevance to him as an expatriate New Zealander. He comments that the scene where Avik and Albertine, both Native Canadians encounter each other on the dance floor in a ballroom in England during World War II struck him as

uncanny, no doubt partly because I saw it in the context of my own displacement as a New Zealander living in the United States [...]. This transplanting of tribal peoples into the imagery of Anglo-American popular film, while based in certain historical actualities, presents a telling example of cinematic dream-work in a post-colonial situation. The encounter presented me with a dream image of my own national identity in crisis.⁸⁸⁶

Meek's reading of the film is from a post-colonial standpoint, from which he argues that:

Map of the Human Heart tells a story about the catastrophes of colonisation and of world war, the two related through the experience of those colonized peoples who found themselves drawn into a military conflict fighting on behalf of their European 'fatherland'. So Avik, the Inuit protagonist in Ward's film, finds himself flying bombing raids over Germany in World War Two with a crew of white colonials including an Australian and a Canadian. Avik's story individually embodies the history of colonization. Catching tuberculosis by contamination with a white Canadian cartographer, his body – as colonial

⁸⁸⁵ Kan quoted in Downie, "Seeing Is Not Believing," 4. Kan was reviewing the film for TV3's *Nightline*.

⁸⁸⁶ Allen Meek, "New Zealand Cinema Leaves Home," NZ Journal of Media Studies 3.1 (1996): 40.

territory – is progressively re-coded by European maps, eyeglasses, diseases, medicines, hospitalisation, education, socialisation and, ultimately, warfare.⁸⁸⁷

While a post-colonial critique offers a useful starting-point, it does not cover the film's autobiographical elements (discussed below) or the Romantic themes of the wilderness and alienation that link strongly with Ward's earlier work.

In *auteurist* terms, the film bears many of the hallmarks of a Ward film. The narrative is informed by the telling of a story (like *The Navigator*); the setting of much of the film, as in most of Ward's films, is a bleak landscape of extremes; and the central protagonist for the first half of the film, is a child, from whose viewpoint the story is told. The story revolves around the love of two outsiders, and "in that sense, returns to a recurring theme in his work – that of the isolated, even marooned individuals on the edge of a hostile world".⁸⁸⁸ Certain motifs in the film echo earlier films – that of blood for instance, in the scene where Avik's blood (from his tubercular lungs) is splattered on Walter's face, reminiscent of the sequence in *Vigil*, where blood from a lamb being docked splatters Toss's face. (Also, this film was originally to be entitled *First Blood Last Rites*.) There is also a familiar emphasis on aerial shots, and the motif of the white horse, to cite a few examples.

Some critics have commented on the theme of vision linking *Vigil*, *The Navigator* and *Map of the Human Heart*: "Ward's films abound with intoxicated sight, and the stories which elaborate themselves around it are themselves thematically and narratively defined in terms of seeing, vision and revelation. The very titles, *Vigil*, *The Navigator* and *Map of the Human Heart* suggest particular ways of tackling the inscrutability of appearances".⁸⁸⁹ Downie linked the notion of revelation to childhood perception: "The protagonists of both [*Vigil*] and *The Navigator*, the provocateurs of the images offered to us on the screen are children, little criminals of perception; and this childlike and 'savage' sensibility is also carried forward through the central character of Avik, the Inuit 'Holy Boy' of *Map of the Human Heart*".⁸⁹⁰ Despite their heightened sensibilities, as Jonathan Rayner noted, their vision clashes with other realities. The child protagonists of Ward's films are "fitted into arbitrary, externally imposed or

⁸⁸⁷ Meek, "New Zealand Cinema Leaves Home," 40.

⁸⁸⁸ Calder, "Finding His Way," 2:1.

⁸⁸⁹ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 8.

⁸⁹⁰ Downie, *The Navigator: A Mediaeval Odyssey* 8.

divinely directed patterns. Their awareness of the future or a subjective truth behind the superficial flow of events does not confer on them any authority over the outcome of a wider adult or predestined narrative”.⁸⁹¹ Thus while Avik perceived Albertine as being his “soul-mate”, he was unable to prevent their separation when she was taken away from the hospital.

Michael Wilmington theorised that in Ward’s films there is another recurring character: - that of “the outsider, the tempter, the traveller from a more civilized world”. In *Vigil*, the mysterious stranger is Ethan who upsets the balance between Toss and her mother and grandfather; in *The Navigator*, Connor is the traveller to the outside world who brings the plague back with him. In *Map of the Human Heart*, “Avik, the happy but unlucky Inuit, is seduced by the British cartographer Walter, who takes him away to Montreal, inspires his enlistment in the World War Two RAF, and eventually causes his participation in the Dresden fire-bombing – apocalyptic savagery that destroys Avik’s lifelong romance with Albertine and sends him home again, prematurely old, all romance and illusion blasted”.⁸⁹²

Like most of Ward’s films, *Map of the Human Heart* has autobiographical elements in that it owes much to the love story of Ward’s parents, who met in Israel at the end of the Second World War, as detailed in Chapter One of this thesis. This story – the chance meeting of exiles who had been uprooted from their homelands – has parallels with the story of Avik and Albertine in *Map of the Human Heart*, but unlike his parents’ love story, there is no “happy ending” and the lovers are never reunited.

Another aspect of the film for which Ward drew from his own experiences is his nomadic lifestyle and the effect that it has on his relationships, which has resonances with the separated lovers in the film. “I travel almost continuously, so I’m dislocated from where I come from and frequently, from the person I’m involved with [...], and it’s that dislocation that I relate to in *Map of the Human Heart*.”⁸⁹³ He expanded on this notion in an article in *Stamp*:

That nomad thing informs my relationships with people, and it’s really part of the context of *Map of the Human Heart* that a lot of contemporary relationships

⁸⁹¹ Rayner, "Paradise and Pandemonium," 48.

⁸⁹² Wilmington, "Firestorm and Dry Ice," 52.

⁸⁹³ Ward quoted in Litson, "Map of Vincent's Heart," 35.

are more fractured than perhaps ever before except in times of war. We have the technology to travel so easily, and the facilities for both men and women to be really independent. In all sorts of ways, there are fewer bonds holding people down to a particular place and a particular relationship. So I think that thing of forming an intense bond with somebody, an intense relationship with someone and then keeping on crossing paths, seems to be kind of relevant, at least in my life.⁸⁹⁴

Ward's experience is a common one in a post-modern, post-colonial world, where many people are dislocated from their roots, from their families, and from their relationships with loved ones. Avik's return to his homeland, albeit a land which is no longer the land of his childhood, at the end of the film, represents the search for identity that remains a prime concern in Ward's films. It is another aspect of *Map of the Human Heart* that can resonate strongly with the experience of New Zealand viewers, living as we do in a marginal, post-colonial country that is still struggling to establish its own identity.

In general, *Map of the Human Heart* took the concerns of Ward's earlier films from a national to a global context. Like the protagonists of his New Zealand films, Avik and Albertine are outsiders who are neither white nor Indian/Inuit, and it is their recognition of the nature of their "otherness" that forges the close bond between them. Ward has stated on several occasions that he is interested in characters on the perimeter of society, and themes of alienation inform all of his films to one degree or another. The characters in *Vigil*, for example, are isolated and inarticulate and there is a strong sense that they are alienated from the land that is a remorseless adversary to those who try to tame it. In *Map of the Human Heart*, the Arctic is similarly represented not only for the European members of Russell's expedition, but also for the Inuits. When Avik is banished from his village for bringing bad luck to the hunt, his grandmother commits suicide so that she will no longer be a burden in an environment where there is not enough food for everyone. Despite these more extreme conditions, Ward in interviews has stressed the similarities between the Arctic and New Zealand as countries that are

⁸⁹⁴ Bernard McDonald, "Mapping Paths: The Guide to the Love of Life," *Stamp* 1993.

both on the outer edges of the world, with the result that “our view of the world is similar”.⁸⁹⁵

As an attempt to find a larger audience for his filmmaking internationally, *Map of the Human Heart* had mixed results. That it made little money for Miramax is evidenced by the studio eventually selling the rights of the film, as one of several films it had “acquired but could not afford to release”, to the Disney studios to release on video.⁸⁹⁶ Nevertheless Ward remained optimistic: “Believing in the material – that’s the main thing. If you have an honesty and integrity about how you do things, it brings out veracity. There are some directors who keep making films they care about but still manage to reach a wider audience”.⁸⁹⁷

1993-1995

Ward had now had unsuccessful encounters with both Hollywood and with international co-production arrangements. His experience of making *Map of the Human Heart* “left him feeling drained and it didn’t make any money”, but at least “everyone sort of felt they could raise their heads about it”.⁸⁹⁸ His work on the film resulted in other job offers in Hollywood and he was given about five hundred scripts to read, all of which he declined. He retreated instead to Sydney, bought himself a house in Surrey Hills, but then somewhat surprisingly given his experiences with *Map of the Human Heart* and *Alien 3*, moved back to Los Angeles on a semi-permanent basis, and set out to re-establish his career in Hollywood. He must have realised that it would always be difficult for him to adapt to Hollywood, but perhaps it was simply that he had outgrown New Zealand in terms of the scale of film funding available there.⁸⁹⁹ France and Canada had also proved to be disappointing.

He continued to be determined to work only on films that he believed in, but to earn a living in Hollywood he turned to acting, making a cameo appearance in *Leaving Las Vegas* (directed by Mike Figgis, 1995) and playing minor roles in other films, including a low-budget independent comedy, *The Shot* (Dan Martin, 1997), and another film

⁸⁹⁵ Ward quoted in Butcher, "What Films May Come," 108.

⁸⁹⁶ Peter Biskind, *Down and Dirty Pictures: Miramax, Sundance, and the Rise of Independent Film* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) 142.

⁸⁹⁷ Calder, "Finding His Way," 2:1.

⁸⁹⁸ Gordon Campbell, "Driven to Dreams," *Listener* 9 November 1996.

⁸⁹⁹ Cf: "Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman," *Ad/Media* 11.3 (1996): 19.

directed by Mike Figgis, *One Night Stand* (1997). Ward had started doing improvisation at the age of fifteen and had always done occasional acting work, an experience he saw as useful for a director: “I find that I’m respectful of what other directors do: generally I’m the most supportive person of the director on the set because I just want them to have their chance in every way”.⁹⁰⁰ Working with other actors has also been important in helping Ward keep in touch with the film-making process from the point-of-view of the actors: “I feel it makes me more empathetic with my actors and more available to them. It keeps me on my toes, it forces me to work on accents, it forces me to be somewhat more knowledgeable about them as a director”; but at the same time he acknowledged that: “I was really putting myself in the front line, it was scary”.⁹⁰¹

Another project that Ward worked on in Hollywood during this period was the early version of what became *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003). He was initially asked to produce and direct the film, and he spent five years researching nineteenth-century Japan and developing the script with a number of different writers. His version of the story centred around an American salesman who got caught up in the Samurai rebellion of 1876 – an event which had enormous social and cultural consequences for nineteenth century Japanese society - but he became more interested in focusing the story on a female character caught between the two sides, rather than on the male lead. Realising that Hollywood would not be interested in expanding the female side of the story because it would make the film less action-orientated, he offered the story concept to the film’s current director, Ed Zwick. As with his experience of working on *Alien 3*, Ward realised that “creative differences” with the production company would not allow him to pursue his vision of the film. When the film was finally released, however, Ward received credit as an executive producer.⁹⁰²

In 1995 Ward returned to New Zealand to direct a Steinlager commercial for Saatchi and Saatchi, the first television commercial he had made for some years. (He had directed some in Australia.) At the time, he was working on the script of what would become *What Dreams May Come*, and its film production company offered him the equivalent amount of money to stay in Los Angeles, an offer he refused. This would

⁹⁰⁰ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Vincent Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁰¹ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Vincent Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁰² Butcher, "What Films May Come," 82.

indicate that his motivation for making the commercial was not based, as *AdMedia* suggested, on the yearning some film directors have to make a television commercial, “because it’s quick, lucrative, and you don’t have to find financial backers”, but to re-establish links with New Zealand.⁹⁰³ The Steinlager commercial was based on a nostalgic recreation of some of New Zealand’s great sporting moments from the 1950s to the 1990s and ended with a futuristic sequence of the hologram of a rugby player scoring a try; the underlying message being that “Steinlager is ever-present at those ‘quintessentially New Zealand moments’”.⁹⁰⁴

Saatchi and Saatchi’s choice of “a rising arthouse director” to direct the commercial was potentially a controversial one, even though Steinlager was being marketed as having a broad appeal (unlike more macho local beers). What Ward was able to bring to the commercial was a “filmic” look, using “grainy black and white for farm and shearing-scenes from the 50s, a retouched-in-colour look for the 60s and a “Kodachrome” effect for the 70s”. His experience working with actors was also useful in directing the largely improvised performances, improvisation being a choice made by the director because: “It’s through improvisation that something real and believable happens”.⁹⁰⁵ In addition, Ward brought to the project his customary *auteur*-style approach in his active involvement in all aspects of the production, an example being his overseeing of the commercial’s soundtrack. The post-production sound had not quite been approved when he was due to return to the United States, so Ward arranged for the post-production company to play the soundtrack down the telephone to him at Auckland airport before his flight left, to give it his final imprimatur.⁹⁰⁶ While the whole project seemed somewhat out of character, Ward insisted that he enjoyed the immediacy of the work: “I get a buzz out of shooting a commercial. It’s short and sharp. You get that very intense burst of activity. It’s like an adrenalin buzz, to an extent”.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰³ "Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman," 18.

⁹⁰⁴ "Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman," 18.

⁹⁰⁵ "Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman," 18.

⁹⁰⁶ *AdMedia* notes that: “It’s unusual in itself for a director to retain final control over a tvc soundtrack” (“Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman,” 18.

⁹⁰⁷ Ward quoted in "Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman," 19.



Figure 8: Steinlager ad. An example of the "filmic" look Ward achieved

What Dreams May Come

Ward's next feature film, *What Dreams May Come*, was a love story centred around Chris, a doctor, and his wife Annie, a painter. Their lives were blissfully happy until their two children were killed in a car crash. Annie was reduced to despair, but Chris brought her back to herself, until he was also killed in a car accident. After his death, Chris was transported to Heaven - which for him, was a landscape of one of Annie's paintings. Annie however, committed suicide, and she found herself in Hell where she and Chris could never be reunited. Chris's love for his wife was such that he was impelled to travel to the underworld to bring her back to Heaven where they were reunited with their children. The film ended with Chris and Annie deciding to be reincarnated so that they could fall in love once again. Ward believed he was fortunate with the film for two reasons: firstly, because he was able to secure a very big star like Robin Williams for the main role⁹⁰⁸ and secondly, because "it was drama, it was good material, with a company that was more European, a background that was a little more open".⁹⁰⁹ He admitted however that, "if you make a film that's under a certain budget, then you can negotiate, you can do what you like, with normal budgetary constraints" but there was less freedom to negotiate during *What Dreams May Come* because of the size of the film's budget (\$150 million).⁹¹⁰

The film was adapted from a book of the same title by Richard Matheson, published in 1979. Stephen Simon, a Hollywood producer with a particular interest in unusual stories with a New Age resonance, had bought the rights to Matheson's book in 1981, but it was not until 1994 when Ron Bass had been brought in to write the screenplay (after a number of failed attempts to get the film version made) that Ward was asked to direct the film.⁹¹¹ The choice of Ward as director was made on the basis that "*What Dreams May Come* required a director who knew how to create a whole new world on film, and Vincent was obviously a genius in that realm", according to Simon.⁹¹² Initially the project seemed to offer Ward an opportunity to make a film that he cared

⁹⁰⁸ Robin Williams has worked on more films that have been an enormous commercial success than almost any other star in Hollywood.

⁹⁰⁹ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹¹⁰ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹¹¹ This process is detailed in Stephen Simon's book, Stephen Simon, *The Force Is with You: Mystical Movie Messages That Inspire Our Lives* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2002).

⁹¹² Simon, *The Force Is with You: Mystical Movie Messages That Inspire Our Lives* 233.

deeply about and to get access to huge Hollywood resources without too much compromise. His optimism would again be put to the test.

The script's initial appeal to Ward was that "it was a very intimate story". The other reason he wanted to direct it was because he could "create an experience for an audience and investigate [the afterlife] vicariously. And I love the idea of the afterlife being something very personal".⁹¹³ What originally drew him to the script was:

It picks up on several strands I've explored in different ways in my work. One is this very New Zealand thing of going out in our 20s, like to war, or OE, and seeing these extra-ordinary places, but actually ending up finding out more about ourselves. It's actually often a journey to do with identity. In several films I've done stories that have taken a narrative leap in terms of the scale of the journey, but ultimately they're human stories, about people trying to find out about themselves, and me as a filmmaker trying to find out something about this business we call living. At the heart of what I do is an intimate story. This is an intimate epic.⁹¹⁴

Although Ward did not write the script himself, he became very involved in the script-writing process after the story idea had been presented to him. He liked the original script, written by Oscar-winning screenplay writer, Ron Bass who is best-known for his screenplays of *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988) and *My Best Friend's Wedding*, (Paul Hogan, 1997), but he was unsure how to visualise the story on film. It was not until he came up with the idea of Annie being a painter, and Chris's version of paradise being a painting she had done for him, that Ward solved the problem. "It served the idea that was in the story already – that paradise is what you make it. It showed how much Chris cared for Annie by making his paradise her painting".⁹¹⁵ One of the major differences from his Australasian experiences that Ward had found when he was working on *Map of the Human Heart* was that "I had to find a way that it would work as a film before it could even get financed".⁹¹⁶ In the case of *What Dreams May Come* it took three years before Polygram (the same company that had co-financed *Map of the Human Heart*) agreed to back the film.

⁹¹³ Leslie O'Toole, "The Navigator," *Pavement* October/November 1998: 82.

⁹¹⁴ Ward quoted in Wong, "Development Hell," 35.

⁹¹⁵ Ward quoted in Robert Ward, "After Life," *New Zealand Herald* 5 November 1998: D3.

⁹¹⁶ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

Ward wanted to get Robin Williams to play the main part because he thought Williams could play a serious character with the required sense of humour needed to leaven the seriousness and drama of the material, but the studio had to be prepared to make Williams a “pay-or-play” offer, by which the star was paid a large amount of money before he would read the script, and there was no guarantee that he would agree to take the part. Fortunately, Williams had read the book on which the screenplay was based, and loved the story, so he agreed. Ward was also a prime mover in casting other well-known actors such as Cuba Gooding Jnr and Max von Sydow. He wanted Cuba’s character to have “a sense of humour, a kind of puckish, mercurial quality, all of which Cuba has” and persuaded him to take a larger part than the one he had originally wanted.⁹¹⁷ One of the untrained actors he cast in the film was his mother, who at the age of seventy-four, came over from New Zealand to be used as a kind of stunt-woman. “She had to balance on a wire forty feet above the ground. Mum said she hadn’t had that much fun since she served in the British Army during World War II”.⁹¹⁸ Another interesting choice of actor to play a small part was Werner Herzog who asked Ward if he could be in the film. For his part in the “Sea of Faces” scene, a sea of heads that Chris (Robin Williams) encounters in Hell and which he has to walk over, Herzog requested that Williams step on his face, because: “It would be very real”. Williams refused, so Herzog asked him to smash his glasses instead.⁹¹⁹ Herzog’s total involvement in the part and his willingness to suffer for the sake of art, is reminiscent of Ward’s willingness to do so, as he had often demonstrated during the making of *Vigil*.

As in *Map of the Human Heart*, Ward’s methods of visualising the script conflicted with the screenplay writer’s methods:

It had a strong dialogue-driven narrative, and I just allowed for a very strongly visually-driven narrative to interact with that [but] every line of dialogue with Ron was like a negotiation. He fights with every director he works with for his words [...]. He wants to make sure that the narrative is really, really clear, no matter how it’s shot, and then as soon as you bring in someone who’s used to

⁹¹⁷ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹¹⁸ Michele Manelis, "Vincent Ward," Pacific Wave, the Inflight Magazine of Air New Zealand December/January 1998-99: 34.

⁹¹⁹ Wong, "Development Hell," 35.

telling stories visually, can communicate the narrative, then you have to strip away quite a lot of the narrative, otherwise you do it twice.⁹²⁰

This was a challenging negotiation for Ward. At best, it could succeed in strengthening the storytelling (his perennial problem), but at worst, it could have the effect of shackling his visual imagination.

In order to visualise the script, Ward did a series of sketches of nearly every shot and gave them to a range of artists to realise in more detail, for the reason that: "It's very important that you have a very clear idea of what you want".⁹²¹ It was in the area of the look of the film that he insisted on retaining absolute control over the material: "I always come up with the images [...]. People contributed in different ways. But I normally come up with the main thing of what it's to look like. I'm very insistent about that".⁹²² He drew many of the scenes of Hell himself - for example, the sea of faces, the upside-down cathedral (which is something he wanted to use in *Alien 3*), and the ships' graveyard, which he felt was "strongly appropriate".⁹²³ Ward notes that there was "a very specific range of images" that he associated with Hell. "We changed the screenplay so that it had these scenes which gave it the feel of a heroic myth [...]. Our depiction of Hell is a bit in the vein of Gustav Doré, because I wanted to make it feel more like an ancient fable rather than purely a psychological journey – though that was a feeling I also wanted".⁹²⁴

Here was an opportunity for Ward to tap many of his old visual interests. Some of the scenes in Hell, particularly the scene where Chris and his companions were in the boat, surrounded by naked swimmers in the sea around them, were reminiscent of Expressionist art. Visually, of all of Ward's films, it drew on his art-school training to the greatest degree. It also represented a return to his earlier interest in German Romanticism. In addition, Van Gogh influenced the trees and skies in Paradise and Monet, the water. Nineteenth century painters, particularly German Romantic painters such as Casper David Friedrich and the pre-Raphaelites, were important because "that was a time when artists still had a way of envisaging paradise". The nineteenth century

⁹²⁰ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹²¹ Ward, "After Life," D3.

⁹²² Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 16 October 1998.

⁹²³ Kim Newman, "Never Say Die," *Sight and Sound* 8.12 (1998): 20.

⁹²⁴ Ron Magrid, "Dream Weavers," *American Cinematographer* 79.11 (1998): 49.

engraver Doré, acknowledged by Ward as an influence on the visuals of *The Navigator* and *Vigil*, became the source of the idea of the distant city in Chris's daughter's Paradise. As Ward explained his choice of style: "Because her mother is interested in nineteenth-century paintings, the daughter has a nineteenth-century-style cardboard panoramic city and stairs with commedia dell'arte-type figures".⁹²⁵ As another influence, the stairway to Heaven is very much like the work of John Martin, a nineteenth-century apocalyptic engraver. The style of nineteenth-century engravings was re-created by "the lighting and the monochromatic look" of some parts of the film.⁹²⁶ The set of the library "was based on the work of the visionary nineteenth-century architect, Boulée".⁹²⁷

Ward said that he and his collaborators were trying to create

a sense of transcendence, partly by colour and partly by referencing artists who had worked with a similar intent. Friedrich had a sense of nature being more powerful than man and a feeling of aloneness that suited the narrative – Robin Williams's first vision of Paradise is in fact a Hell of aloneness. As for the colours, in almost all religions, purple is a sacred colour and it seems to evoke a sense of awe and mystery.⁹²⁸

Drawn once again to the Romantic Sublime, Ward felt that in the nineteenth century, artists "tried to create a sense of Paradise that was awesome, or sublime. A lot of that imagery has been really devalued and commercialised, like in greeting cards, so I wanted to go back to the originals and recapture some of their power".⁹²⁹ As Ward also points out, the sense of Paradise that the German Romantics envisaged was "not a tame place. It's a place of roaring winds and twisted trees and steep mountains and mist".⁹³⁰ Such a comment reminds us of the landscapes of *Vigil*, and perhaps also the painting scene in *A State of Siege* with its contrast between Malfred's polite watercolours and the energy of nature.

⁹²⁵ Newman, "Never Say Die," 19.

⁹²⁶ Ward quoted in Newman, "Never Say Die," 20.

⁹²⁷ Magrid, "Dream Weavers," 48.

⁹²⁸ Newman, "Never Say Die," 18.

⁹²⁹ Wong, "Development Hell," 34.

⁹³⁰ Production notes accompanying the Special Edition DVD of *What Dreams May Come*, Polygram Video, 1999.

The title of the film (*What Dreams May Come*) refers to another important Romantic preoccupation – the interest in the irrational and the subconscious. In the film’s depiction of Hell, this interest manifests itself in the grotesque in the sense of being “something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one”.⁹³¹ The landscape of Hell is a nightmarish one, not only because it is unfamiliar and unpredictable, but also, particularly in the Sea of Faces scene and the scene where hellions attack Chris’s boat, because it creates an atmosphere of terror. For Annie, however, Hell is not a nightmare where she has to combat tangible threats but a psychological Hell where she must combat her inner fears. This too is an expression of a gothic sensibility where an atmosphere of unease is created by the fear of the unseen. Like Malfred Signal in *A State of Siege*, where props and furniture start disappearing from the set as Malfred becomes increasingly unhinged, Annie’s decaying physical surroundings are created by her psychological state.

Both Annie and Chris literally live in an afterlife world of their own inner emotions, a concept that has resonances with Expressionism. As in Wiene’s 1919 film, *Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari* in which the distorted angles of the sets reflect the madness of the film’s protagonist, the gloomy colours of the broken-down building inhabited by Annie indicate her depression. Like many Expressionist films, *What Dreams May Come* uses lighting to create what Lotte Eisner described as *Stimmung* (mood or atmosphere) and this is evident not only in Annie’s Hell, but also in Chris’s Heaven. Arguably, the film’s aesthetic is motivated at least in part by an Expressionistic subjectivity, by which the world is literally constructed from the particular perspective of the individual character, and by an Expressionistic rejection of a naturalistic depiction of the world, and of everyday truth. What also links the film to Expressionism are its carefully-composed images and its expressions of intense emotion. The latter characteristic fits with Ward’s own definition of Expressionism, which is that in such a work of art the emotion is the most important essential element and “the technique is only there to serve the emotion”.⁹³² As discussed in Chapter One, this emphasis on emotion does not preclude thought or philosophical reflection, and in *What Dreams May Come*, philosophical reflection on the nature of life and death is strongly linked with emotion.

⁹³¹ Previously quoted in Chapter One of this thesis: Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* 21.

⁹³² Previously cited in Chapter One of this thesis from an interview with Ward,

The visual concept for the film was a very difficult one to realise and eighteen months were spent developing it, with more than two hundred people working in four visual-effects companies to complete the film. Part of the reason for the complexity was, as Ward explained, “In the old days [...] they had three layers of film. We have, in some cases, anywhere between eighty and one hundred and forty layers, because it’s digital and each layer has something different on it”.⁹³³ To create the effect of Williams’s character walking around in one of Annie’s paintings, a process called Lidar (a combination of laser and radar) was adapted from its military application of mapping Cruise missile flight paths and targeting leaks in rocket systems. This involved shooting regular film with actors during the day, and sending in the Lidar crew at night to scan three-dimensionally. The device used is a mapping tool that three-dimensionally maps every surface for three hundred yards, and then the information is transferred to a computer, in order to combine the map with the live-action footage. This process had never been used on film before, and it was necessary to experiment to solve problems right up to the end of the shoot.⁹³⁴ The difficulty of creating the special effects was illustrated by Ward’s comment that “in post-production, some shots took forty people nine months to animate”.⁹³⁵

Many of the scenes of *Paradise* were shot in relatively inaccessible locations in Montana’s Glacier National Park, where “a two-and-a-half tonne concrete and steel tree” was transported and taken to the top of a mountain.⁹³⁶ Interiors were constructed at Treasure Island in San Francisco, with the crew erecting gigantic sets in large hangars, including a 300,000-gallon pool with multi-story sets built around it. Co-producer Alan Blomquist notes that: “The design team arranged the sets as if they were built on an operatic stage. The pond was the central set piece and we had set changes, like act changes - that is, a set is taken out and an entirely new set is brought in”.⁹³⁷ Ward’s aesthetic was clearly compatible with one aspect of Hollywood – its expensive and spectacular special effects, made possible by an infrastructure of related skills and technologies.

⁹³³ Ward, “After Life,” D3.

⁹³⁴ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹³⁵ Bob Strauss, “Making Dreams Come True,” *Animation Magazine* 12.11 (1998): 26.

⁹³⁶ Ward quoted in the “Featurette” section of the Special Edition DVD of *What Dreams May Come*.

⁹³⁷ Production notes to the Special Edition DVD of *What Dreams May Come*.

As usual Ward's approach to directing the film was to demand a great deal from his cast and crew and this earned him a reputation for being tough even by Hollywood standards. Robin Williams described him as "a pitbull", but enjoyed the experience of working with the director.⁹³⁸ Ward however, was unapologetic about his approach:

Look, when I direct, I try to be fair and reasonable. I always want to be considerate, but directing a movie is like running an army. I have to keep everything together. I am demanding, meticulous and very detail-orientated. I don't want to be an easy-going guy when it comes to making films because I'd end up with a mess. I have a definite view of what the film should be and I fight every inch to have it realised on my terms.⁹³⁹

French cinematographer Eduardo Serra, who had worked with Ward on *Map of the Human Heart*, was the film's director of photography. Ward's characteristic concern with light was part of his reason for choosing Serra: "Eduardo is very methodical and particular about light. He can create what I call 'exotic experiences', particularly in smaller environments. He paints in tones photographically, so he'll underexpose a background element in a very measured way – by two or three stops – but he's very conscious that that element is an important part of the shot, which creates this very layered, European effect".⁹⁴⁰ Serra, like most people who have worked with Ward, found him to be not only a perfectionist but an artist who is always pushing the boundaries:

Vincent is only interested in what has not been done before, which is basically the same for me. He's always invited me to invent things and to use a very wide span of whatever can be done with a camera, so he is very open to all kinds of technical solutions. What makes his richness as an artist is his way of thinking, which is not a scholarly A plus B meets C. Vincent's creative process can be very confusing for people around him; he will say very strange things and make great demands that sometimes contradict themselves. But that's his way of

⁹³⁸ Manelis, "Vincent Ward," 34.

⁹³⁹ Ward quoted in Manelis, "Vincent Ward," 34-35.

⁹⁴⁰ Serra quoted in Magrid, "Dream Weavers," 43.

creating and building up decisions [...]. When we let Vincent's ideas overflow, then we get something wonderful that we would not get otherwise.⁹⁴¹

As in *Map of the Human Heart*, the central element of *What Dreams May Come* is the love story. Ward believes that his parents' successful marriage has made him curious about long-lived relationships: "When two strong-minded people live together, there's always this thing of negotiation. I'm interested in how people communicate, how they try to find a way to get past the terrible things that happen to them, and the needs that drive them to be together. Sometimes it's actually worse being without the other, so you have to find a way to stick together. I've explored that in this film, where the couple are successful, and in *Map of the Human Heart* where they aren't".⁹⁴² While the film revolves around Chris and Annie's relationship, it also depicts Chris's spiritual awakening and discovery as he journeys through the afterlife to find Annie. As Leslie O'Toole acknowledges, "Ward has consistently explored the nature of spiritual and emotional journeys in all his films. In particular, his films are about relationships and their psychological, emotional and spiritual dimensions". However: "Emotional journeys are never easy to capture on film. It's always a particular challenge to a filmmaker to accurately depict the roots of an emotion and the intensity of feeling it produces in the subject. Harder, still, is the depiction of a spiritual journey".⁹⁴³ Peter Matthews has also commented on the difficulty: "Special effects aren't the best way to conjure an ethereal atmosphere, since they can't help conferring a certain literal-mindedness on the proceedings. As André Bazin once remarked, cinema imposes its own irresistible realism".⁹⁴⁴

Ward's view of a subjective afterlife was that it is "the only kind that makes any sense to me - why would a Native American's afterlife be the same as yours or mine?"⁹⁴⁵ Although the book on which the film was based was written twenty years ago and optioned eighteen years ago, he believed the project did not come to fruition then because people were less interested in spirituality than they are today. Ward quoted a recent *Time Magazine* poll as showing that "eighty percent of Americans believe in an afterlife", but pointed out that the film does not have a religious message. "It is designed

⁹⁴¹ Magrid, "Dream Weavers," 44.

⁹⁴² Ward quoted in Wong, "Development Hell," 35.

⁹⁴³ O'Toole, "The Navigator," 80.

⁹⁴⁴ Peter Matthews, "What Dreams May Come," *Sight and Sound* 9.1 (1999): 61.

⁹⁴⁵ Ward quoted in Newman, "Never Say Die," 21.

to appeal to people from different religious backgrounds and even cynics like myself. It embraces a lot of different beliefs and you can fill it up with what you believe, I think".⁹⁴⁶ The film can also be read "purely as a psychological journey, as someone coming to understand themselves and their relationships. Then there's the smaller idea that the dead grieve for the living".⁹⁴⁷

The notion of those who have committed suicide going to Hell is an orthodox Catholic belief, but Hell in the film is depicted as a psychological context of the character's own making. Ward believes that "in almost every religion and philosophy that I know of, except perhaps ancient Roman culture, [suicide] is normally considered as going against some kind of life force principle [...] and it's normally discouraged". In his view, since this attitude to suicide crosses many different cultures, the film does not take a moralistic stance but explores the debate of whether a person should be damned for committing suicide because they loved too much.⁹⁴⁸ The film's title is a quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but Ward thinks it should not be interpreted too literally except in the sense that the afterlife may be what you imagine it to be - subjective, based on a person's own experiences. The idea of someone attempting to rescue a loved one from Hell is rooted in both myth (Orpheus and Eurydice) and religion (Christ going to Hell in order to save humanity, the Tibetan Book of the Dead). The universal nature of this story is one that appealed to Ward because he has lived "in a lot of different communities, whether it's in the Ureweras or it's in the Arctic [or] investigating a film set in nineteenth-century Japan".⁹⁴⁹ Ward linked the film's concern with spirituality with German Romanticism: "The German Romantic [element] I respond to, and I thought it was appropriate for the story. I always had a sense of some force that you can't quite put a name on, some sense of the sublime".⁹⁵⁰

Another characteristic trait that is evident in *What Dreams May Come* is Ward's interest in outsiders. According to Robert Ward: "*What Dreams May Come* takes Ward's theme of outsiders confronting alien worlds to its furthest extension: Williams' character Chris and his wife Annie [...] both die and encounter heaven and hell. The afterlife Ward creates unites his two passions, art and film-making [...], his training as a painter

⁹⁴⁶ O'Toole, "The Navigator," 82.

⁹⁴⁷ Ward quoted in Newman, "Never Say Die," 21.

⁹⁴⁸ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁴⁹ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁵⁰ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

gave him the key that enabled him to make the movie”.⁹⁵¹ The film however, is Ward’s least autobiographical, except perhaps that the story of the separated lovers has some resonances with the story of his mother and father’s meeting in Israel and the difficulties they encountered in order to be together. Louis Nowra, Ward’s co-writer, commented that:

Vincent brings into his films his whole being, so in *Map of the Human Heart*, he was Avik [...]. And with *The Navigator*, that’s sort of about New Zealand, that’s him in New Zealand, and I think *Vigil*, that’s kind of his childhood on his dad’s property. And the girl is Vincent, that’s him, a lonely little boy with his imagination, that’s Vincent. Whereas in his latest film, I can’t see Vincent, I just can’t see him, which is I think when technique began to overcome the core of that love affair.⁹⁵²

The loss of the director’s personal signature in some aspects of this film was perhaps a result of the difficulties for an *auteur* such as Ward trying to retain his vision of the film while working in a large and complex Hollywood context. What happened after the initial edit of *What Dreams May Come* illustrates these problems. The first cut was edited exactly as it had been written, and at the first test screening, with an audience recruited “solely on the basis of their interest in the subject matter of the film”, the reaction was very positive. The studio however, insisted on a second test screening with a broader audience, who, according to the film’s producer Stephen Simon, “didn’t accept the film at all and was actually hostile about the confusing nature of the first act. We had to go back and re-edit the film with a much simpler and cleaner through-line in mind”.⁹⁵³ As Simon points out, a lot of money had been spent on making the film, “therefore Polygram had a huge investment, and they needed to have the film appeal to the widest possible audience [...]. But making it a more mainstream film took some of the power of the experience away from those who were deeply interested in the subject matter”.⁹⁵⁴

In an unpublished interview shortly after the release of *What Dreams May Come*, the director described his position in regard to working in the commercial milieu of

⁹⁵¹ Ward, "After Life," D3.

⁹⁵² Lynette Read, interview with Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000.

⁹⁵³ Simon, *The Force Is with You: Mystical Movie Messages That Inspire Our Lives* 236.

⁹⁵⁴ Simon, *The Force Is with You: Mystical Movie Messages That Inspire Our Lives* 237.

Hollywood: “I get offered a lot of material working in Los Angeles, but most of it’s not very good, - it may be [good in] technical or generic [terms], but it never has any originality [...]. It’s hard to find good material; it’s hard to develop good material. And I’d rather just hold out for things [...]. I only want to do stuff I really believe in”.⁹⁵⁵ However, once he had found a project he believed in – *What Dreams My Come* – he still had to contend with constraints inherent in working in the Hollywood studio system. That he was thoroughly aware of the problems for a filmmaker of his type was evident in his comment to AdMedia “With a studio film, you have a lot of people making the decisions and they are spending vast amounts of money, so the decision making becomes very conservative. Those involved can get very scared and at that point, you start making yesterday’s film. I try to thread myself through the maze and make the films I want to”.⁹⁵⁶ Ward is not the only *auteur* director in Hollywood who has had to face similar problems. His comments are similar to those of Francis Ford Coppola, who is quoted as saying: “A lot of the energy that went into the film [*The Godfather*] went into simply trying to convince the people who held the power to let me do the film my way”.⁹⁵⁷

The way Ward managed the “maze” of Hollywood was to stay “absolutely focused” on his own work, according to Graeme Barnes, a school friend who stayed with him while he was living in Hollywood. His impression was that Ward was only living there because that was where he had to be to do his work, and was completely unmoved by some of the famous people he met, although when he was involved in making a movie, he felt he had to play “a whole lot of strategy games”. According to Barnes, for Ward, the stress of making *What Dreams May Come* was not in actually making the movie, but the “difficult negotiations to maintain artistic control”. Another telling comment by Ward about Hollywood was that the people he was negotiating with were scared, since if the movie lost money they would be out of a job, and he found it exhausting to work with people motivated by fear.⁹⁵⁸

Ward’s comment in an interview for *Pavement* pinpointed the root of the problem of working in Hollywood: “The industry isn’t looking for the same thing I am. Their

⁹⁵⁵ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁵⁶ “Vincent Ward: Arthouse Madman,” 19.

⁹⁵⁷ Coppola quoted in Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* 112.

⁹⁵⁸ Lynette Read, interview with Graeme Barnes, 16 December 1999.

primary goal is money”.⁹⁵⁹ Hollywood’s resistance to original ideas had been, for him, the most frustrating aspect of trying to succeed in the American industry: “For four years, I was going crazy here, trying to get these films out that I believed in passionately, and I really wanted to do something that you could see a result for. When I worked in New Zealand and Australia I always had a one-to-one ratio of things developed to things made, and I always believed if you could get the script to where it was considered good by enough people, or you felt that it was good, it would get made. Here, that’s definitely not true. If it’s good and interesting – and certainly if it’s original – it has less chance of getting made than a remake of what was made last year”.⁹⁶⁰ Another difference in working in Hollywood is that “In New Zealand and Australia, the film industry is director-driven. The budgets are small and that gives the directors more independence. In Hollywood, the big-budget films are star-driven”. He believes that “it is very difficult for most Australasian film-makers to work (in Hollywood), if they have any voice [...], unless you want to make ‘gun-for-hire’ films, which I don’t want to make, and most of us don’t want to make, you have to constantly be wary, it’s a mine-field”.⁹⁶¹

When asked if he had ever considered a different ending – that Chris was unable to bring his wife back from hell – Ward replied that he had not because “it was never part of the book. I’ve certainly had my share of dark endings, a love story also, but we felt that we put the audience through a wringer and wanted them to come out the other side. We wanted it finally to be an uplifting story, a story with some hope in it”.⁹⁶² An alternative ending, with Chris being reborn in Philadelphia and Annie being reborn in Sri Lanka, and the two characters meeting up later in life, was shot, but this ending was rejected in favour of a more simplistic one.⁹⁶³ Both the ending of the film - which New Zealand critic, Helen Wong described as being “designed for American audiences” - and the film’s sentimentality, were singled out for criticism by Antipodean critics. “Chris and Annie are set up as the perfect fairy-tale soulmates, their separation by death

⁹⁵⁹ O’Toole, “The Navigator,” 82.

⁹⁶⁰ Ward quoted in Ward, “After Life,” D3.

⁹⁶¹ Campbell, “Driven to Dreams,” 40.

⁹⁶² Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁶³ This alternative ending is included in the Special Edition DVD of *What Dreams May Come*.

truly tragic”, but this resulted for the local critic in a “central relationship that fails to engage us, perhaps because it is so idealised”.⁹⁶⁴

Even overseas critical response was deeply divided, many critics castigating it for being “corny, not believable, overwrought”.⁹⁶⁵ One review in *Sight and Sound* characterised the “loose framework” of *What Dreams May Come* as being typical of Ward’s “strong visual imagination but scant story sense”. On this occasion, however, the film was less often castigated for weaknesses in its narrative structure.⁹⁶⁶ Graham Tetley who wrote the screenplay of *Vigil* evaluated the film’s narrative as being “much better-shaped as a reasonably traditional narrative than any of the others”.⁹⁶⁷

John Maynard believes that it is

a misunderstood film [...]. First of all, it was an unbelievably magnificent vision to take on within the Hollywood studio system, almost doomed to fail by the fact that eventually, the system would be all over it to modify it, to make it acceptable and so on [...]. It was made under, I think, incredibly difficult situations – situations in terms of an enormous budget, a limitation on who he could cast, and then of course, the effect of the studios, as they tried to maximise their investment.

His comment on the film’s reception in New Zealand and Australia was that it was virtually impossible for a film like *What Dreams May Come* to be favourably received “in a country which is full of a dour realism, and in New Zealand, a stern realism, a country in which material values are the things which are valued most of all”. He added: “Within this naturalism and realism that has dominated cinema in Australia and New Zealand, there’s never been any room for fantasy or fantastic art [...]. A film that is so ambitiously rooted in fantasy – any film – would find it very difficult to take root here”. Maynard pointed out that in contrast to the reaction of Protestant New Zealand, the film was very successful in the South American countries since they have a Catholic tradition.⁹⁶⁸ Maynard’s comments are accurate in relation to a particular kind of earnest New Zealand reviewing which promotes local realism as a resistance to Hollywood

⁹⁶⁴ Helene Wong, "In Living Colour," *Listener* 14 November 1998: 43.

⁹⁶⁵ Simon, *The Force Is with You: Mystical Movie Messages That Inspire Our Lives* 238.

⁹⁶⁶ Matthews, "What Dreams May Come," 61.

⁹⁶⁷ Lynette Read, interview with Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998.

⁹⁶⁸ Lynette Read, interview with John Maynard, 27 September 1999.

escapism, but his emphasis on the rejection of “fantasy” seems less convincing in the wake of *Lord of the Rings* which has been hugely successful in New Zealand.

Ward summed up his hopes for the film in these terms: “I didn’t want this film to be too arty. I wanted it to be visceral with a strong narrative behind it”.⁹⁶⁹ He reiterated this in an interview in the NZ Herald: “Although *Dreams* makes use of painting, it is not an art movie. It is serious entertainment and a drama, a love story and a quest”.⁹⁷⁰ Ward was partially successful in his aims – the film did reach a mainstream audience and it has a strong narrative, yet it was not commercially successful.⁹⁷¹ One possible explanation is that Hollywood diluted the film – it should have given the director more freedom. It was not Ward’s script (although he did have an important input into the storyline), and the final edit changed the ending to a more predictable “happy ending”. The film’s sentimentality was certainly something that critics overseas (and especially in New Zealand) reacted negatively to. Maynard believes that New Zealanders also found the fantasy elements difficult to accept, but in my view, the problem was the way in which the fantasy was combined with elements of naturalism. The casting of Robin Williams as the lead should have helped to make the film a box-office success, but the star’s history of playing comic characters and the often comedic lines of dialogue he was given, tended to work against the audience’s perception that this was a serious drama. Nowra’s comment that he could not see Ward in the film is an interesting one. *What Dreams May Come* does have some autobiographical elements, but fewer than Ward’s previous films. It seems that he departed from his own precept that to create a work of art: “You start with who you are”.⁹⁷² Whether turning Ward loose would have made this film a greater box-office success remains in the realm of speculation, but it would certainly have produced a more intense artistic result.

Ward was able to retain an *auteurist* control over the visual aspects of the film, and it is no accident that these aspects are the most successful. His interest in the Romantic Sublime resulted in the scenes set in Paradise depicting not a “picture-postcard” version of the landscape, but one that demonstrates the power and transcendence of nature. The

⁹⁶⁹ Manelis, "Vincent Ward," 36.

⁹⁷⁰ Ward, "After Life," D3.

⁹⁷¹ Box-office figures as at the end of December 1998, nearly three months after the film’s release, were that the Production Budget for the film was \$80,000,000 (US) and the Worldwide Gross \$55,485,043 (US). This figure does not include video and DVD sales or sales of merchandise (www.the-numbers.com/movies/1998/WHTDR, accessed July 18 2004).

⁹⁷² Lynette Read, interview with Vincent Ward, 11 December 1996.

influence of Expressionism clearly visible in the scenes set in Hell – in the use of *Stimmung* and the subjectivity of the mise-en-scène – resulted in the creation of powerful and unforgettable images. The film was justifiably nominated for two Academy Awards in 1999, one for Eugenio Zannetti's production design, and one for the visual effects, which was won by Joel Hynek and Nick Brooks, who supervised the visual effects team. That the film won an Oscar cemented Ward's reputation as a director of international standing, but making the film in the context of the Hollywood studio system proved to be a frustrating experience which he no longer (at present) wishes to repeat. Hollywood, for its part, was disappointed with the box-office results.

The director's journey from New Zealand to Australia and then to Hollywood could be seen as paralleling the physical and spiritual journeys made by the characters in his films; but although his films have come a long way in terms of the size of their budgets, their technical sophistication and the size of their audiences, they have retained a consistency of themes and concerns. While working within the context of the small film industry in New Zealand had its limitations in terms of funding and technical resources, it gave Ward greater freedom. Working in the Hollywood studio system was clearly a mixed experience for Ward. His venture into international co-production and his dealings with Miramax also proved frustrating.

In the last few years since the release of *What Dreams May Come* he has made a living by directing large-budget commercials such as the one he made recently for an Asian airline, shot in Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand and New Zealand. Before that he was hired by Steven Spielberg to direct a promotional film for General Motors. He admits that it has not been easy to resist the temptations of Hollywood: "It's very hard to break out of Hollywood".⁹⁷³ But the alternatives available for a filmmaker like Ward are far from clear, particularly if he wants to make films with more than a small budget.

Current Project

Shortly after the release of his last film, Ward stated categorically that he was not prepared to return to New Zealand to make films:

I couldn't work here. I've never got over the experience of *The Navigator*. The New Zealand Film Commission does a great job but I feel it's under-appreciated

⁹⁷³ Ward quoted in Butcher, "What Films May Come," 88.

by the Government, which pays lip-service to the importance of films, but places financial roadblocks in its way. There's only enough money for low budget films which makes it actually worse than it used to be. The Government's failure to give proper resources is inviting the best people in the industry to leave New Zealand and that's a tragedy.⁹⁷⁴

At the same time, however, he felt that it was a great shame that it was so difficult for experienced film makers to come back to New Zealand and make films that are New Zealand stories, and that if the government made it impossible to do so, New Zealand would be in the position of being "a country without a voice, a country that can't look at itself in the mirror".⁹⁷⁵

He has spent years developing a script set in New Zealand in the colonial era, about a Pakeha woman living in a Maori community. What occasioned the change of heart? Ward explains it in terms of his strong but conflicted sense of national identity: "I hate to say this – I loathe it in myself – but [New Zealand] stories are the stories I identify with more. But also, this is a very distinctive country. I think in many ways, Australia is a lot more bland".⁹⁷⁶ (This is an interesting comment as Australian public opinion tends to assume the reverse.) Ward became interested in the notion of "would-be colonists 'going native', which was a common story in nineteenth-century New Zealand, but one seldom told or heard". He explains that:

Some terrible things happened to Maori in that century, a lot of disenfranchisement, but I had the feeling also that, compared to other parts of the world where they would poison grain crops and shoot people for sport, it was nowhere near as extreme. I kept wondering why that was, why New Zealand is unique and how that worked. Why there was a treaty here and not, for example, in Australia or South Africa. They say there were no full-blooded Maori left by the 1930s: that suggests a very high level of engagement. We know who the chiefs and generals were, the people who took strong positions, left and right. But how did the people in between behave in everyday engagement between the two cultures? Those must have been the people who effected a lot of change,

⁹⁷⁴ Brent Lewis, "Mapping the Dreams," *Sunday Star Times* 1 November 1998: F1.

⁹⁷⁵ Sam Gaoa, unpublished interview with Vincent Ward, 17 October 1998.

⁹⁷⁶ Butcher, "What Films May Come," 85.

the glue between the cultures, but often they didn't fit into either of their communities terribly well.⁹⁷⁷

The script of "River Queen" tells the fictional story of an Irishwoman who lives among Maori in the 1860s, becoming pregnant but then leaving her son behind and returning to the Pakeha community. Margot Butcher believes that the story is "somehow connected" with Ward's pivotal experience of working on *In Spring One Plants Alone* and "to his challenging memories of the Ureweras".⁹⁷⁸

Ward has been working on the script for the past five years with Wellington playwright Toa Fraser, "hiring researchers, reading historians, even ploughing through nineteenth-century parliamentary manuscripts, diaries and original records to learn more about our history".⁹⁷⁹ Historical research has been an important factor in much of Ward's script-writing from *The Navigator* to *The Last Samurai*. The difficulties of raising the finance for this project have been enormous. As an historical epic set in remote locations, the minimum budget was set at around twenty million dollars. Ward and co-producer Don Reynolds raised much of the budget from British and other European investors, on the strength of Ward's international reputation, and a further ten percent from New Zealand - five hundred thousand from the Film Commission and two and a half million from the Film Fund. This however left a shortfall of approximately five and a half million dollars, which resulted in the shooting date having to be postponed until the next financial year, putting in jeopardy the investments already promised. It is interesting that the size of *River Queen* - falling in the middle between a low-budget art film and a Hollywood-style big-budget film - has made it difficult to line the project up with the government's guidelines and also with international funding which tends now to gravitate towards either smaller or larger budgets. Also, Ward's reputation as an *auteur* has been seen as both an advantage and a disadvantage in securing overseas funding. Investors are attracted to his reputation but nervous about the possibility that his individuality will get out of hand and put the film over budget.

Ward has said: "You can't expect Hollywood to back a small independent film in another country, that's not what Hollywood survives on. In fact you're generally much better to avoid American financing, because they then take control of the project and it

⁹⁷⁷ Butcher, "What Films May Come," 82.

⁹⁷⁸ Butcher, "What Films May Come," 82.

⁹⁷⁹ Butcher, "What Films May Come," 82.

can completely affect the content”, but putting together a budget from European sources has also been difficult.⁹⁸⁰ In general, he feels that his experience has taught him a harsh lesson: “I used to believe that if something was good, it would get made. I’m way too seasoned to believe that anymore. In fact I tend to believe the opposite”.⁹⁸¹ John Maynard who regards Ward as a major talent says: “what we’re seeing is visionary filmmakers finding it harder to make films”.⁹⁸² There is also the problem that Ward is neither a fully New Zealand director, nor a fully international one. Peter Jackson’s example (in requiring Hollywood to come to New Zealand) will certainly enlarge the range of possibilities, but *The Lord of the Rings* is clearly an international project in terms of its content - what the Hollywood unions would call a “runaway”. In contrast, Ward’s script has specific New Zealand content, and despite the precedent of *The Piano* (made with funding from a French source) - and despite all the talk today about the internationalism of the film industry *River Queen* has taken years to fund.

As this thesis is sent away to be bound (August 2004), the latest news of *River Queen* suggests that the fate of this project now hangs very much in the balance. In July, the film went into production. But filming came to a dramatic halt approximately three weeks into the start of principal photography. The Completion Guarantor had been on location since the beginning of the shoot, and he is now involved in negotiations over the future of the film. Local newspapers have carried stories heavy on speculation and light on facts, looking for signs of a scandal (since three million dollars of public money are now at risk). The production company has attempted to keep publicity to a minimum, suggesting that what has happened is merely a delay rather than a serious collapse. It is difficult at present for someone outside the production to know what has actually happened. I was about to take up an invitation from Ward to visit the location when the announcement was made that filming had come to a halt.

Gossip has suggested that the lead actor, Samantha Morton, began to rebel against the production on the first day of filming, after being required to walk into a freezing river. Unsympathetic reports have described her as fragile or temperamental. However, the official story is that she came down with serious illness, and there is certainly evidence

⁹⁸⁰ Butcher, "What Films May Come," 85.

⁹⁸¹ Ward quoted in Butcher, "What Films May Come," 88.

⁹⁸² Butcher, "What Films May Come," 88.

to support this interpretation – at one stage, she was admitted to hospital. Because of her illness, the fate of the film now centres round an insurance claim.

It is clear, however, that Morton's absence has been only one of the production problems. It is also rumoured within the industry that there has been a rebellion among crew members over the unsatisfactory conditions of the shoot, situated in the midst of winter in very difficult locations. Among producers, it is assumed that these problems have arisen partly because of a shortfall in the budget. According to this interpretation, the final investment had not been confirmed, but the project had been in preparation for so long that a decision was made to begin filming regardless. Such last minute financial crises are a common feature of the film business since investors vacillate and sometimes engage in games of brinkmanship over contracts. Producers often have to make hair-raising decisions about whether to proceed or not. The history of the industry is full of stories about productions which took risks but managed to succeed, but also contains stories of disasters where crew members and directors found themselves out of work after a few weeks of filming. In this case, the project appears to have run into problems because financially there was no slack in the budget, no room for contingencies. It is one of the problems of the New Zealand situation that budgets are necessarily so tight that there is almost no possibility of going over budget, even if there is a genuine need to do so. (In contrast, *What Dreams May Come* did run over budget and the studio was persuaded to increase its investment.)

The New Zealand Herald (the country's largest newspaper) offered this overview of what had happened:

Since Morton became ill about three weeks ago, rumours have been rife that all was not well on the set of the movie [...]. Media interest in the movie was heightened when a group calling themselves the United Chiefs of Aotearoa posted a public notice in a local newspaper warning of a looming disaster. The Dominion Post newspaper reported a source describing filming as miserable, and saying Morton had rarely turned up. *One News* said crew had dubbed her the 'drama queen', and she supposedly kept them waiting for hours. [Producer Don] Reynolds said Morton was committed to the film. He put any tension on the set down to the fact that Morton was a method actor, which some of the crew had not encountered before. Mr Reynolds said there was no issue with funds.

The investors, who include businessman Eric Watson, were supportive and wanted the film to be finished. He said the film's star, Kiefer Sutherland, left New Zealand last week to return to his television series *24*, but had agreed to return to finish filming his scenes.⁹⁸³

Sutherland is said to be very committed to the project and has been very accommodating in re-working his schedule. It remains to be seen, however, whether the film can be salvaged. If investors are offered an insurance payout, they may now be reluctant to risk another shoot, particularly if an increased investment is required.

From the perspective of the current thesis, it is clear that the project is an important one for Ward's career, and one that has already involved years of creative work. It is also evident from the previous projects I have documented that the problems are unfortunately all too familiar - the financial pressures of the New Zealand film environment, the complexities of matching up New Zealand-based projects with the interests of the global film industry, the pressures involved in trying to operate on a pared-down budget, and Ward's need for collaborators as committed as himself (with a similar passion for perfectionism and the ability to be stimulated by difficult locations). From the perspective of *auteur* theory, Ward is facing the old curse of Orson Welles - trying to operate as an artist within a system that operates as an industry. One must acknowledge, however, that the industry has valid concerns of its own - most investors need profit to stay in business, and crew members have fought hard over the years to obtain acceptable working conditions. It is also apparent that Ward is not the easiest of directors to work with - his working methods are particularly difficult to reconcile with the severe financial pressures of local film-making. Also, the local industry has changed its character in recent years due to the huge wages for key crew members on the large international projects being filmed in New Zealand (*Lord of the Rings*, *The Last Samurai*, *Vertical Limits*, *Hercules*, and so on). Whereas local filmmaking in the days of *A State of Siege* was driven largely by enthusiasm and idealism, and felt more like a privilege or a crusade than a job, it has since become another "industry" or "career choice" for technicians - though admittedly still an insecure way of life. There are obvious benefits to the expansion and consolidation of this infrastructure, but it is not necessarily a better environment for a filmmaker such as Ward. It is understandable

⁹⁸³ Ainsley Thomson, "The River Queen Is Still Alive, Say Backers," *NZ Herald* 3 August 2004.

that technicians may prefer a director who is “realistic” and has “good people skills” to a visionary genius, a Romantic with a hunger for perfection. The “middle” size of its budget (large for New Zealand, though tiny by Hollywood standards) and overseas lead actors may have added to the confusion since some crew-members may have assumed that *River Queen* was in the tradition of other large offshore projects, with comparable pay and conditions, rather than a brave attempt to make a passionate art film in defiance of funding limitations.

Salvaging the project will certainly involve some changes. It could mean the replacement of Ward as director, and at the least is likely to involve a scaling down of the script. It is likely to be a long time before the implications are clarified and the true story of what has happened is established. Regardless of the outcome, it would be tragic to discover that there was simply not a place in the global or local film industry for the maker of such important and distinctive films - an artist who should now be at the peak of his career and in his most productive phase.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this study has been to reach an understanding of Ward's aesthetic approach, and of how this aesthetic has emerged both in terms of theory and practice. In the process, I have discussed the influence of both European and locally-inflected traditions of Romanticism and Expressionism, Ward's personal background and training, and the application and development of this aesthetic through each of his films. A secondary aim has been to situate Ward in the context of the New Zealand film industry, exploring the importance of his contribution and examining evidence of local cultural input in his work, while at the same time, discussing the reasons why his films were markedly different from those produced in New Zealand at that time. In a sense, my thesis has also been a test of the *auteur* theory's strengths and weaknesses as applied to a filmmaker who seems to be one of New Zealand's strongest candidates for authorship. My approach has been to not only examine the texts themselves, but to look at the process by which they were produced. This was partly to counteract the criticisms frequently made about *auteur* studies – the tendency to commit errors of attribution and the tendency to ignore both the constraints imposed by the industry and the social and historical contexts within which films are made – and partly to document and analyse the process of filmmaking as an aesthetic in practice. I have sought to clarify the complexities of collaboration, an issue that is often seen as one of the weaknesses of an *auteurist* approach, by examining all the available documentation and interviewing Ward's associates in order to determine their contributions to the films. By researching a variety of sources, I hope to have provided the most comprehensive study to date of the biography and career of this important filmmaker.

I began my research on the basis that what made Ward's films different from other New Zealand films at the time was that they seemed to be directly linked to the European art film. I came, however, to see this as too glib a way of categorising his work since it did not fully explain its New Zealand "flavour" or Ward's highly original approach. It was necessary to go further back to the roots of film as art and to nineteenth-century European Romanticism, to understand the complex historical and artistic traditions that informed his approach. Romanticism provided a useful starting-point because Ward has

described himself as liking and being interested in nineteenth-century German Romanticism and “the northern European experience”, and he also has strong German connections through his mother.

Romantic artists, because of their commitment to originality, have traditionally disliked being categorised, and Ward has expressed similar views. It is certainly true that labelling him as a Romantic or Expressionist filmmaker (even in the broadest sense) cannot fully “explain” his approach. These concepts (visionary, individual, *auteur*, Romantic, Expressionist) have been used so broadly that my task was to pin down the particular sense in which they might be applicable to Ward. One aspect of Romanticism that proved to be particularly relevant to Ward’s approach was the conception of the artist as visionary. Another relevant Romantic concept was the emphasis placed on individual sensibility and imagination. I have sought to clarify the implications of this idea, for example by studying the genesis of Ward’s film scripts. It is Ward’s individualist *auteurist* approach, evident in the strength of his “vision” and of his desire for artistic control over all aspects of his work that distinguishes him from other New Zealand directors of his generation. There is also a distinct link with Romanticism in Ward’s interest in mysticism and the role of the unconscious and irrational. Although he does not see himself as a religious filmmaker, his work is concerned with spirituality in its diverse forms. His interest in the irrational and the grotesque (linked with Romanticism particularly in its Gothic forms) is evident in the atmosphere of unease created in his early films, especially *A State of Siege* and *Vigil*. The role of the unconscious is explored in the “dream-like” elements of his work and is linked to the figure of the *doppelgänger* (the divided self) which figured strongly in both Romantic and Expressionist art forms. Ward is likewise fascinated with the divided self, not surprising in terms of his own sense of divided identity (for example, the mixture of German Jewish and Irish Catholic in his background). The figure of the outsider on the fringes of society – a figure that has its origins in the Byronic hero - has also been a constant theme in his work.

While Romanticism provides a useful starting-point, Ward’s work can also be more specifically associated with Expressionism. Although several of the main protagonists in his films make literal journeys from one end of the world to the other, the focus in his work is always on their inner journeys. The psychological state of the characters is

reflected in the external environment – either in props and settings (as in *A State of Siege*) or in the landscape. Notions of the Romantic Sublime focused on the awesomeness of the natural environment, which could produce emotions of terror as well as wonder, and this is an aspect that is explored in Ward's work; but he goes further than this at times in giving nature a threatening, demonic aspect. This sense of the demonic potential of the natural world – although it can be balanced by ecstasy, as in the moment of epiphany at the end of *A State of Siege* – is closer to Expressionism than Romanticism. The ending of this film also has an ambiguity – ecstasy or horror? – that is typically Expressionist. The style of Ward's work was influenced by German Expressionism in terms of its lighting tradition, particularly chiaroscuro lighting. The importance of the composition of individual shots and of the mise-en-scène to convey atmosphere can also be usefully related to the influence of German Expressionism on his work, but it is in the use of *Stimmung* (atmosphere), particularly an atmosphere of unease, that Ward's work draws closest to Expressionism.

Chapter Two of this thesis explored the director's biography, focusing on how his childhood, family environment and education may have contributed to his aesthetic. Ward's early years spent on a farm in the Wairarapa seem to have directly informed *Vigil*, the most overtly autobiographical of his films. The film portrays the harshness of the farm's environment including incidents from his childhood such as the docking of lambs. The boredom and isolation of living on the farm appears to have encouraged Ward to become reflective and to rely on his own resources, resulting in his work having a strongly introspective strain. His parents are connected with the film in different ways – the portrayal of Liz as a cultivated woman living in the backblocks has resonances with Ward's mother, Judy, who came from a cultivated Jewish milieu in Germany to live on an isolated farm in New Zealand. Ward's father, Pat, whose hobby was giving eulogies, played a non-speaking role in the film as one of the mourners at the funeral. His parents' love story had a considerable impact not only on *Vigil* but also on *Map of the Human Heart* and *What Dreams May Come*. The collision between New Zealand and Europe embodied in Ward's parents is mirrored by a similar collision of New Zealand and European influences in his work, and helps to account for his interest in identity. The influence of his Catholic upbringing is evident in the Catholic ritual and iconography of *Vigil* and *The Navigator*, and less directly, in *In Spring One Plants*

Alone, which deals with aspects of Maori spirituality, and *What Dreams May Come*, which explores individual notions of the afterlife.

While an examination of Ward's family background and upbringing is useful in shedding light on the concerns and themes of his films, it is necessary to examine his training as an art student to explain other aspects of his aesthetic. When Ward began his studies at the Ilam School of Fine Arts in 1974, there were few employment prospects available for filmmakers in the small-scale New Zealand film industry at the time, and most of the students who graduated ended up teaching or going overseas to work in the film industry. The course that Ward undertook included other elements of the visual arts such as painting and a general education in the humanities. The Moving Image Department had been founded relatively recently and suffered from having little equipment and a single lecturer, inexperienced in some areas. The advantage of this situation for Ward was that he was to a large extent thrown back on his own resources, and was certainly not required to follow any particular "house style". Film history was part of the course and the students viewed and discussed a number of films that were not readily available in New Zealand. The practical part of the course enabled them to get "hands-on" experience in all aspects of filmmaking and to experiment within a relaxed, collegial atmosphere, despite the financial hardship caused by the high costs of having to buy their own materials. During his years at art school, Ward was able to make a number of short films, the subjects and themes of which prefigured those of his later films. He also completed *A State of Siege* and *In Spring One Plants Alone* as part of the course. His fellow-students perceived him as a controversial but very intense and dedicated figure not unlike some of his later Romantic protagonists. His lecturers were not so sympathetic and did not always recognise and acknowledge his talent.

The lack of resources at Ilam was a challenging situation in which, from the beginning, Ward demonstrated his extraordinary persistence, energy and perfectionism. He sought out experienced people in the film industry from whom he could learn what was necessary. Because he did not have access to lighting equipment, he learned to use natural light, which later influenced the special look in of his films. The course at Ilam introduced him to German Expressionist art, in particular the work of Käthe Kollwitz, and to German Expressionist film, which was to have a considerable impact on his later work. Ward was fortunate in that the calibre of his fellow-students was very high, and

he formed a successful partnership with Timothy White, who worked on several of his films and went on to become a leading producer in Australia. What was most fortunate for the director, however, was that by the time he had completed his training, the local film industry was in a stage of rapid development. This growth was due in part to the founding of the New Zealand Film Commission which made government funding available to local filmmakers, and in part to the success of feature films such as *Sleeping Dogs* which had demonstrated the viability of making local features. Ward was able to take advantage of the developing expertise of local filmmakers such as Alun Bollinger (who had worked on *Sleeping Dogs*) for the film he made as part of the requirements for his third professional examination at Ilam, *A State of Siege*.

A State of Siege, Ward's first major film, clearly demonstrated his fascination with the theme of outsiders, the extraordinary thoroughness of his working methods, and the influence of European film. It was the result of a collaboration between Ward and White as his producer, and a number of industry professionals who, for various reasons, agreed to work on a low-budget student film. Since it was a collaborative project, a study of the process of making the film provides a good case study in the strengths and weaknesses of *auteur* theory. The film was a remarkable one for two students to have conceived and completed, particularly as this was the first time Janet Frame had agreed to allow her work to be adapted to film. *A State of Siege* has historical significance as, arguably, New Zealand's first thorough-going or full-scale example of an art film. With its emphasis on atmosphere and the psychological state of the protagonist (rather than on action), its literary associations, subjective point-of-view and oblique narrative, *A State of Siege* was reminiscent of European precedents. The film's style was also consistent with this genre in its careful composition of shots, slow pace of editing and reliance on visual methods of storytelling. Ward consciously attempted to emulate the work of filmmakers such as Carl-Theodor Dreyer. His interest in Expressionism was reflected in the film's effective creation of *Stimmung* (an atmosphere of unease), the use of chiaroscuro lighting and distortion, the way the landscape and interior settings reflected the mood of the main character, and the general world-view implied by the film.

While *A State of Siege* could be viewed as the type of derivative film that young art students make, it already displayed signs of Ward's *auteurist* approach and working

methods - his meticulous attention to details, exhaustive search for locations, and his desire to be involved in all aspects of the film's production. He appears to have been not at all overawed by the greater experience of his collaborators, nor by the reputation of Janet Frame (the film adapts her novel with considerable freedom). Ward was fortunate in that his distinguished collaborators were willing to facilitate the director's vision. However, the process of working on the film was very much a learning experience for the young director, and its success owed a great deal to the experience of industry professionals, as both Ward and White readily acknowledged. White's contribution to the film was an important one – albeit leaning more to the practical side of producing - and on the credits he and Ward were listed equally. Thus, although the film was received as an inspirational example of the emergent New Zealand film industry and the work of a young New Zealand *auteur*, it was in practical terms, much more of a collaborative effort than a straightforward *auteurist* approach would suggest. It is striking, however, how closely it relates in theme and style to later films directed by Ward.

In Spring One Plants Alone was also made while Ward was still at Ilam as part of the course requirements for his DipFA Honours. It remains the only documentary he has made to date. It reflected many of his stylistic and thematic concerns in its focus on outsiders, the meticulous research undertaken, the exhaustive search for a subject and location, and the film's emphasis on striking images. The film relied a great deal upon its cameramen, but this was a skeleton crew compared with *A State of Siege*. The subject-matter was most unusual – Herzog-like in its exploration of an unusual way of life and unusual forms of subjectivity. While Ward's approach displayed a Romantic world-view in its concern with spirituality and its expanded sense of the real, the style utilised in the film owed much to *cinéma vérité*, with its careful observation of small details. There were also suggestions of a Bazinian aesthetic in the film's focus on the spiritual aspects of Puihi's life, its reliance on subtle nuance and suggestion, and the use of long-held shots. Although the film appeared to be an objective record, its interest clearly lay in extraordinary images and states of being. Ward commented recently that "authentic filmmaking" only comes about through subjectivity linked with careful observation and a determination to really hear what the subjects are saying. Arguably this respect for reality and the mystery contained within it is Bazinian, and at the same

time Romantic – and far removed from the secular concerns of most prime-time documentary-making in New Zealand today.

Ward was one of the first Pakeha filmmakers to take a serious interest in Maori culture. His subject-matter – the treatment of a mentally disabled person in a rural Maori community – was one that appears not to have been previously dealt with. The film was not an easy one to make since Ward felt himself to be an outsider to the community and was unfamiliar with Maori language and culture. There were also many difficulties in the process of making the film – the problem of dealing with a stubborn old lady, only being able to shoot one day out of seven, technical difficulties, problems in the funding of the film, and so on. It was typical of Ward both to tackle such a difficult and controversial subject, and to have the persistence to see it through. In doing so, he created a lasting testament to the old lady's belief in spiritual values and to her particular version of a traditional way of life.

The reception of the film was mixed - most critics overseas and in New Zealand were enthusiastic, but it received negative responses from some Maori critics on the grounds that Ward had brought his own (Pakeha) sensibilities and world-view to bear on a subject that, by not being Maori, he was incapable of understanding. The criticisms made by two critics, Parekowhai and Bilbrough, demonstrate some of the weaknesses of their *auteurist* assumptions, particularly in their incorrect attribution of aspects of the film to aesthetic choices made by the director when they were in fact a result of practical necessities. Neither critic had researched the local context of the film or the process of making it and this led to inaccuracies. There are lessons here for *auteur* criticism. Their criticisms carried more weight in cultural terms – there was indeed a danger of the film romanticising the exotic “other”.

The process of making *In Spring One Plants Alone* had an enormous effect on Ward personally, and *Vigil*, his first film as a professional filmmaker, carried through some of the concerns and themes of *In Spring*. The film was the third of a trilogy of films that focused on strong female characters isolated from society. It represented, however, a change in direction towards films more grounded in the director's own experiences and background. Other differences from his previous work were the more accessible, less austere style, focusing to a greater degree on action than on the psychological state of the characters (although this was still an important aspect). It displayed the familiar

features of Ward's work in the strength of its images, attention to detail, strongly subjective feel (for example in its many point-of-view shots), Expressionistic mise-en-scène, and in the influence of an art-house aesthetic evidenced by the slow pace of some scenes, highly-stylised cinematography and use of symbolism.

An analysis of Ward's idiosyncratic approach to writing the script of *Vigil* helps us to understand the underlying reasons for the particular strengths and weakness of his narratives. One of the strongest features of *Vigil* (and indeed of all his films) – its memorable imagery – was based on his method of writing a script beginning purely with images, around which he gradually constructed a story. Another characteristic feature of the narrative was its mythic nature, which can be attributed to a conscious attempt by Ward and Tetley, his collaborator on the script, to incorporate archetypal elements into the script. Ward's interest in symbolism, images and the psychology of the characters led to a complex narrative, working by juxtaposition rather than a continuous sequence of cause and effect, that critics often felt uneasy about. This type of narrative relied more heavily on implication and sub-text than conventional narratives, encouraging the viewer to actively construct meanings as much from mise-en-scène and contrast as from the film's minimal dialogue.

Initially the story of *Vigil* focussed equally on the four main characters, but through successive drafts of the script, the story came to focus on Toss, played by Fiona Kay. Although Ward was working with a child actor for the first time, the experience showed that one of the strengths of his direction was his ability to work with children. The difficult locations and Ward's perfectionist approach demanded an unusual commitment from the cast and crew, but most were prepared to acknowledge that Ward's obsessiveness, commitment and flair for lateral thinking produced outstanding results.

These qualities clearly provide the basis in practice for Ward's *auteurist* reputation. While classic *auteur* theory concentrates on the textual qualities of completed films, an expanded sense of *auteurism* will also consider the director's filmmaking practice. My own approach has sought to explore the links between theory, practice, and textual results at a deeper level than any personality cult. In the case of *Vigil*, my record of the filmmaking process has shown that three complicating factors need to be acknowledged: the quality of Ward's collaborators (artists with their own distinctive artistic personalities such as Tetley, Maynard, Bollinger and Morris); the practical

compromises inevitable in any challenging film location; and the strong inputs from various cultural traditions. Nevertheless, Ward's perfectionism and intense personal commitment ensured that he remained the prime mover and central point of reference. In the case of *Vigil*, the textual results confirm the strong degree of authorship despite the complexity of the filmmaking process.

Curiously, *Vigil* is Ward's most "New Zealand" film, despite its singularity. Its New Zealandness is apparent not in terms of the influence of other local films, but in its subject matter and in its links with broader aspects of New Zealand culture (such as the tradition of painting and the director's own life experience). It does, however, also contain elements that might be described as archetypal, such as the love triangle with its Oedipal undertones, and its mythic or religious associations. This unusual blend of local and mythic features was further evidence that Ward was developing a distinctive aesthetic. The film has stood the test of time and is acknowledged as having had an important influence on the direction of New Zealand film. *Vigil* continued the tradition of Ward attracting highly talented collaborators, one of whom was the producer, John Maynard who went on to work with him on *The Navigator: a Medieval Odyssey*.

The Navigator was originally intended to be financed by New Zealand sources, but after the collapse of local funding, Ward and Maynard went to Australia to find new sources of funding for the film. It eventually became a New Zealand/Australian co-production although this had a far-reaching impact on its creative aspects. Several aspects of *The Navigator* were common to his earlier films: the inspiration for the story came (indirectly) from his own experiences; the script was slowly developed from isolated images; the details were researched with an almost obsessive energy; the film reflected Ward's art-school training in the painterly, chiaroscuro look of the cinematography; it focused on aspects of spirituality; and its narrative contained powerful mythic elements. It differed from Ward's previous films in its depiction of a world that was essentially masculine. (Granted, there was a curious ambiguity about Toss's gender in *Vigil* – she was to some extent a stand-in for Ward as a child.) The budget was also much larger than that of any of his earlier films (much of the budget was spent on complex special effects) and for this reason, there was an increased pressure on him to attract a wide audience, rather than just an "art-house" one.

Like all of Ward's work, *The Navigator* had a spiritual aspect – it was about faith, albeit in a broad sense. The notions of sacrifice and scepticism or pragmatism versus faith were important concerns in this film, as in *Vigil*. In this film also, the influence of Ward's Catholic upbringing was evident in the iconography. The central concept for the film - that of medieval men encountering the modern world - was a striking and original one. Initially, Ward intended to draw parallels between the situation of the medieval villagers in an isolated pocket of the world, fighting off the plague, and the situation of twentieth-century New Zealanders, equally geographically isolated, defending themselves against the threat of nuclear war by the super-powers. He drew on extensive research to depict the medieval world of the film, but his intention was not to achieve historical authenticity for its own sake. At times, he was willing to sacrifice historical accuracy for the sake of achieving a striking image, and once again it was Ward's extraordinary visual sense and passion for details that were the film's strengths. He drew upon his knowledge of the visual arts for the look of the film that was inspired by medieval paintings and stained glass. He knew little about special effects so the film was a steep learning curve for him. The film's storyboard demonstrated how detailed his vision was and how meticulously he planned the film, although he also relied heavily upon specialists to achieve many of the effects.

Like *Vigil* the film's narrative was criticised for not being entirely coherent and practical problems in production were obviously responsible for some of the gaps. But since it was based on dream structure in some respects, the film might be said to have its own logic, with the viewer encouraged to construct his or her own meanings from the images. Ward's original aim had been to strengthen the story-telling aspects of the film, but his methods of scripting – starting with images and seeing the details before the overall pattern - remained incompatible with orthodox Hollywood narrative patterns. Likewise, in casting the actors, his decisions were based on the primacy of the image rather than acting abilities. His search for the actor to play Griffin (Hamish McFarlane) was thorough and meticulous, and his ability to work with children resulted in a strong performance from McFarlane that was another of the film's strengths. Apart from the difficulties of funding the film, the shoot was very difficult for the cast and crew, due to the extreme locations Ward had chosen, and to his perfectionist methods that caused hostility amongst the crew at times. That the film was eventually completed was, to a considerable extent, due to Maynard's belief in the director's vision and his

commitment to the project. Once again, therefore, the issue of authorship is an extremely complex one. Ward's collaborators made crucial contributions, yet it was the director's ability to attract and inspire them that made such results possible. Again, practical problems distorted the film (like "noise" interfering with the *auteur's* intended "signal"), but such problems arose precisely because of the director's unusual demands and ambitions. Thus, even the very aspects of the film that reflected the resistance of the so-called real world to Ward's over-ambitious vision were, in a sense, coloured by that vision, and (in his commitment to dream logic) could to some extent be accommodated within that vision, at least to the eyes of a sympathetic viewer. Hence, *The Navigator* remains very much "a Vincent Ward film" – although an *auteurist* approach based solely on the end result, ignoring the practical struggles and compromises involved in making the film, would be a two-dimensional simplification. What the project demonstrated, however, was the danger inherent in Ward's style of direction that his high ambitions, in conflict with budget pressures, could – in less fortunate circumstances – result in a serious loss of control. In other words, a Romantic approach to filmmaking (using that term in its most serious sense as a visionary, individualistic aesthetic) exists uneasily in the medium of film which involves strong elements of the pragmatic, the social, and the commercial. This is not to question Ward's professionalism – by now, he had mastered many of the practical skills of filmmaking and sincerely valued the abilities of his collaborators – but his values and ambitions could not always be lined up with those of the industry environment in which films are made.

The Navigator represented a new peak of achievement for Ward in its scope, richness of texture and imaginative power and strengthened his status as an *auteur* on the international scene. It also represented for the director a geographical move away from New Zealand, to Australia and eventually to the USA, where he was to be based for the later part of his career. The films made after *The Navigator* were made in quite different production contexts and had much larger budgets, and this resulted in some loss of control for Ward as an *auteur*, involving the pressure to make more commercial films with a stronger storyline and upbeat ending. The first of these was *Map of the Human Heart*, which, like *The Navigator*, belonged to a recognisable genre (epic romance) and displayed some features of the art film in its strong authorial vision and its emphasis on visual aspects. Other similarities to *The Navigator* included the

juxtaposition of an earlier, more “primitive” setting with a later, more modern one; the use of extreme locations; the central concepts of navigation and the undertaking of a journey from one end of the world to the other; and the point-of-view of a child (at least in the first part of the film). Like *The Navigator*, the film was also a co-production (in this case a multi-national one) and it similarly ran into financial difficulties. A production guarantor was called in, and this, added to the producers’ demands for Ward to create a more positive ending, made it difficult for him to maintain his vision for the film. Despite such pressure, his *auteurist* approach was - arguably - still clearly evident in his involvement in writing the script and co-producing the film; in the film’s central themes and concerns - the love story between two outsiders; the theme of vision or revelation; the search for identity; the use of familiar motifs such as blood, white horses, and striking aerial shots; and in its various autobiographical elements. A Romantic aesthetic informed some aspects of the film - in particular its sublime landscapes, the notion of unrequited love, and the ambitious nature of the overall project. *Map of the Human Heart* had a mixed reception - it was regarded as an ambitious but flawed masterpiece, not sufficiently intellectual and uncompromising to impress an art-house audience, but also insufficiently accessible for a mainstream audience.

My analysis also saw the film as an interesting example of the complex issues surrounding national identity. While not at first glance a “New Zealand film” in any sense, it nevertheless responds richly to being read from a post-colonial standpoint, extending the concerns of Ward’s earlier films from a national to an international context. The critical discussion of the film once again illustrates the inadequacies of an *auteurist* approach that does not take account of production information. Editing as a salvage job (in some parts of the film) was done under Ward’s supervision but it was clearly a compromise, and any meaningful discussion of authorship needs to acknowledge the practical pressures involved in making a film of this kind. Granted, it may be said - as in the case of *The Navigator* - that the particular kind of mixed bag that the film became could only have resulted from the high ambitions of a director such as Ward. An *auteur* may have characteristic flaws and disasters as well as characteristic strengths and triumphs.

Following *Map of the Human Heart*, Ward was involved in a number of projects as a writer/director or actor. The first of these was *Alien 3* for which he came up with a

story concept that included aspects similar to his earlier films in its religious allusions, subjective point-of-view, and notions of sacrifice and personal dilemma. Like his earlier films, the visual concept was strongly influenced by medieval art, and the story was to centre on a female protagonist. However, pressure was brought to bear on him by the producers to change his original concept, and the experience of not having the freedom to carry out his ideas resulted in him pulling out of the project. Despite this, the final version of the film retained some of his ideas, and he was sufficiently optimistic about being able to tell his own stories to move to Hollywood in 1993, where he intended to continue to make big budget films. The basis of the initial mutual attraction between Ward and Hollywood was obviously his ability to imagine alternative worlds in vivid detail on a scale that only Hollywood could realise. One of the projects he worked on in Hollywood was *The Last Samurai* – another vivid story of clashing cultures - but he realised once again that he would not be allowed to pursue his vision of the film and he pulled out of the project. In the meantime, he was able to make a living as an actor (which proved to be good experience for him as a director) and he went back to New Zealand for a short time, to make a television commercial for Steinlager. Although commercials are among the most circumscribed forms of filmmaking, Ward brought to this project many aspects of his characteristic approach as a film director – evident in the “filmic” look of the commercial and the largely improvised performances of the actors. Also typical was his active involvement in all aspects of the production. Prestige advertising of this kind is always a complex transaction as the company concerned is seeking to benefit from the status of the *auteur* it employs and the artistic style he brings to the commercial. Basically the company wants only the aspects of his “vision” that will serve its commercial priorities.

The last film Ward made in Hollywood was *What Dreams May Come*, a project that appealed to him initially because it was an intimate story that picked up on several strands he had already explored in his work - in particular, a gruelling spiritual and emotional journey with a mythical resonance, and the notion of an outsider confronting an alien world. At first it seemed he would be able to make a film he cared deeply about with access to Hollywood resources and without having to compromise. In his usual fashion, he was heavily involved in casting the actors, scripting the film (although in this case, he was not the principal scriptwriter) and in many aspects of the production. As always he chose difficult locations and demanded a great deal of the cast and crew.

It was in the visual aspects that his influence was most strongly evident. Elements of the Romantic Sublime were present in the way the landscape was depicted, and Ward drew on his art-school training for the Expressionistic aspects of the film – the use of settings to express the psychological state of the characters, the creation of an atmosphere of terror in the scenes in Hell, the use of lighting and colour to create mood, the use of carefully-composed images and the film’s interest in dreams and the subconscious mind. Despite Ward’s desire to maintain artistic control over the film, Polygram had made a huge financial investment which the company needed to recoup by ensuring that the film appealed to the widest audience possible. Ward was required to make compromises that weakened some aspects of the film, especially the ending. As it turned out, the film did not do well at the box office – arguably it did not succeed fully either as an art film or as a mainstream film – and this did not help Ward’s marketability. The film was still a remarkable artistic achievement in many respects, but it clearly did not reach its full potential. The experience of working in Hollywood was ultimately frustrating for the director who wanted to make films he passionately believed in, but found himself at odds with the industry which wanted him to be more conventional in his general approach. Other New Zealand directors who had gone to Hollywood such as Roger Donaldson, Geoff Murphy and Lee Tamahori had effectively accepted the devil’s bargain of increased resources in return for reduced individuality. On at least some of their projects, they had become “guns for hire” (something Ward has stated he wished to avoid). One way to interpret Ward’s experience would be to see his intense *auteurism* as incompatible with Hollywood. We might, however, see the problem as residing in his particular style of *auteurism*, since some *auteurs* did find ways of operating within the commercial system (the Hitchcock paradigm). *Map of the Human Heart* and *What Dreams May Come* might be seen as unsuccessful attempts to find common ground between the mainstream, multiplex movie and the specialised, art-house film. Finding such ground was not impossible, as demonstrated by at least some of the films of New Zealand expatriate Jane Campion. *The Piano* was a successful “crossover” film, whereas her later films sometimes fell between the two stools. The size of budgets – necessarily large where fantasy or history was involved – influenced the level of risk. The career of Orson Welles, known as the *auteur’s auteur*, remains relevant in its sad chronicle of compromise and unfinished later projects. Ward’s experience to date has unfortunately been closer to Welles’s than to Campion’s. In addition to the problem of reconciling commercial with cultural priorities, Ward has

also – in his most recent project – had difficulty aligning regional (New Zealand) concerns with the interests of international investors.

This thesis has examined the biography and work of a leading New Zealand filmmaker. It has sought to define what makes Ward's work distinctive and the evolution of his aesthetic. As a contribution to the under-researched tradition of film study in New Zealand, it has documented the process by which his films were made. Close study has confirmed my belief that they represent an exceptionally important body of work.

As a test of *auteur* theory, I believe my study of the films has shown the basic relevance of this approach to a director with his type of artistic personality. In Ward's case, an individualist approach accords with the Romantic aspects of his aesthetic. My *auteurist* analysis has identified characteristic themes, visual motifs, stylistic tendencies and other distinctive interests. In my discussions with the director, I became aware that every creative decision he made was carefully thought through and that he is the kind of *auteur* who sees a close dialogue between theory and practice. This is one reason why I have employed an expanded conception of *auteur* theory that considers practice as well as theory – the distinctive characteristics of the director in action, in addition to the textual results of that action. As such, I believe that in its exploration of biographical influences and production activities as well as filmmaking contexts, this case study may have made a contribution to the development of *auteur* criticism. At the same time, I have seen *auteurism* as only one dimension of my study, needing to be complemented first by a study of intellectual and cultural history (the overall contexts of Romanticism, Expressionism and the New Zealand film tradition, among other sources), and secondly by an account of the film industry contexts (financial, technological, and organizational) in which any director must operate. This eclectic or “thick” description seems appropriate for the complex medium of film. It is also one way of responding to Ward's dislike of labels – I do not want to refrain from categorization but I must acknowledge that an adequate description involves not one but many categories, allowing us to discuss but never to exhaust a complex work of art which continues to exist – in W.H. Auden's phrase - “in the valley of its making”, never entirely ceding to the critic its own complex power and mystery.⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸⁴ W.H.Auden, “In Memory of W.B.Yeats”. Helen Gardner, ed., The New Oxford Book of English Verse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 920.

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Vincent Ward A Filmography

- 1975** *The Cave* (as scriptwriter and director)
30 minutes, 16mm colour and B&W
Camera: John McWilliams
Incomplete; exists only in double-head form.
- 1976** *Boned* (as director)
Stills animation, 6 minutes, 16mm B&W
Camera: Vincent Ward
Double-head copy only.
- 1976** *Void* (as director, actor and scriptwriter)
20 minutes, half-inch video
Camera: John McWilliams.
- 1977** *Ma Olsen* (as director)
15 minutes, 16mm colour
Camera: Euan Frizzell, Vincent Ward
Made with the assistance of the Education Department and TV1.
- 1977** *Samir* (as cameraman)
6 minutes, 16mm colour
Director: Timothy White
Double-head copy only.
- 1978** *A State of Siege*
52 minutes, 16 mm colour
Producer: Timothy White
Screenplay: White and Ward based on a novel by Janet Frame
Camera: Alun Bollinger
Additional Photography: Mike Rathbone
Assistant Director: Geoff Murphy
Film Editor: Chris King
Sound: Don Reynolds, Malcolm Moore
Costumes: Gwen Kaiser
Continuity: Christine Hancox
Music: John Cousins
Cast: Anne Flannery (Malfred Signal), Peggy Walker, John Bullock, Jennifer Kahn, Peter McCauley, Maime White, Dorothy McKegg.
Made on a budget of approx. \$22,000 with the assistance of the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council II, the Education Department and the Interim Film Commission
Awards/Major Festivals: Golden Hugo Award (for best student film) at the Chicago Film Festival 1978; Gold Medal Special Jury Prize at the Miami Festival 1978; included in the New Directors Section of the San Francisco Film Festival 1980.

- 1979** *Sons for the Return Home* (as art director)
 117 minutes, 35mm colour
 Production Company: Pacific Films in association with the New Zealand Film Commission.
 Budget: approx. \$420,000
 Director: Paul Maunder
 Executive Producer: Don Blakeney
 Screenplay: Paul Maunder, based on a novel by Albert Wendt
 Director of Photography: Alun Bollinger
 Editor: Christine Lancaster
 Costume Designer: Christine Hansen
 Music: Malcolm Smith
 Sound: Don Reynolds, Brian Shennan
 Cast: Ueese Petaia (Sione), Fiona Lindsay (Sarah), Moira Walker (Sione's mother), Lani Tupu (Sione's father), Amalamo Tanielu (Malie), Anne Flannery (Sarah's mother), Alan Jervis (Sarah's father), Malama Masima (Receptionist), Sean Duffy (Sarah's first love), Tony Groser (Headmaster), Peleti Lima (Sione aged 15).
- 1980** *In Spring One Plants Alone* (as scriptwriter, director and producer)
 45 minutes, 16mm colour
 Production Company: Vincent Ward Film Productions
 Budget: approx. \$23,000
 Research: Vincent Ward, Alister Barry
 Camera: Alun Bollinger, Leon Narbey
 Editor: Chris Lancaster
 Music: Jack Body
 Sound: Steve Upston
 Production Assistants: Ken Sparks, David Coulson, Alistair Barry
 Sound Mix: Brian Shannon
 Stills: Miles Hargest
 Made with the assistance of the Education Department, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and the New Zealand Film Commission
 Awards/Major Festivals: Silver Hugo Award at the Chicago Film Festival 1980; Grand Prix Winner at the 1982 Cinéma du Réel Festival. In 1980 it toured the USA with *A State of Siege*; this included a San Francisco Film Festival screening.
- 1982** Ward did two weeks of visual research for Geoff Murphy's feature-film *Utū*, which went into production in 1982.
- 1984** *Vigil* (as director and co-scriptwriter)
 91 minutes, 35 mm colour
 Production Company: John Maynard Productions
 Budget: just under \$2 million
 Producer: John Maynard
 Executive Producer: Gary Hannam
 Associate Producer: Piers Davies
 Screenplay: Vincent Ward, Graeme Tetley

Camera: Alun Bollinger
 Editor: Simon Reece
 Production Designer: Kai Hawkins
 Costume Designer: Glenys Jackson
 Sound Recordist: Graham Morris
 Music: Jack Body
 Cast: Bill Kerr (Birdie), Fiona Kay (Toss), Gordon Shields (Justin Peers),
 Penelope Stewart (Elizabeth Peers), Frank Whitten (Ethan Ruir)
 Made with the assistance of the NZ Film Commission
 Awards/Major Festivals: Selected for Competition at the Cannes Film Festival
 1984; Most Popular Film at the Prades Film Festival 1984; Best Film at the
 Imag Fic Festival 1985; Best Cinematography, Best Original Screenplay, Best
 Production Design New Zealand Listener Film and Television Awards 1986.

- 1988** *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (as director)
 93 minutes, 35mm B&W/colour
 Production Company: Arenafilm and the Film Investment Corporation of New
 Zealand.
 Budget: \$4.3 million
 Producer: John Maynard
 Co-producer/Executive Producer: Gary Hannam
 Screenplay: Vincent Ward, Kely Lyons, Geoff Chapple, from an original idea by
 Vincent Ward.
 Director of Photography: Geoffrey Simpson
 Camera Operator: Allen Guilford
 Editor: John Scott
 Production Designer: Sally Campbell
 Costume Designer: Glenys Jackson
 Research: Lynda Fairbairn, Alison Carter, Clare Shanks
 Special Effects Pyrotechnics: Ken Durey
 Special Effects Supervisor: Paul Nichola
 Music: Davood A. Tabrizi
 Sound: Dick Reade, Liz Goldfinch, Lee Smith, Peter Townend, Phil Judd
 Cast: Bruce Lyons (Connor), Chris Haywood (Arno), Hamish McFarlane
 (Griffin), Marshall Napier (Searle), Noel Appleby (Ulf), Paul Livingstone
 (Martin), Sarah Peirse (Linnet), Mark Wheatley (Tog 1), Tony Herbert (Tog 2),
 Jessica Cardiff-Smith (Esme), Roy Wesley (Grandpa), Kathleen-Elizabeth
 Kelly (Grandma), Jay Saussey (Griffin's girlfriend), Charles Walker (Old
 Chrissie), Desmond Kelly (Smithy), Bill Le Marquand (Tom), Jay Lavea
 Laga'aia (Jay), Norman Fairley (Submarine Captain), Alister Babbage (Grigor)
 Made with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission and the NZ Film
 Commission
 Awards/Major Festivals: Official Selection in Cannes Film Festival 1988; Jury
 Prize, Best Film, Fanta Film Festival, Rome 1988; Best Film Cinema Fantastic,
 Sitges Film Festival, Spain 1988; Best Film, International Festival of Fantasy
 Films, Munich 1988; Australian Film Institute Awards for Best Film, Best
 Director, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, Best Production Design, Best
 Costume Design 1988; Best Film, Oporto Film Festival, USA 1989; Best Film,
 Best Male Performance, Hamish McFarlane, Best Female Performance in a
 Supporting Role, Sarah Peirse, Best Male Performance in a Supporting Role,

Noel Appleby, Best Cinematography, Best Soundtrack, Best Director, Best Editing, Best Film Score, Best Original Screenplay, Best Production Design, New Zealand Film and Television Awards 1989.

- 1990** *Alien 3* (as scriptwriter)
 114 minutes, 35mm, 70mm colour
 Production Company: Twentieth Century Fox: A Brandywine Production
 Budget: approx US \$70 million
 Executive Producer: Ezra Swerdlow
 Co-producer: Sigourney Weaver
 Producers: Gordon Carroll, David Giler, Walter Hill
 Director: David Fincher
 Screenplay: David Giler, Walter Hill, Larry Ferguson
 Director of Photography: Alex Thomson
 Editor: Terry Rawlings
 Music: Eliot Goldenthal
 Production Designer: Norman Reynolds
 Visual Effects: Richard Edlund
 Cast: Signourey Weaver (Ellen Ripley), Charles Dutton (Dillon), Charles Dance (Clemens), Paul McGann (Golic), Brian Glover (Andrews), Ralph Brown (Aaron), Daniel Webb (Morse), Christopher John Fields (Rains), Holt McCallany (Junior), Lance Henriksen (Bishop II), Christopher Fairbank (Murphy), Carl Chase (Frank), Leon Herbert (Boggs), Vincenzo Nicoli (Jude), Pete Postlethwaite (David)
 Awards: Nominated for Academy Award for Best Visual Effects 1991.
- 1992** *Map of the Human Heart* (as director, scriptwriter and producer)
 109 minutes, 35mm colour
 Production Companies: Working Title, Map Films (London); Vincent Ward Films (Sydney); Les Films Ariane (Paris); Sunrise Films (Toronto) for Polygram Filmed Entertainment
 Budget: approx. \$20 million
 Executive Producers: Graham Bradstreet, Harvey Weinstein, Bob Weinstein
 Producers: Tim Bevan, Vincent Ward
 Co-producers: Timothy White, Linda Beath, Paul Saltzman (Canada), Sylvaine Sainderichin (France)
 Screenplay: Louis Nowra
 Story: Vincent Ward
 Director of Photography: Eduardo Serra
 Editors: John Scott, Frans Vandenburg (Australia)
 Production Designer: John Beard
 Costume Design: Renee April, Penny Rose (UK)
 Music: Gabriel Yared
 Cast: Jason Scott-Lee (Avik), Robert Joamie (young Avik), Anne Parillaud (Albertine), Annie Gallipeau (young Albertine), Patrick Bergin (Walter Russell), Clothilde Courau (Rainee), John Cusack (Mapmaker), Jeanne Moreau (Sister Banville), Ben Mendelsohn (Farmboy), Jerry Snell (Boleslaw), Jayko Pitseolak (Avik's grandmother), Matt Holland (Flight Navigator), Rebecca Vevee (Inuit cook), Josape Kopalee (Inuit elder), Reepah Arereak (Avik's girlfriend), Monique Sparziani (Nurse Beatrice), Harry Hill (X-ray doctor), Anik Matern

(Thelma), Marc Ruel (Photo Analyst), Tyley Ross (Photo Messenger), Charlotte Coleman (Julie), Richard Zeman (Military Policeman), Minor Mustain (Army Sergeant), Gordon Masten (Captain Johns), Michelle Turmel (Ginger Jameson), Rick Hamburg (Arctic NCO), Dall Sullivan (Barrage Balloon WAAC), Tamar Kozlov (Dresden girl), Robin Dorken (Oil man), Bill Rowat (Barman), Sophie Leger (Voice artist)

Awards/Major Festivals: Screened at Cannes in the non-competitive section 1992, Young Actor's Award Australian Film Institute 1993, Best Artistic Contribution Award (Vincent Ward, director) Tokyo International Film Festival 1993.

1993-1995 Ward worked on several films as an actor:

Leaving Las Vegas, directed by Mike Figgis (released 1995)

The Shot, directed by Dan Martin (released 1997)

One Night Stand, directed by Mike Figgis (released 1997).

1998 *What Dreams May Come* (as director)

113 minutes, 35mm colour

Production companies: PolyGram in association with Metafilmics

Budget: approx. US \$90 million

Executive Producers: Ted Field, Scott Kroopf, Erica Huggins, Ron Bass

Producers: Stephen Simon, Barnet Bain

Screenplay: Ron Bass, based on the novel by Richard Matheson

Director of Photography: Eduardo Serra

Editors: David Brenner, Maysie Hoy

Production Designer: Eugenio Zanetti

Costume Designer: Yvonne Blake

Music: Michael Kamen

Visual Effects Supervisors: Joel Hynek, Nicholas Brooks

Cast: Robin Williams (Chris Nielsen), Cuba Gooding Jr (Albert), Annabella Sciorra (Annie Nielsen), Max von Sydow (The Tracker), Jessica Brooks Grant (Marie Nielsen), Josh Paddock (Ian Nielsen), Rosalind Chao (Leona), Maggie McCarthy (Stacey Jacobs), Wilma Bonet (Angie), Matt Salinger (Reverend Hanely), Carin Sprague (Cindy), June Lomena (woman in car accident), Paul P. Card IV (paramedic), Werner Herzog (face), Clara Thomas (little girl at lake), Benjamin Brock (little boy at lake)

Awards: nominated for an Academy Award for Production Design, received an Academy Award for Visual Effects, 1999.

2003 *The Last Samurai* (as researcher and co-producer)

154 minutes, 35mm colour

Production Company: Warner Bros.

Budget: \$170 million

Director: Edward Zwick

Executive Producers: Ted Field, Rick Solomon, Charles Mulvehill, Vincent Ward

Producers: Scott Kroopf, Tom Engelman, Edward Zwick, Marshall Herskovitz, Tom Cruise, Paula Wagner

Screenplay: John Logan, Edward Zwick, Marshall Herskovitz

Director of Photography: John Toll

Editors: Steven Rosenblum, Victor Dubois

Production Designer: Lilly Kilvert

Music: Hans Zimmer

Cast: Ken Watanabe (Katsumoto), Tom Cruise (Nathan Algren), Billy Connolly (Zebulon Gant), Tony Goldwyn (Colonel Bagley), Masato Harada (Omura), Timothy Spall (Simon Graham), Shichinosuke Nakamura (Emperor Meiji), Togo Igawa (General Hasegawa), Shun Sugata (Nakao), Seizo Fukumoto (Silent Samurai).

List of Interviews

All interviews were conducted in person unless otherwise indicated.

Maurice Askew, 25 January 1999
Graeme Barnes, 16 December 1999
Jocelyn Beavan, 26 January 1999
Stephanie Beth, 26 January 1999
Alun Bollinger, 3 December 1998
Alison Carter, 6 August 2002
Eric Caton, 16 April 2000
Marianne Chandler, 1 October 1999
David Coulson, 16 August 2002
David Field, 15 April 1999
Murray Freeth, 25 January 1999
Roger Horrocks, various
Bridget Ikin, 27 September 1999
Chris King, 2 February 1999
Trevor Lamb, 15 April 1999
John Maynard, 29 September 1999
Hamish McFarlane, 15 August 2002
Elizabeth McRae, 20 November 2001
Graham Morris, 28 August 2003
Leon Narbey, 29 January 2002
Louis Nowra, 29 February 2000
Geoffrey Simpson, 29 September 1999
Victoria Stafford, 10 June 1999
Bay Takao, 16 April 2000
Maui and Kero Te Pou, 15 April 2000
Graham Tetley, 4 December 1998
Helen and Toka Tewara, 16 April 2000
Ingrid Ward, 15 April 1999
Judy Ward, 15 April 1999
Vincent Ward, 11 December 1997, 16 October 1998, (phone) 17 December 2003
Timothy White, 29 September 1999
Frank Whitten, 13 April 2002

