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GOING FAR?

**JOHN O'SHEA'S RUNAWAY
IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS
ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A FEATURE
FILM INDUSTRY IN NEW ZEALAND**

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Thesis Abstract

Over the past two decades, the amount of media attention and scholarly research focused on New Zealand feature-films has greatly increased. However, because this work has emphasised directors and films from 1977 onwards, John O’Shea (1920-2001) has not received the detailed treatment called for in terms of the crucial role he played in sustaining and building film production in New Zealand through his company Pacific Films.

This thesis seeks to make a comprehensive study of one of O’Shea’s most important feature films, *Runaway* (1964). The film provides a classic example of the importance of contexts in film study, and this thesis seeks to explore a variety of relevant contexts – the previous history of film production in New Zealand; the development of a general ‘film culture’; O’Shea’s personal background; the events leading up to the *Runaway*’s production; the social, cultural, technical and financial challenges O’Shea faced in completing the film; and its reception and subsequent influence. His earlier and later feature films are also discussed in some detail.

The limited amount of previous scholarship on this topic necessitated primary research of various kinds, beginning with a study of the extensive records of Pacific Films – scripts, correspondence, music scores, flyers, press clippings, etc. Interviews were conducted with O’Shea over a six-year period. In addition, interviews were held with various people involved in the production of *Runaway*, as well as a number of writers. These included Colin Broadley, Betty Curnow, John Graham, Kevin Ireland, William Johnstone and Ian Mune.

Runaway makes an interesting case study for many reasons – its novelty as the first 35mm feature made in New Zealand for 12 years; O’Shea’s struggle to create the necessary creative and technical infrastructure; the influence of contemporary European cinema; the film’s portrayal of an ‘Angry Young Man’ combined with the New Zealand ‘Man Alone’ tradition; and its creative achievement in a situation when there were so few precedents or possible ways of funding film-making. This thesis seeks to expand the record of an under-researched period of our film history, to

provide insights into the dynamics of New Zealand culture at the time, and to analyse O’Shea’s remarkable contribution to the development of a local film industry.

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To Bess, my muse

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Personal friends also supported me with their regular inquiries and from time to time were able to offer ideas and resources. Shade Smith who had assisted me in the shooting of my 1993 documentary *Runaway Revisited* often discussed the progress of the thesis which had grown out of that production. Composer Gary Daverne generously wrote a personal perspective of Robin Maconie's *Runaway* music while others also added their words of encouragement and discussed my ideas and problems at length.

Those associated with *Runaway* were invaluable. In particular John O’Shea, who I first met in 1992, was exceedingly generous with his time and support. It is my fervent hope that the thesis will go some way to gaining a greater degree of acknowledgement for him in the artistic community. His *Runaway* co-writer John Graham was also extremely helpful with his time and with documentation – some of which appears for the first time in this thesis. Others who willingly supported my efforts were Clyde Scott, Alama Woods, William Johnstone, Gil Cornwall, and Colin Broadley. Colin, in particular, was very generous with his time, a generosity which was much appreciated due to the pivotal role which he played in *Runaway*. By coincidence his former wife Colleen successfully auditioned for a part in *Sink the Warrior!* a musical which I wrote with Shade Smith in 1994. When the *Runaway* connection was made it transpired that her daughter’s employer Ross White had happened to have a camera on the day *Runaway* was being shot in Mission Bay. The result is that some of Ross’s photographs appear in the thesis. Other fruitful coincidences included a chance conversation with Gerd Free, an AUT colleague whom I had known for many years. I discovered that she had auditioned for *Runaway* and was related through her husband Ian Free to John Graham. Gerd and Ian’s reminiscences added a further dimension to my research.

I was also gratified to have enthusiastic support from film personnel based overseas. Actor Terence Bayler, producer Michael Forlong and composer Robin Maconie all wrote detailed and valuable responses to my written inquiries. I was also delighted, after considerable efforts to track down London-based Nadja Regin the star of *Runaway* with whom I recorded a long and fascinating phone interview.

Others from the cultural community who contributed their time and expertise included writers Kevin Ireland, Diane Brown, and Peter Simpson, film commentator Jonathan Dennis, the multi-talented Ian Mune, actor Lorenz van Sommaruga and colleague Anna Soutar. Anna, like Gerd Free, had been an acquaintance of mine for many years. Consequently I was surprised and delighted to discover that she had acted in John Graham’s 1962 play *Lest We Resemble*. Betty Curnow, whose attendance at the play and the resulting letter to John O’Shea in November 1962 triggered off a whole series of events which culminated in the production of *Runaway*, was able to draw on a rich variety of artistic and literary experiences during my interviews with her.

The New Zealand Film Archive showed what a valuable organisation it is for persons like me who are digging into the increasingly rich lode of New Zealand film history. The support of their personnel was much appreciated. Others who supported me in the challenging but necessary business of word processing, collating, compiling and printing included Sharon Deal, my friend Clive Brown of Office Products Depot Takapuna, his brother David, and David's wife Prue.

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INTRODUCTION

“I can remember him saying, ‘All the best films are in black and white’.”
(Jane Campion)¹

Producer and/or director of large numbers of New Zealand documentaries, director of the only New Zealand feature films made during the 1950s and 60s, author of many film-related essays and mentor to generations of young film-makers, John Dempsey O’Shea should have become a byword in the visual arts and media community. Yet this never happened. Over a period of 50 years he developed and maintained a career as a film director and an influential mentor for successive generations of film-makers. While he did receive an honorary doctorate and an OBE for his services to New Zealand film, he was frequently overlooked by those writing about key figures in the arts. Although his autobiography *Don’t Let It Get You* attracted several positive reviews and some television coverage, he remained a little-known figure in the culture in comparison with contemporaries such as James K. Baxter or Colin McCahon. Certainly he is remembered and honoured by the film industry but seldom by society at large. Yet he had a significant impact on many people and is still deeply relevant to us as a role model.

Although film has always been an extremely popular and influential medium in this country, for many years O’Shea was virtually the only New Zealander to stand against the flood of imported feature-films that filled local screens. Inspiring his team of necessarily under-paid workers, he strove to establish an infrastructure in which the regular production of local feature films could gain an accepted place in New Zealand culture. In spite of his efforts, at first glance he would seem to have failed. Between 1953 and 1966 he produced and directed three feature films, *Broken Barrier* (1953), *Runaway* (1964) and *Don’t Let It Get You* (1966), but after that, no other 35mm features appeared for eleven years. On-going feature film production only began in 1977, through a new wave of films led by Roger Donaldson’s *Sleeping Dogs*. Thus, O’Shea had tried to create a feature-film industry but the attempt had proved too difficult in the 60s. Furthermore, in the public enthusiasm that followed the development of a more stable industry in the 1970s O’Shea was largely overlooked. By this time he had become a producer rather than a director and as there is a common

tendency for publicity to focus on the director, awareness of him remained limited. Consequently apart from passing references in film histories and the occasional article, little of any substance has been written about him or his work. Writing in 1977, Roger Horrocks pointed out that “John O’Shea whose career extends over twenty-five years has not received the serious attention or the warm tribute that his contribution demands”², and unfortunately 25 years later this comment is still relevant.

The present thesis is one attempt to remedy this oversight, not only on the grounds that O’Shea’s career deserves serious attention, but also because it provides such a rich case study. While O’Shea’s efforts may be said to have ended in glorious failure, the precise details of this “failure” are highly informative in terms of the dynamics of New Zealand society and culture at the time. His films raise large questions such as:

- 1) What form was “a New Zealand feature film” to take?
- 2) How would audiences – both local and overseas – react to this new kind of film?
- 3) Did this country have the skill base to make such production possible?

The answers (in 1964 when *Runaway* appeared) were complex and revealing. Furthermore, O’Shea’s efforts continued to function in the collective memory of the film-making community as evidence that New Zealand feature films could be produced, thus acting as a challenge to others to make the same attempt. Similarly, some of the young people who had been members of O’Shea’s film crews or actors in his films were to go overseas returning later to play a key role in the 1970s film-making upsurge. Along with many others who passed through Pacific Films, they honoured him as a guide and mentor.

In highlighting the achievements and influence of John O’Shea I have chosen to focus mainly on his second feature film *Runaway*. A full-length feature with a large cast and a plot that traversed the length of New Zealand, it was O’Shea’s most ambitious attempt to create a great New Zealand film. *Runaway* was launched at a special vice-regal function and viewed by many thousands throughout the country. Unfortunately

it was not only a financial disappointment but was deemed by the majority of critics and commentators to have failed to communicate its message and, due to its potpourri of styles and genres, was accused of doing more to confuse than to enlighten or entertain. Yet the *Runaway* project was still a glorious failure because of its strengths as well as its weaknesses. If it did not provide answers, it nevertheless raised many important questions in its courageous attempt to challenge contemporary aspirations.

The decision to concentrate on a single feature film as the key aspect of my thesis deserves comment. Although the published literature on O’Shea is sketchy, his company Pacific Films was meticulous in maintaining its archives. Consequently there is a wealth of information on the processes of planning, scripting, shooting and marketing this film. Considering how often this kind of documentation is thrown away because companies run out of storage space, any researcher must be immensely grateful for the care taken to preserve it – and the honesty involved in keeping even the records of acrimonious disagreements (such as that between director and script-writer). O’Shea’s university education and his post-war employment as a war archivist, may well have influenced his decision to maintain such detailed documentation, and he must also have been aware that in attempting to create a New Zealand feature film industry he and his team were making history. When I first gained access to the material it was still housed in cardboard boxes at Pacific Films. Subsequently I was pleased to see that it had gone to the New Zealand Film Archive where it was in the process of being catalogued and can now be permanently accessed. Whatever O’Shea’s reasons for preserving the material, it provided me with the unique opportunity to analyse in depth many aspects entailed in the production of that most sophisticated and complex of art forms, the feature film. Besides documenting how the film was planned and completed, the material gave a dramatic sense of the challenges which O’Shea and his team faced in trying to produce a feature film in a country whose production infrastructure was very limited.

Next I needed to expand on this information and to contextualise it by interviewing a number of key personnel, exploring newspapers and magazines and viewing other films of the period. One difficulty involved in pursuing this investigation was the fact that so few researchers had preceded me. I was therefore involved in primary research and basic documentation, with almost no other analyses or generalisations

available for me to argue with or build on. The film's concept, characters and structure reflected a range of artistic interests and influences present at this time within the wider context of New Zealand culture. I ended up with a huge amount of written material – various versions of the script, production notes, letters (such as those exchanged between script-writer and director), interview transcripts, photographic documentation, and related "texts" from other cultural areas such as literature and the visual arts. Every feature film is like the tip of an iceberg. The unseen portion contains the massive amount of material required to support the viewable summit. This material includes the bulk of the documents involved in the film-making process which is a "paper trail" recording large numbers of creative decisions and practical compromises. From the 90 minutes of *Runaway*, with its plot, settings, dialogue, characters, costumes, music and cinematic structure can be gleaned a considerable amount of information on aspects of the New Zealand culture of the time. As British writer John Hill pointed out, investigating films involves "not simply an analysis of the films themselves and the representations ... which they provided, but also an assessment of the significance of these representations in relation to the society of which they were a part. From this point of view, it is not only what films tell us about society which is important but also what an understanding of the society can tell us about the films and the nature of their representation ... films do more than just 'reflect'; they also actively explain and interpret the way in which the world is to be perceived and understood."³ Dermody and Jacka concur, pointing out that their interest in Australian national cinema is "not completely cranky or remote from the cutting edge. Instead it seems to be part of a fresh impetus in film scholarship, an impetus from film *history*, in which the cultural, the economic, and the technological are perceived as a fascinating complex of relations. It is a conjuncture in which the nature and movement of a society and the way in which it thinks about itself can be glimpsed."⁴

My most important informant was of course John O'Shea himself with whom I had many interviews. In some cases these were face to face during trips by him to Auckland or by me to Wellington. At other times I phoned him. Also invaluable were the interviews which I conducted with John Graham the co-writer of *Runaway*. The first interview took place at his property on Great Barrier Island, others during his trips to Auckland and others by phone. Face to face interviews were also done with

actors such as Colin Broadley, William Johnstone and Clyde Scott as well as others who were linked at one stage or another with the project such as Betty Curnow. I was also fortunate in being able to track down *Runaway* lead actress Nadja Regin in London, and conduct an extensive phone interview with her. I also benefited greatly from correspondence with *Runaway* music composer Robin Maconie and *Broken Barrier* actor Terence Bayler, both of whom now live in London.

Feature film production tends to leave a “paper trail” in newspapers, magazines, radio or television. Although such coverage was spasmodic and not always reliable, it helped me to document key aspects of O’Shea’s life and work. Also invaluable were the documents and films in The New Zealand Film Archive where I was able to view many of his earlier productions including *Cookery Nook* (1955) and *Think About Tomorrow* (1960). I also refreshed my memory of films such as Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and Michaelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* (1960) which were contemporary influences on O’Shea’s feature films. Time was also spent in viewing material in the Television New Zealand Archives and the University of Auckland Film Library, in addition to my own collection and the collections of friends and colleagues. If at times the thesis seems overloaded with the factual information garnered in this way, I should explain that my commitment to primary research was strengthened in the course of the project by my frustration over the lack of such information in print. New Zealand film history remains a largely unexplored territory, which does not prevent commentators from creating sweeping theories. At the risk of being accused of writing a prosaic thesis, I have set out to research one corner of local film history so thoroughly that theorists will at last have a bedrock of facts on which to base their generalisations. The fact that there is strong interest in O’Shea within some areas of the film industry, and a sense of frustration that so little information about him is available – a situation brought home to me strongly when I attended his funeral – has provided a further incentive for me to write an accessible, well-documented account that might help to meet those community needs. This is not to neglect the theoretical questions that are inevitably raised by every study of history – questions I shall address in the second half of this introduction.

The Importance of Contexts

The complex art of the feature film touches on many areas of the culture. Besides its unique aspects, film has absorbed elements from other forms of cultural expression such as photography, drama and music. Initially, however, it was not regarded as a medium that produced anything remotely connected with high art – its very popularity or mass appeal made it intellectually suspect. This was particularly the case in New Zealand where intellectuals tended to associate films with American popular culture. It was part of O’Shea’s struggle to have film included as an integral part of the arts, without necessarily making it elitist.

The writer and the painter, although requiring time and dedication, have comparatively simple tools of trade - the writer needs paper, pen, desk and chair and the painter needs an easel, canvas and paints. Both can seek to publish or display their efforts relatively simply. Although getting accepted by a publisher or mounting an exhibition have their unique challenges, they pale in comparison with the challenges facing the aspiring film-maker. The production of even a simple film requires an expensive camera, film stock, the services of a laboratory, editing equipment and equipment to project the completed work. In New Zealand, which for many years lacked the ingredients to support production, film did not develop as a serious medium for local expression until decades after the written word or the painted image. Films were made, but not films with the sophistication of poems or paintings. Thus when we celebrate the emergence of a “critical mass” of serious local artists and writers in the 1930s, we should regard the 1950s and 60s as the period when a similar infrastructure began to develop – albeit tentatively – within the medium of film, leading to its consolidation in the late 70s.

A subject such as this has many layers within layers. Not only was it important to set O’Shea and his works within the context of New Zealand film history but to set that, in turn, within the broader international context of film production. I emphasise historical analysis, seeing it as a pre-condition for understanding how complex texts come to take their particular shape. Needless to say, this ideal is difficult to realise because of the many dimensions of the medium. Daniel Maryland in an essay on the theory of film history argued the need to explore the complex “connections between the production, distribution, exhibition and consumption of movies as commodity and

as art, connections that have been visible from the inception of the industry.”⁵ Implied by such histories is a preference for an integrated historical approach, “a scheme based on the broad sweep of historical forces that have been crystallised in the characters of film markets.”⁶ Noel Burch in his analysis of film history pointed out the erroneousness of considering the language of film solely in terms of its universality without considering the specific social context in which it developed. His analysis of early film production, for example, highlighted the cultural context in which early films were regarded particularly in relation to the theatre. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson pointed out that technological developments not only provided film-makers with increasingly sophisticated options for producing and projecting their films but also impacted on the subjects and environments which they chose. Thus for the post-war French New Wave film-makers the attempt to represent reality in films was considerably enhanced by the camera manufacturer Éclair who “had recently developed a lightweight camera that could be hand held. (That the Éclair had been used primarily for documentary work accorded perfectly with the ‘realistic’ mis-en-scène of the New Wave.) New Wave [film-makers] were intoxicated with the freedom offered by the hand held camera.”⁷ Histories of film are full of examples of this kind where technological, commercial or political priorities interact with aesthetic ones. The problem for the historian is how to interweave these strands. It seems to me clearly better to adjust the “mix” as one proceeds through a particular historical topic rather than adopt a formulaic approach. This seems particularly appropriate to the present subject for if ever there was an experimental project it was the attempt by Pacific Films to create a New Zealand feature film industry in 1964.

The improvisatory aspect of early New Zealand film production is often summed up in the metaphor of “No. 8 fencing wire.” Though cleverly parodied in Peter Jackson’s “mockumentary” *Forgotten Silver*, it is an image of the film pioneer that constantly reappears. The metaphor works best for technological aspects. The cultural equivalent is the metaphor of the “bricoleur”, a term introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss and shrewdly applied to the New Zealand situation by Nick Perry in *Dominion of Signs*. Both metaphors imply that New Zealand culture has a kind of patchwork quality. The present thesis does not assume this to be wholly the case with *Runaway*, although the film was certainly described by some critics as a mélange. Indeed, one of the goals of the thesis is to investigate whether the film can be seen as more

coherent and sophisticated than has been assumed – whether in fact, it carried New Zealand film-making to a new level beyond the No. 8 fencing wire stereotype.

A Personal Perspective

Runaway has also been a film of particular personal interest to me, and it is perhaps not irrelevant to relate it to my own historical circumstances (since history must always be written from a particular context and perspective). As a young man I saw the film in Auckland's Civic Theatre where it ran for three weeks. Its novelty as a New Zealand feature and a number of its striking images stayed in my memory. Soon after viewing the film I travelled overseas and in the subsequent years earned a living as a teacher in England, Canada and Rhodesia. On returning to New Zealand I continued teaching while enrolled for a BA at the University of Auckland. During that period I became increasingly interested in the influence of media, particularly film, on young people and began experimenting with teaching film-making to primary school age children. Although film was not yet part of the school or university curriculum, this was a special time in the development of film-making in New Zealand. A new generation was emerging to complete the project that O'Shea had attempted – the establishment of a coherent film culture, including a wide range of film-making activities. I joined the fledgling film-makers' co-operative Alternative Cinema and, as well as promoting its activities (I was president for several years) I took part in a range of film and video-making experiences. My own work led, in 1972, to support from Ray Hayes, head of the National Film Library who, intrigued by the concept of film production in a primary school, managed to borrow a hand-cranked 16mm Bolex camera from the National Film Unit and took the unprecedented step of sponsoring my projects with funds from his annual budget. Supported by the school staff and with advice and assistance from many associated with Alternative Cinema I directed two films with casts of over 160 school children at Onepoto School in Northcote where I was teaching at the time. The efforts at the school created considerable interest and, as the result of an approach by publishers Longman Paul, in 1974 I published my first book, *Camera in the Classroom*. The point to make here is the degree to which such film-making at the time seemed new and unprecedented. Mine was one of a number of film projects popping up all over the country at this time. Yet, in many respects the new film-makers could be said to be "re-inventing the wheel" (or reel) as, in the background, was the presence of O'Shea as the precursor to

all this activity. Some knew of him (especially those working in Wellington), but many did not. Whenever a young film-maker did come across information about his feature films of the 1950s and 60s for the first time, there was always a shock of recognition and a sense of positive reinforcement.

Having graduated with my BA in History, I applied for and received a generous grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council to undertake an MA in Media Education at San Jose State University, California. On returning to New Zealand in 1976 I lectured in Media Studies at the Auckland College of Education, in Continuing Education at the University of Auckland, and at the then Auckland Institute of Technology. Public interest in the subject was continuing to develop. For example by this time Roger Donaldson and Ian Mune were making the *Winners and Losers* series of short dramas, as a lead-up to attempting a feature film. The 1970s had seen many individual initiatives mesh together to create a new film culture which in the next decade would become an established part of the creative arts in New Zealand.

I continued my interest in film and other media with the publication, in 1984 of my second book *Media Matters*. Seven years later a chance meeting with Colin Broadley, the star of *Runaway* (as well as an early TVNZ presenter and one of Radio Hauraki's original "pirates"), rekindled my interest in *Runaway* and its origins. O'Shea was not well known in the Auckland scene, his name rarely occurring in conversations about New Zealand film-making. Although by this time, a diverse film industry had developed locally, much of the talk focused on currently fashionable young directors and on their latest projects – in short, it was a film culture which lacked (and continues today to lack) a strong sense of history. After my curiosity was stirred by the conversation with Broadley I contacted O'Shea, and, after a number of phone conversations, travelled to Wellington to meet him. With his generous co-operation and funding from the Ministry of Education I researched, wrote, produced and directed a 20 minute video documentary on the making of *Runaway* entitled *Runaway Revisited*. This was released through the Ministry of Education together with a video copy of *Runaway* and teaching guides which I wrote.

I remember that my first meeting with O'Shea at Pacific Films in Wellington in November 1991 held several surprises for me. I had never visited Pacific Films

before and my preconception as to what to expect was doubtless shaped by association with a number of Auckland film production companies, advertising agencies, and a weekend at Avalon. Consequently, I expected a contemporary building with a tastefully decorated or glitzy reception area manned by a professionally smiling secretary. Not so. The building was small, worn and with no clear indication as to its entrance. I knocked tentatively on several exterior doors and, receiving no reply, tried the handle of the third one. It opened to reveal a small dark corridor, the walls of which were decorated with movie posters of Pacific Films' productions. At the end of the corridor with his back to me was a burly figure seated alone at a school desk writing with a ball-point on sheets of paper. This figure who turned to greet me warmly was John O'Shea. Pacific Films was a world away from showbiz glamour and hype. My impression of O'Shea was of a man single-mindedly dedicated to his craft for whom substance was everything and flashy style was irrelevant. These first impressions were to be subsequently confirmed.

What Pacific Films did remind me of was Alternative Cinema, the Auckland filmmakers' co-operative that in the 1970s had been housed in a building due for demolition. These two environments were where aspiring film-makers dispensed with creature comforts simply because they wanted to make films, not because they dreamed of glamorous careers. Alternative Cinema members were perversely proud of their poverty, regarding themselves as the new innovators determined to succeed in spite of the limited resources available to them. What most of the new film-makers didn't realise at the time was that John O'Shea and Pacific Films had been operating in this manner for two decades.

By the completion of my necessarily brief documentary I had become increasingly interested not only in the production of *Runaway* but also the social and political context in which it was made. Colin Broadley and I are contemporaries and in the film he portrayed a young man who grew up in 1950s New Zealand suburbia as I had. O'Shea was of my father's generation. The idea of a thesis on *Runaway* represented a way to bring together my university backgrounds in History and Media, my film-making activities and an increasing personal interest in the period of my youth

Methodology

It should be clear from my introduction up to this point that I am particularly interested in the fact that every feature film is as much a technological, economic and social product as an artistic product, and the struggles involved in producing *Runaway* make it a perfect example. But how to organise such a complex investigation? My thesis is built around these basic concepts: context, agency and authorship, industry, and infrastructure. Within my discussion of industry I focus on the more specific concept of infrastructure, which I seek to fine-tune in terms of the New Zealand situation. By interrelating these concepts I aim to provide an overall grasp of my topic, for example by looking at how agency (with its implications of “authorship”) operates within particular contexts, and how industry and infrastructure function as organised forms of agency in the production of feature films.

To begin with context, I will mention two examples of how this seemed to me important in making sense of *Runaway*. In practice my process consisted of researching a context and then revising and fine-tuning conventional ideas about it. Consider “the sixties”. Although shot in the 1960s *Runaway* is a useful corrective to today’s popular understanding of that decade. Most of “the sixties” decade in New Zealand is usefully viewed as a continuation of the culture of the 1950s. *Runaway* was made before the emergence of the counter-culture associated with psychedelic drugs, new forms of rock music or Vietnam and other protest movements. Today public collective memory tends to be dominated by the later 60s and an effort of historical imagination is required to go back to the early 60s and to understand the ways in which *Runaway* represents a different kind of 60s “counter-culture”, an earlier conception which involved its own kind of dropping out and “running away” from mainstream culture.

Another context is what we might call “New Zealand film culture.” *Runaway* is likely to strike today’s viewer as a strange film in terms of some of its stylistic and thematic aspects; but those ingredients become understandable if we reconstruct the film culture out of which *Runaway* emerged. Culture is, of course, a somewhat diffuse concept. Lawrence Grossburg perceives culture as having twin aspects in the sense that it should be understood “*both* as a way of life – encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions and structures of power – and a whole range of

cultural practices; artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities and so forth.”⁸ John B. Thompson sees culture as not only a broad field of semiotic activity but also a context in which we constantly interpret and re-interpret our lives – it encompasses “not merely a matter of objects and events which occur like happenings in the natural world; it is also a matter of meaningful actions and expression, of utterances, symbols, texts and artefacts of various kinds and subjects who express themselves and others by interpreting the expression they produce and receive.”⁹ The arts can be seen as performing various functions within the broad context of culture as a central engine of interpretation and innovation. Out of these wide-ranging definitions I focus on two aspects: first, the specific “way of life” of the serious New Zealand film enthusiast in the 1950s and 60s (an almost anthropological sense of “practices” and “institutions” and the “field of semiotic activity” associated with them); and second, Thompson’s vivid sense of culture as an arena of change and of cultural work as an intervention, particularly important in the case of *Runaway* because feature film-making did not then exist in New Zealand as an accepted social activity – O’Shea’s film had to create its own context, its own relationship to the way of life of its viewers. Interestingly, the film is sufficiently self conscious of this problem to raise the issue itself, at least by implication, though arguably it failed to do so in a way that was understood by its audiences. *Runaway* can usefully be analysed both as a construction made up of ingredients of the early 60s and as a vigorous questioning or re-interpretation of that context. The fact that contemporary audiences were in many cases uneasy with it as a “representation” of New Zealand is a fascinating complication. The film’s very ambition and novelty made it a complex venture, an attempt to criticise a “way of life” that was not accustomed to being directly challenged through the medium of film.

Within this sense of context (highly specific and local in historical terms), I have sought to investigate basic questions about the nature of individual agency within film production. In that respect my thesis could be seen as a testing of auteur theory. To what extent can O’Shea’s individual contribution be identified? What other film makers contributed to the work that bore his signature as director? How did he himself interact with the culture? Did he reflect his environment and historical period or stand out sharply from it? To answer such questions required detailed, ground-level information, and such information was not on record. Previous discussion of

O’Shea consisted in many cases of generalized appreciation or used his work to explore abstract theoretical issues, often erecting heavy conclusions on what seemed to me too fragile a base of facts. So it was unavoidable that my first task was primary research, to explore issues of agency and cultural process at a level of detail that might enable finer distinctions to be made. I embarked on this task with the desire to have as few preconceptions as possible. O’Shea’s project seemed unique in its time and place – the creation of a film industry seemingly from scratch. His work provided an opportunity to observe the building of a complex form of culture, a large jigsaw that involved many pieces.

Industry

Inevitably such a study required me to think about the concept of “film industry” since *Runaway* could be seen as an attempt to create not only a film but a film industry. Yet “industry” and “industrial analysis” are terms often used loosely today, implying little more than a concern with production. My thesis seeks to demonstrate that a more comprehensive form of industrial analysis is needed. George A. Huaco has usefully characterised film-making as an art that exists necessarily within “a socio-economic and political system [as determined by] the presence or absence of four structural factors: a cadre of film technicians, the required industrial plant, a favourable mode of organisation of the industry and a favourable political climate.”¹⁰ In his “Concepts of National Cinema” Stephen Crofts summed up David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson’s monumental *The Classic Hollywood Cinema* (1985) as a study in how “the economic, technological and ideological factors affecting Hollywood production act as mutually interacting determinations which are irreducible to one another.”¹¹ How are we to understand the nature of “film industry” within this complex field of production? Crofts also cited the corresponding perspective of Colin Crisp in his book *Classic French Cinema 1930 - 1960* as analysing production “into various components: political economy and industrial structure, plant and technology, personnel and their training, discursive endeavours to form audiences, authorial control in relation to the mode of production, and work practices and stylistic change.”¹² Dermody and Jacka offer an equally broad understanding:

A film industry is partly a measurable, historically determined object, with economic structures, institutions, records, decisions and effects, and partly the locus of a series of rather powerful imaginary constructs. A film industry constantly slides into ‘culture’ – a cultural industry. Circuits of money and circuits of meaning are deeply involved with each other in film production. Notions of money, business and industry interplay rhetorically with the notion of art, quality and the ‘genuinely Australian’. The two sets of notions, with their fundamentally different logics and appeals, are used in film industry rhetoric to support or divert attention from one another [sic] as the situation demands. If ‘industry’ and ‘culture’ are poles of the construct in one sense, they are mutual pretexts in another, and industry, and industry rhetoric slides between them – despite the fact that each can generate contradictory or contrary positions.¹³

These are useful complications but I needed a more focused and concrete conception of “industry” with which to structure my research. First, a simple but important limitation was my decision to concentrate on feature film production. Dermody and Jacka made the same choice for their Australian survey:

The phrase ‘the Australian film industry’ is always taken to imply the feature film industry. You have to specify all other categories of film production, such as documentary, experimental, short drama, educational, advertising, etc., if you want them included. Narrative film, with the force and consciousness of considerable money behind it, and all of the technical possibilities that money opens up, is always at the crux of the phrase.¹⁴

In the New Zealand context this “crux” has very significant implications. Internationally a feature film is a dramatic production conventionally accepted as being over 60 minutes and generally over 90 minutes in length, involving a major investment of resources (financial, technical, administrative and creative) in order to produce what are called “high production values” – and designed for screening in cinemas for the entertainment of large numbers of people. New Zealand director Vincent Ward has described the production of a feature film as “an act of faith and a giant gamble – a punt on an idea taken by financiers, crew, cast and not least by the producer.”¹⁵ Thus for a feature film *industry* to become established, many ingredients

are involved, more readily available in large countries. And one way to write the history of films is to trace the development of that complex apparatus as a whole.

It is not surprising that a feature industry grew particularly rapidly in the United States. By the turn of the century the country had a strongly established industrial base which could quickly be adapted to supply the industrial needs of the burgeoning film industry. Its large and increasingly well educated population base was also able to produce the numbers and range of personnel necessary to sustain and develop the production of complex feature films. When Otis Ferguson, the *New Republic*'s film writer, travelled west to Hollywood in the 1930s he was "amazed by the number of workers who contributed to the final product – the producer, the writers, the director, the researchers, the costume designers, the musicians, the cinematographers, the cutters and the special effects men."¹⁶ The United States also had a huge, relatively prosperous population whose continued patronage sustained the on-going production of feature films. As production grew, American audiences became accustomed to seeing their society and culture portrayed on the screen. Films and film personnel were frequently discussed and commented on in the news media. Thus, as a medium, local feature film production become an integral aspect of American cultural activities. Similarly, in spite of disincentives such as McCarthyism and various codes of censorship, the nation's socio-political climate was based on notions of free speech within a democratic structure, thus providing film-makers with considerable creative latitude in the portrayal of their society.

Today in most countries a feature film occupies the entire cinema programme, apart from advertisements and trailers for forthcoming films. The adjective "feature" is derived from the old phrase "main feature", which in the time of *Runaway* was still preceded by short films such as newsreels, cartoons, travelogues and documentaries. Sometimes two feature films were screened in sequence, separated by an "interval" with the shorter or less attractive of the two known as the "B-movie." For example, Rudall Hayward's 1940 feature *Rewi's Last Stand* was unfortunately cut "from its original length to about an hour or so it could be played as one half of a double feature,"¹⁷ and distributed in England as a B-movie. Feature films have always been conventionally regarded as the summit of the hierarchy of film-making activities, with typical audience expectations involving not only length but also a high level of

film-making skills, a variety of locations and characters, high quality images, and a story with a sense of depth, scale and consequence. Satisfying such demands tends to require a large budget and large team of specialists – since the film is likely to be harshly judged if even one aspect is underdeveloped. (An average budget for a New Zealand feature today is around NZ\$3 million, and for a Hollywood feature around NZ\$100 million. In both cases audiences in the millions are required to recoup the investment.)

All of the above aspects carry a special resonance for a small country in which the feature film industry was slow to develop. New Zealand, with its rural-based economy, had a limited industrial infrastructure unlikely to produce the specialised equipment required for feature film making. Similarly, its very small population meant that even if a feature film were produced, the numbers likely to pay money to see it would be insufficient for the production company to recoup its investment, let alone make a profit. It is standard business practice for a company making features to seek to recover costs in the “home market” and then to make its profits from overseas sales. Exceptions to the rule occur in countries with adequate public funding, which was certainly not the case in New Zealand prior to 1978 (when the Film Commission was created). Consequently New Zealanders rarely saw themselves on the screen and, although theirs was a democratic nation in which freedom of expression was permitted, local feature film production was not considered a likely medium for either entertainment or artistic expression.

Generally feature films are shot in regions where equipment can be hired, free-lance specialists can be “picked up” on short-term contracts, and film stock can be processed. Although a feature film can be shot at a location where most of the equipment and expertise has been imported, cost and logistics ensure that features are usually produced in areas where film-making activities are well established. A country could have a relatively buoyant film sector making documentaries, training films, experimental productions for art houses or television commercials, but unless it was producing 35mm feature-length films on a regular basis, it could not claim to have its own “feature film industry”. Similarly there has to be a “critical mass” of actors even if they are only playing minor roles. Furthermore, local audiences have to be prepared to value locally produced films in order to provide a basic “home

market". Such a context only developed in New Zealand over a long period. Up until the late 1970s, all aspects of the New Zealand film situation were so patchy that only strongly motivated directors such as Rudall Hayward and John O'Shea were able to make features, and then only rarely. Although, as will be shown, film-making has been an aspect of New Zealand culture for many decades, it was not until 1977 that there was a support system with sufficient depth and coherence to enable features to be produced on a regular basis. This support system I shall speak of as "infrastructure".

Infrastructure forms part of – and is a precondition for – a film industry which I choose to define in practical terms as an enterprise concerned with the on-going creation, manufacture and distribution of a specified product. It can be argued that for any area of collective activity to be a true industry, it must also be commercially viable. However, there are many examples of industries being subsidised for a variety of social or political reasons. In the former Soviet Union, a thriving feature film industry was established after World War I which was wholly dependent upon government funding. It utilised large numbers of personnel and equipment and regularly created, produced and distributed feature films (even under stringent wartime conditions). Although some of the products were sold overseas, essentially this industry operated to turn out a particular kind of product for cultural or political purposes. Similarly, in New Zealand, after the commencement of World War II, the National Film Unit (NFU) was the recipient of government funding. A range of film-making personnel within the NFU were employed as scriptwriters, producers, camera operators, sound recordists, lighting technicians and editors. They were all public servants using the government's equipment and facilities which included studios and processing laboratories. Like its Soviet Union counterpart (albeit on a much smaller scale) the NFU was not required to sell its films which were offered free to cinemas. NFU films were primarily informational, although they might incorporate brief dramatised sequences. The NFU did not, however, produce feature films, at least not on an ongoing basis.

Discussions of film industries often overlook issues of distribution and exhibition, but these were crucial factors in the effort by New Zealand film-makers to establish themselves as an industry. To qualify as a true feature film, a production has to be

accepted by cinemas. Today if it fails to gain cinema distribution, its ultimate release is at best confined to video or television. Similarly, an amateur film production may be of feature length but its technical and acting standards would restrict its distribution to non-professional venues. Distribution and exhibition in New Zealand were tightly controlled by those whose closest links were with American companies, and in most cases they had no interest in the production of locally-made films. This situation was mirrored in Australia where “historically film-making and thus an Australian film-culture was dominated by clearly popular-commercial concerns and values, heavily circumscribed by the traditional dominance of overseas interests in the distribution and exhibition sectors.”¹⁸ For John O’Shea as an aspiring feature film-maker the situation was both puzzling and frustrating. “By the time I began film making, I found the appellation of ‘industry’ had been hijacked by film wholesalers and retailers, the distributors and exhibitors. They regarded themselves – in New Zealand at any rate – as the ‘film industry’. Even though there was no manufacturing operation worth speaking of, I never did find out why the people who represented overseas studios and ran warehouses in which ‘the product’ was stored until it was sent out to the cinemas thought that they and the cinema owners collectively constituted an ‘industry’.”¹⁹ His comments were echoed in 1992 by New Zealand director Geoff Murphy: “The cinema is the most difficult marketplace of all. For half a century independent film-makers like Rudall Hayward and John O’Shea had struggled against overwhelming odds to create a market for New Zealand films. The hostility of the major exhibitors and distributors to New Zealand films is an eloquent if tragic tribute to their failure.”²⁰ (Whether or not O’Shea’s attempt was in fact a failure will of course need to be discussed later.)

What these quotations illustrate is the contested nature of the term “film industry”. From a narrow, commercial viewpoint the only true film industry is an unsubsidised infrastructure of commercially successful production companies providing product on an on-going basis to commercial cinemas. For New Zealand this referred to the few large American and British studios that supplied the major cinema chains. From the point of view of a local film maker the definition is somewhat different – “industry” refers to the ability of New Zealanders to keep making films, and to see film making as a viable career. Naturally this depends upon adequate resources (adequate investment and/or public funding and the availability of equipment and a range of

specialists). From this perspective, the aim of the industry is to provide relevant films for local audiences (a cultural or democratic view of the “market”). Of course film-makers may also be motivated by commercial aims – the term encompasses both cultural and commercial motivations. There are many variations such as O’Shea’s sense of the industry as “hijacked” by certain commercial interests who prevent film-makers from demonstrating that local features can be *both* commercially and culturally successful. All these attitudes and obstacles define the territory to be explored by my study of *Runaway* and O’Shea’s attempt to establish a “feature film industry” in New Zealand.

Infrastructure

More needs to be said about the concept of infrastructure since that is one of the most important ways in which I have organised my industrial analysis of O’Shea’s activities. I started from Huaco’s categories (personnel, plant, mode of organisation and politics) but expanded and modified them to suit the New Zealand situation. What are the types of input that make up the film making infrastructure? I decided that infrastructure could be analysed in terms of (1) technical (film-specific) aspects, (2) non-film-specific support systems, (3) financial aspects, (4) distribution and exhibition networks, and (5) larger social, cultural and political contexts. The first category involves film-specific creative skills in writing, direction, production, acting, music composition, set and costume design, filming and editing (both sound and visual). There is also a need for individual specialists with the technical expertise to repair equipment, set up lights and cables, etc. Another aspect is film processing and other functions of the lab (such as colour grading and neg cutting). At the time *Runaway* was made, such specialists and facilities were extremely thin on the ground.

The second category involves access to efficient and reasonably-priced transportation (a very important aspect for any film project that wants to take advantage of a range of locations and landscapes), accomodation, insurance, electricity, telecommunication, and other non-film-specific support systems. The cooperation of local and national authorities can be a major factor – for example, help from the Traffic Department, permission to film in scenic areas, or involvement by local iwi. O’Shea was particularly sensitive and resourceful in the way he obtained cooperation and contras from a variety of groups.

The third category is financial – such an important dimension for New Zealand filmmakers that I have added it to the categories in Huaco's list. In 1964 there was no Film Commission, and neither television nor the Arts Council was interested in funding feature films. This lack of public funding was a serious missing link in the infrastructure. Successive New Zealand governments saw little merit in encouraging local film-making outside of support for tourism, propaganda in wartime and showcasing government achievements, and the small size of the New Zealand population also acted as a disincentive. Besides demanding large amounts of money, a feature film also requires many kinds of financial management – negotiating with banks and suppliers, planning the production, supervising a large and complex budget, dealing with complex revenue streams, etc.

The fourth infrastructure category involves access to distribution and exhibition networks, both nationally and internationally. And the fifth covers general aspects of the environment such as the public's lack of exposure and uncertain response (a typical legacy of colonialism) to local films outside of newsreels and the occasional documentary. Infrastructure thus involves a number of interdependent elements. It is important to stress the effects of positive or negative synergy produced by their interaction. O'Shea's project had difficulty with all of the infrastructure categories so his biggest problem was having to perform too many functions – he was co-writer, producer, production manager, co-editor and marketer as well as director. While auteur theory tends to encourage the view creative artists to keep control over as many aspects of film as possible, successful auteurship (or should I say 'the auteur effect') depends in most cases upon having an infrastructure that enables the director to concentrate his or her best energies on purely creative decisions. In such films most of the infrastructure remains invisible, a kind of unconscious of the film-making process. Today it is a common film industry assumption that any doubling up of roles is risky. A director/producer or writer/director can operate successfully, but the attempt to perform two functions can be disastrous. Funding bodies tend to regard the tension between different people and perspectives as healthy because it helps to discourage a director from making extreme or indulgent decisions – for example, a producer can ensure that the director allocates the available budget sensibly. Not every auteur would agree with these assumptions but arguably O'Shea did benefit

from his earlier collaboration with Roger Mirams. At the least, his creative energies on *Runaway* were compromised or diluted by his need to perform so many functions.

Yet in a situation like New Zealand in 1964, the existence of a multi-skilled, creative individual with the potential to be an auteur was a crucial factor, as important as infrastructure. Certainly O'Shea as an innovator and agent of change had those characteristics. Unfortunately, although supported by people who shared (or were persuaded to share) his vision, he was overextended and achieved only partial success. With stronger backup he would have been a better director. Later, during the 1970s and 80s, his drive and experience made him an outstanding producer, though he sometimes had difficulty working with strong-minded directors as though there were problems of role and infrastructure that had not been resolved in the new environment.

O'Shea's career provides an illuminating case study in relation to debates about the auteur theory. Individual agency was the cultural discourse that dominated film culture at the time of *Runaway* and I have remained close to auteurist discourse in my own study, but with an attitude of questioning. My critique of auteur theory is not in post structuralist terms -- I belong to a generation of film students that emerged before post-structuralism and my critique is based on my study of the complexities of the production process rather than a study of the complexities of discourse, though the two perspectives arrive at some of the same conclusions. Authorship *is* complex and *is* frequently an illusion but I regard it still as a significant factor. O'Shea (a complex subject in himself) did make a difference to New Zealand culture, though in closely tracking his work my thesis shows clearly that his individual efforts shaded off constantly into the agency of others (for example, Tony Williams' distinctive camera work and Robin Maconie's music). Also, *Runaway* needs to be understood not only in individual terms but as a product of the times, a complex interaction of cultural, social and economic forces. My case study could be described as an on-going dialogue between *auteur* and *context* (including *infrastructure*).

In terms of methodology a key question for my thesis has been what *not* to include. To emphasise the complex nature of feature film-making is to run the risk of becoming swamped by research information. Yet I did not want to anticipate or

second-guess the factors that might, behind the scenes, have proved significant for the success or failure of O’Shea’s venture. In the end, my basis for inclusion was my judgement as to the degree of effective agency or influence (by a person, event or process) on the final shape of *Runaway*. However, I also chose to include material from some informants (such as Nadja Regin) who provided sample slices of the culture of the period, useful details or texture that clarified the contexts in which the film was made. Thus the decision about where to stop was determined on the one hand by practicality (I could not interview everyone) and on the other hand by a concept of infrastructure and sense of relative agency that took shape over the course of my research. Some individuals, events and processes had a clear impact on the final shape of the film or on its reception (and that area needed to be explored as well as production since it impacted on O’Shea’s attempt to create an industry). A number of unspoken decisions were made in the writing up of my research, for while the production of a feature film is such a complex process that one almost needs to employ chaos theory, there are still points at which the significance of a person’s involvement can be clearly weighed and the historian can decide to leave minor or less successful contributions on the cutting room floor. Yet even on those occasions I had to be cautious because any gaps and failures in the film making process (either in O’Shea’s agency or the crew’s expertise) were at least as revealing as the successes. I was also concerned about the speed with which information about O’Shea in the oral culture was disappearing. The film maker’s death came as one shock of that kind. As I talked with older informants I was even conscious of my own entry into the 60s age bracket. So much interesting information about Pacific Films has not yet been put on record that I hesitated to leave out details for other researchers in the future may discover something interesting in them. There is still no wide-ranging history of New Zealand film making (in contrast to the many books on Australian film history). Hence my thesis may at times seem overloaded with basic information, though I believe it gains an underlying coherence from my ideas about what constitutes a necessary and effective infrastructure and the particular character of O’Shea’s agency or authorship. Also, I hope my account of the give and take between agency and infrastructure in the case of *Runaway* will clarify the kinds of complexities that an “industrial analysis” needs to explore if it is truly going to illuminate the basic processes of a feature film industry.

Linear or chronological form

As I commenced the thesis it was obvious in formal terms that a strong framework was needed into which I could place the information I was gathering from a wide variety of sources. Thematic organisation had an initial appeal but the complex interrelationships within the research material prevented it from being fitted tidily into a thematic framework. I shifted to a linear progression as I came to see the importance of sequence and cause-and-effect in understanding O'Shea's attempt to build a film industry step by step in a country that was itself changing rapidly. While I turned to an historical approach basically because of its explanatory power, I also saw the advantage of narrative organisation as a way to make my research more accessible to a wider audience.

As I studied contexts I gained a heightened sense of the impact of historical change. For example:

-If *Runaway* had been made six years earlier -- 1958 -- it would have had a larger potential cinema audience (television was the focus of interest after 1960). Yet O'Shea might not yet have had access to synchronised sound technology.

-If the film had been made six years later – 1970 – the script-writers would almost certainly have conceived of its runaway rebel differently, in a post-*Easy Rider* fashion. One can already see such a change starting to happen in O'Shea's work in the two years between *Runaway* and *Don't Let It Get You*. A 1970 hippie version of *Runaway* would probably have seemed forward-looking rather than backward-looking. (Although the 1964 *Runaway* displays the cutting edge influence of the French New Wave, its central character harks back to the rebels of the 1950s and the even older tradition of the Man Alone.)

-Had the film been made twelve years later, in 1976, it would have benefitted from the great upsurge of film-making and development of a new infrastructure in the 1970s. The 1976 *Runaway* could have been the first of the new wave of features!

Such suggestions are highly speculative but they help to illustrate the importance of historical context, and are one way to justify the value of a linear or blow-by-blow chronological account.

Though man makes history he does it in conditions not of his own making, especially someone striving to create a new feature film industry. My history has therefore needed to take several steps back to explore the development of New Zealand film-making and the conditions of the culture at large before 1964. Chapters One and Two show that in spite of the many challenges faced by early film-makers there has been a steady output of local productions, but feature production has remained limited, as has the filmic infrastructure. It is also important in these chapters to establish the surrounding cultural and social environment. In its colonial situation New Zealand film culture took its bearings from the United States and England. But the cultural or critical nationalism pioneered by the writers and artists of the 1930s represented an important breakthrough. This movement did not encompass film-making - it tended to be hostile to that medium, associating it with cultural colonialism - but it introduced the nationalist or localist attitudes that would later inform O'Shea's features. (Indeed, his films can be seen as a delayed contribution to the movement, delayed because of the complexity and expense of the film medium, but adding to the movement a deeper understanding of the Maori dimension.)

Devoting Chapter Three to the nationalist tradition modifies the narrative approach of the thesis to some extent in order to do justice to complex cultural developments. However, having established some key themes and contexts, I return in the next chapter to chronology, tracing O'Shea's early life and career -- his boyhood, war years and decision to become a film-maker. This is necessary backstory, followed by a chapter on *Broken Barrier* that documents the process of making this significant film and the extent to which it shapes the subsequent activities of O'Shea and Pacific Films. The next chapter puts on record an early sketch of the *Runaway* story and traces the development of O'Shea's film-making skills in the years immediately after *Broken Barrier*. At this stage of the thesis I have to interrupt my narrative to introduce O'Shea's co-writer John Graham and to supply some information on his background as a creative figure. Graham's work in theatre provides an interesting

parallel to O’Shea’s, with the emergence of nationalist forms of drama paralleling in some respects the emergence of nationalist film-making.

With the two men united in the task of writing the *Runaway* script, a strong sense of narrative returns. I devote three chapters to this process for a number of reasons -- because I have a wealth of new material (this is a story not previously told for which I have access to unique information), because I see the development of scripts as an aspect of feature film- making that is often under-researched and under-estimated, and because in this case tracking the process is very revealing. I attempt to re-live the history of the script so far as the evidence enables me to reconstruct it, in order to clarify both the authorial dynamics and the creative logic involved in the various additions and disagreements. The script process provides a particularly interesting example of the interaction between O’Shea’s individual personality and that of his collaborator. To what extent is this “O’Shea’s script?” To what extent are both scriptwriters simply engaged in a borrowing (or bricolage) of the discourses of the period? The process helps to explain how and why *Runaway* acquires its curiously hybrid mix of ingredients. The attempt to create the Great New Zealand Movie produces a sometimes jarring intersection of contemporary discourses -- those of the Film Society or “art” film, those of the Hollywood genre movie, those of New Zealand literature with its “man alone” themes, etc. It is typical of the project that the writers are not merely creating a feature script but grappling with the basics of how to do such a thing and with the problem of what a “New Zealand film” can or should be like. Of course the subsequent process of production is equally important but a script sets up the horizons or limits of a film project.

Next I devote chapters to the pre-production, production and post-production of the film. This section of the thesis naturally follows chronological order as any production process is full of narrative urgency. It is an extremely challenging process for O’Shea and his team to assemble actors, raise finance, locate sponsors, gather a production crew and organise the shoot. At the same time the process involves simultaneous activities and so my chapters have to juggle some of those elements. It is difficult to organise the rich lode of information about locations, personalities, production crises and publicity ploys. But chronology provides the basic throughline

since a feature film shoot proceeds with a roller-coaster sense of speed and risk, particularly when the budget is as tight as this one.

The post-production chapter documents some interesting creative choices such as the dubbing of appropriate accents and the curious way in which the soundtrack is composed in Germany without any visual references. Robin Maconie is another significant contributor to the authorship of the film, and the development and performance of the music offers a striking example of the practical problems involved. Such infrastructural details seem to me crucial to an understanding of the final form and style of *Runaway*.

The film is then marketed, a process more revealing than one might have expected. How to market a film that combines high culture with populist elements? My research suggests that the promotion of *Runaway* as an action-packed adventure with sexual overtones is a key factor in the confusion and disappointment felt by many viewers. Completing my chronology, I trace the reception of the film in New Zealand and England, O’Shea’s own response to that reception, the bitter quarrel with Graham, and the subsequent careers of O’Shea’s main collaborators.

The next section, in which I commented on the relevance of *Runaway*, is a natural follow-on. I consider it a crucial chapter as it enables me to justify the rationale behind writing a PhD thesis based largely on one feature film. Despite having given *Runaway* all the historical benefit of the doubt, the film still appears unresolved but I hope at least to have established the particular field of forces from which it has emerged and have thereby explained many aspects of its final form. The need for O’Shea to cover too many gaps in the infrastructure has inevitably compromised the end result. The film can be seen to make sense in terms of the context of its production but falls short of the artistic coherence its director hoped to achieve or the ideas he hoped to communicate. I end with a brief account of O’Shea’s subsequent works, referencing them to *Runaway*, and summing up the influence he has had on the development of our feature-film industry. I conclude that the method of infrastructural analysis developed in the thesis has a general applicability to the evolution of any film industry.

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- ¹Jane Campion, “A Memoir of John O’Shea”, John O’Shea, *Don’t Let it Get You*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1999, p7
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I. FORERUNNERS

Chapter 1: FILM-MAKING IN NEW ZEALAND

Film as an entertainment medium has been an important aspect of New Zealand society since the final years of the 19th century. Moving pictures were first screened in New Zealand at the Opera House in Auckland on 13 October 1896. Two years later *The Opening of the Auckland Exhibition* was screened by A. H. Whitehouse. Earlier in the same year, Whitehouse began touring New Zealand with a kinescope which he had imported into the country after meeting its inventor Thomas Edison in the United States. Although the new invention intrigued his audiences, it was not without its technical challenges.

This itinerant purveyor of entertainment would arrive by train from time to time and set himself up in the public hall ... There was no electricity so the hand-cranked projector used gaslight illumination. It must have been difficult to get enough light to throw a decent image, but it seemed to work after a fashion. It certainly worked well enough to attract vast clouds of moths, so many in fact that the show had to be stopped from time to time to clean the incinerated creatures out of the machinery.¹

Whitehouse, in fact, shot the oldest surviving piece of New Zealand film (discovered in 1993 by the NZ Film Archive) a 50 foot record, filmed on 13 January 1900, of local soldiers on parade at Newton Park in Wellington prior to their departure for the South African war. Other film-makers followed Whitehouse's example by filming scenery and a variety of local and national events. In the early years of film-making in New Zealand, a number of short dramatic films were also made. Even before the advent of film sound and with less sophisticated "production values", the technical challenge of producing a dramatic film of any reasonable length was a major undertaking.

New Zealanders had, as a result of the efforts of Whitehouse and others, demonstrated an early enthusiasm for the motion picture. Furthermore, by attending screenings of films shot in their own country they showed that they were interested in seeing themselves and their country depicted on the screen. News and picturesque landscapes had a clear attraction. This early enthusiasm boded well for the development of a climate that would accept local films as an integral part of the culture. At first, however, films had limited cultural status and tended to be viewed as

a novelty or as entertainment rather than as “art”. Diane Collins’ description of the Australian feature film industry has a number of parallels with New Zealand:

The industry’s eventual staple, the tension filled dramatic narrative, appeared about the turn of the century – usually a simple story of good and evil played out in a domestic setting. No more than one reel (or 1,000 ft) in length, such films were, however, of very short duration. Multi-reel dramas (later called “feature films”) were developed first by Australian and European film-makers. In 1906 Australian producers made the 4,000 ft *The Story of the Kelly Gang* – possibly the longest film released in the world up to that date, and by 1911 three and four-reel films (each reel running for 10-11 minutes) were a standard feature of dramatic production (in Australia).²

A typical example of the early non-fiction film was Brandon Haughton’s 4 min 13 seconds record of a New Plymouth picnic in 1912. With the plain title of *Picnic at East End*, it was on screen only six days later at New Plymouth’s Empire Theatre. The following day, the *Taranaki Herald* described the reactions to this still novel form of entertainment:

The screening drew an immense crowd … it was quite evident that the local content in the programme was providing a big draw. The building is meant to accommodate 630 people with seats. The number present last night when the first picture was thrown upon the screen must have been nearer 800 and the only disappointed ones in the huge crowd were those who could not gain admittance … As scene after scene was unfolded before the audience, parents joyfully recognising their own particular “Jimmys” and “Nellies” and some groups of merry makers gave vent to their feelings in little suppressed exclamations of satisfaction.³

In such cases film functioned as a form of mirroring, a moving version of the group photograph.

In that same year, Gaston Melies (brother of innovative French film-maker George Melies) became the first of a number of foreign producers to use this country as a

location for a story film. Arriving from America he made two one-reel films *Hinemoa* and *How Chief Te Ponga Won His Bride* and a two reel production *Loved By A Maori Chieftess* [sic]. Such films appear to have combined tourist footage with what critics have subsequently call “polynesianism” (an ethnographic interest in Maori culture coloured by a sense of exotic otherness). In 1914 George Tarr followed Melies’s example with the production of a 2,500ft film *Hinemoa* (shot over 8 days in Rotorua on a budget of £50). Half the length of *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, it was a multi-reel drama production. *Hinemoa* “was distributed throughout New Zealand by Hayward Pictures (the family of pioneer film-maker Rudall Hayward) and Tarr accompanied the film as a lecturer.”⁴ (Rudall Hayward recalled it as “a very fine film, beautifully made [and] the photography was first class.”)⁵) Two years later, Rawdon Blanford produced and starred in an Auckland-based four reel feature⁶ drama *The Test* based on William Satchell’s *The Ballad of Stuttering Jim*. A year earlier, Australian producer Raymond Langford shot *A Maori Maid’s Love* and followed this in 1916 by re-visiting New Zealand to shoot scenes for *The Mutiny of the Bounty*.⁷ In spite of these early productions, the making of large scale dramas was a difficult undertaking and the “few film-makers working in New Zealand before 1920 concentrated on shooting news films for local theatres or scenic and industrial films for more general release. Very few dramatic films were made, notable exceptions being Harrington Reynolds’ *The Birth of New Zealand* (1922) and Rudall Hayward’s *My Lady of the Cave* (1922), and the silent version of *Rewi’s Last Stand* (1925). The only regular productions came from the newsreel cameramen supplying cinema chains.”⁸ Harrington Reynolds’ *The Birth of New Zealand* (“shot at the initiative of a travelling theatrical company known as the ‘Globe Trotters’”⁹) had Rudall Hayward as assistant director. The film, a kind of dramatised documentary, was “made on location on the beach at Howick where a replica of Queen Street was set up, also a mock up of Gabriel’s Gully tent town. The film took about two months to make and locals acted as extras at ten shillings a day. Some of this was processed in the old Richmond Hall ... which may be considered the first film studio in New Zealand apart from a building somewhere in Wellington used by the Tourist Department ‘kinematographist’.”¹⁰ With its title alluding to D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, the film appealed to a growing sense that New Zealand had its own unique history.



Plate 1: Shooting *The Birth of New Zealand*.. Cameraman Edwin (Ted Coubray) is seated in the driver's seat. He later formed New Zealand Radio Films and on occasions, worked with the Haywards.

New Zealand film-makers faced many challenges in their early attempts. The geographic isolation of the country meant they were far from the established centres of technical and creative expertise, and hampered by a lack of equipment and a small potential audience. Thus they were unable to follow the adage of writer Otis Ferguson who pointed out that the first task of an aspiring film-maker was to “get an audience. To get and hold a body of followers large enough to support this fabulous expense in production is the prime moving force of the whole industry.”¹¹

Unfortunately the “whole industry” was, in New Zealand’s case, in a very limited state of development. With a still largely rural economy the country lacked an industrial infrastructure but nevertheless the penchant of New Zealanders for creating something out of very limited resources was a key characteristic of these early film-makers. They concentrated their efforts on creating short entertaining productions, using available resources (from the scenery to public events), keeping techniques simple, and sticking close to a documentary style (even for fiction films). For example, during the 1920s

a considerable number of “quickies” … were turned out by New Zealanders. Such films were usually shot in a few days, with an improvised script keeping fairly closely to basic formulas, and using unpaid actors, mainly recruited from amateur dramatic societies. Most of these were screened only in the locality in which they were made, and won audiences less for their art and technical skill than for their topicality. They bore such titles as *Daughters of Dannevirke* and *Hamilton Husbands*. *The Adventures of Algie* with Claude Dampier, which was partly set in Luna Park (a long since demolished Auckland fun fair) made a good profit for its producers.¹²

In spite of the difficult production environment, a surprisingly large number of “quickies” were produced. Minette Hillyer pointed out that “the New Zealand Film Archive’s ‘Last Film Search’ alone resulted in the deposit of more than 4,000 early films”¹³ in its archives. However, the use of amateur actors and an emphasis on regionalism is indicative of both limited infrastructure and the limited resources. One man, Rudall Hayward, showed a particular determination to keep producing features. Inheriting his father’s keen interest in film, Hayward showed early technical ingenuity when, at the age of 12 he built his first movie camera. He recalled:

I made it out of a very small Pathe projector … The whole box was built of wood and was very heavy. When you threaded the film into it you had to screw the sides up and seal it up before you could photograph … I was so excited I looked round for a subject to photograph and, as I had no tripod, I put the camera on the veranda. I rushed out and got hold of the family cat and put the cat into a watering can with the lid on it. I started my camera rolling. and pulled the lid off the watering can and of course the cat jumped out. That was the first piece of action I ever photographed … my very first movie shot.¹⁴

This boyhood interest lasted into adulthood and, like other early film-makers, he travelled throughout the country, developing his craft by making short films using people from a local community, quickly processing and editing the footage, and then screening it locally to the participants, their friends and relatives. The “material was very lightweight; primarily entertaining theatre-goers with images of themselves. The films had none of the ‘bite’ of his indigenous epic films.”¹⁵ Like many early films

Hayward's grew out of the traditions of popular entertainment rather than the traditions of art or literature. Drawing on the technical expertise he had begun to develop as a boy, Hayward had to construct and maintain much of his own production equipment as he strove to make a living from film-making during a time notable for a "lack of funds, of equipment and of a professional community."¹⁶ Like many other New Zealand film pioneers, Hayward had to be a one-man band, combining the range of skills later divided up between the various members of a film crew. Technical skills were at least as important to early film-makers as creative skills. Wives and family members frequently helped out. His short comedy *Takapuna Scandal* (1928) provides a good example. Hayward "wrote the script, produced this comedy and delivered it to the theatre within 10 days."¹⁷ Shot with Australian actor Henry Sinclair in Auckland's Lunar Park (three years after *The Adventures of Algie* had been shot at the same location) the script involved a man riding on a roller coaster with a woman who, when it starts to rain, raises an umbrella. As the wind increases the man seizes the umbrella and is swept out of the roller coaster, floats over Queen St and finally lands amongst a group of surprised picnickers in Takapuna. Hayward recalled:

It was made very hurriedly [and was] New Zealand's first Mack Sennett-type film ... This was the first occasion on which a travelling matte had been used in New Zealand and we had to manufacture this in order to get the double exposure of him floating, hanging onto an umbrella over Queen St. In order to do this we had to sling Henry Sinclair on top of the highest point on the roller coaster switchback against the background of an old picture screen 35 feet across ... by means of a harness on his wrist and body so he appeared to be holding onto an umbrella. This was pretty difficult [as he was] 10 to 12 feet up in the air ... He was practically a cot case when we got him down ... At the end of each day's shooting I would rush home afterwards and develop the film.¹⁸

As Deborah Shephard has documented,¹⁹ Rudall's wife Hilda Hayward made a huge and often uncredited contribution to this and other films. But while the "man alone" image that Hayward himself cultivated is not entirely accurate; he was a multi-skilled and highly resourceful film-maker. As well as producing short comedies such as *Takapuna Scandal*, Hayward was also responsible for several feature films made

under his early company name of “Maori War Films”. These included *Rewi’s Last Stand* (1925), *The Te Kooti Trail* (1927) and *The Bush Cinderella* (1928). *The Bush Cinderella* was Hayward’s last silent feature, produced with a budget of £700. Typically “Hayward was producer, director and cameraman as well as laboratory hand. He [also] co-wrote the screenplay with his uncle Henry Hayward.”²⁰ Included in the cast was Hayward’s young daughter Philippa. The film was received enthusiastically by audiences and newspapers throughout the country. Typical was the review in the *Otago Daily Times* which “went so far as to say, ‘The *Bush Cinderella* … easily comes within the category of one of the best pictures yet seen here’.”²¹

A number of other features were also made at various times during the 1920s and 30s by foreign film-makers, a notable example being *Hei Tiki* (1935) by Alexander Markey from Hollywood’s Universal Films, a fictional tale of star-crossed lovers facing the wrath of their respective warring tribes. (After its New York première it was renamed *Primitive Passions*.) Shot with some local finance and a large Maori cast, the film was a particularly glaring example of the exploitation and misrepresentation of Maori culture. As Merata Mita has pointed out, Markey was only interested in portraying Maori culture in terms of his “already entrenched ideas about racial superiority, and what his audience’s expectation of the romantic South Seas should be.”²² Of course Markey’s attempt to oversimplify Maori culture in order to conform to European stereotypes was not peculiar to New Zealand. Kenneth Cameron pointed out in his book *Africa On Film* that for decades “Most films about Africa were made by whites for whites.”²³ He highlighted the oversimplification of the culture by pointing out that “all Africans were called Zulus in early films … with one language, and one landscape and a few physical types replacing the hundreds of languages and cultures and physical environments.”²⁴ Again, such films draw their stereotypes from the traditions of popular culture (including melodrama, the so-called “Empire romance”, various orientalisms, and other populist genres). The production of these early features in New Zealand, although keeping alive film-making activities in this country, did little to develop an indigenous feature film industry since key crew members often came from overseas, often shot the productions and left, taking with them the equipment and, sometimes (as in Markey’s case) walking off with valuable Maori artefacts borrowed for use as props.²⁵

Jonathan Dennis noted that, “when George Bernard Shaw came [to New Zealand] in 1934 he recommended the creation of a local film industry or, he said, you will lose your souls without even getting American ones.”²⁶ As an outsider Shaw saw the need for a local industry but unfortunately the authorities did not share his views and feature film production continued to be left to individual enthusiasts. For example 1935 saw the production of New Zealand’s first sound feature film *Down On The Farm* produced by Stewart Pitt and Lee Hill, with sound recording by Jack Welsh. (A production photograph from the film shows an orchestra on the back of a truck in a paddock waiting for their cue to play in time with the live action when the camera was to start rolling.) The advent of technology (in the late 1920s) which enabled synchronised sound to become an integral ingredient of a film was a mixed blessing for New Zealand film-makers as it virtually doubled the cost of film production and created a scarcity of equipment. Although Rudall Hayward was able to master synchronised sound, “the period of expensive sound production saw no regular work in this field. The only continuity of the film production was in the making of short films – scenics and industrials, beauty contests and screen tests and local news films made by exhibitors.”²⁷



Plate 2: The orchestra waits for their cue to play with the live action during the shooting of *Down on The Farm*

Attracted by the “talkies”, audiences became increasingly intolerant of silent films. For local film-makers, often having to work with out-dated cine equipment, the

demand for sound movies presented an impossible challenge, and “what had been an active, if fledgling local industry, was decimated by the arrival of sound.”²⁸ Robert Sklar noted that the problem was not only a matter of cost: “When sound came into motion pictures in the late twenties, the principal sound systems were closely controlled by patents, franchises and industrial secrecy. It was next to impossible for anyone in New Zealand to purchase or even to observe sound motion picture recording cameras.”²⁹

New Zealand cinema audiences were still provided with a steady diet of high quality, entertaining, imported feature films and consequently were not overly concerned at the lack of local productions. Nevertheless, a few determined film-makers such as Rudall Hayward persisted by developing their own forms of sound equipment. In 1936 Hayward produced his first sound film, *On The Friendly Road* and followed this with a sound version of his epic *Rewi's Last Stand* in 1939. This was Hayward’s finest film. Although the sheer size and scale of the production was an unprecedented achievement for a New Zealand director, it was also notable for its cultural ambitions. The 1940 Centennial provided him with an opportunity to seek investments and donations. It was clearly an attempt to create “the great New Zealand movie”, in the tradition of Griffith’s civil war epic. Once again this fictional film chose to keep close to documentary, being based on historical events, and with ethnographic elements, though the central story drew on the narrative stereotypes of popular fiction (as a variant on the “Romeo and Juliet” situation). Despite operating on a minimal budget Hayward went to great pains to achieve historical accuracy with the unpaid help of local historical societies and other groups. He and his wife Hilda had to create their own infrastructure. Consequently he was involved in scripting, fund-raising, directing and eventually even becoming his own camera operator. In the drawn-out and under-funded situation in which the film had to be made, it was difficult to maintain a consistent production team.

Hayward relied upon his own savings and the help of many small investors who were apparently as much motivated by the cultural value of the project as by its potential to make money. Lacking a pool of professional actors he used the organisational processes he had developed while travelling the country and making regional films. He negotiated “co-operation from the Maori tribes about whose earlier history it

concerned.”³⁰ As well as providing extras the local Maori offered full “co-operation in the costumes and props department”³¹ which, from Hayward’s point of view, had the added bonus of ensuring “the maximum degree of ethnographic authenticity.”³² Facing the twin handicaps of working with largely amateur actors and minuscule budgets, Hayward worked hard to establish an empathy with his cast members in order to obtain optimum performances and reduce any wastage of film stock. As Ramai Hayward, his leading lady and his second wife recalled, “He was very patient with his actors … He would rehearse us, and he’d tell us to think about it and really get into the part. When we came on camera he’d say, ‘I haven’t got very much film, I only got enough film for one take’. That really put you on the spot – you knew that beforehand so you knew your lines thoroughly and you’d also rehearsed the part and you put everything you’d got into that first take.”³³ Although the film has an uneasy mixture of styles, reflecting its extended and interrupted production process, it contains some powerful sequences. Above all is the sequence in which a Maori-speaking British officer, standing above the trenches in which his fellow-soldiers are crouched, under the cover of a flag of truce calls upon the beleaguered inhabitants of the Orakau Pa to surrender and is answered with the defiant cry of, “Friend, I will fight you, Ake! Ake! Ake!”³⁴ Although *Rewi’s Last Stand* was shown throughout the country, the box office takings were disappointing. The New Zealand Centennial celebrations provided a helpful context but in 1940 the country was distracted by the war with Germany. An attempt was made to sell the film overseas but the result was less than successful with only a small amount of revenue accruing from the film which was accepted as a ‘B’-movie under the Commonwealth Quota. Ironically the only surviving print of *Rewi’s Last Stand* today is the shortened version, savagely cut for British audiences.

The film clearly reflects the difficulties involved in the push towards feature production. Some dialogue is stilted, and at times the excessive makeup gives the soldiers and missionaries what modern audiences might see as disconcerting drag-queen appearance. Similarly the Maori actors sometimes have a contrived, concert-party-like appearance, an effect exacerbated by a sequence clearly modelled on the ethnographic film genre. Nevertheless, as an attempt to portray an important stage of New Zealand history and also to tell a moving story of young lovers entangled in the cross-cultural conflicts of the New Zealand Wars, *Rewi’s Last Stand* was a landmark

in the development of the New Zealand feature film. Like many other attempts at the great New Zealand drama, it takes as its theme a story of interracial conflict based on a romance between a young Pakeha man and a young Maori woman. Hayward made serious attempts to achieve a more authentic representation of the Maori people than previous film-makers such as Markey had provided. His depiction of the Battle of Orakau Pa was that of a “fiercely fought contest between opposing forces who regarded each other with mutual respect”. This conception was progressive in terms of its period, though coloured by Victorian ideals of chivalry. In later years, under the influence of post-colonial theory and post Nga Tamatoa Maori radicalism, Hayward’s representation of the conflict and its consequences has been challenged. For example Russell Campbell has seen the film as a gross oversimplification, in which only the Pakeha perspective is presented:

A fair fight is not at issue here. Having set up the war as an operation to stamp out lawlessness, the film can afford the luxury of depicting Rewi’s stand as heroic, since his defeat is necessary and inevitable. Order imposed by force of arms will be, in this film’s inflexion of the Pakeha myth, the necessary precondition for a harmonious bi-racial society to grow and prosper. We return to the text of the film’s foreword, which assures us: ‘Today, the slowly blending races of white men and brown, live in peace and equality as one people...the New Zealanders.’³⁵

American academic Robert Sklar (at the end of a visit to New Zealand) had a contrasting perspective.

The dominant visual planes of the last half of Mr Hayward’s film *Rewi’s Last Stand* are vertical, conveying a sense of the land. Yet it is a familiar land, a benign and even loved land, to be lived with, in contrast to the Western’s horizontal planes depicting a scenic but also awesome land, to be seized or traversed. Even more significant is the theme of racial conflict. Until recently the American Indians were pictured in films as ruthless and treacherous antagonists, a people fighting against white encroachment but hardly ever shown as representing a life or culture of their own. In Rudall Hayward’s handling of New Zealand conflict the Maoris are treated with dignity and

indeed their sense of the land preceded and even shapes that of the Europeans. Most historical films demean our sense of history; *Rewi's Last Stand* is one of the few I know which can enhance our feeling for the past.³⁶

John O'Shea too, was largely supportive of the film pointing out that it was different “from Hollywood ‘Injun’ films … There was no mistaking [Hayward’s] sentiment – and often his sentimentality. If the British regular troops are handled with the near slapstick earthiness that marks John Ford’s depiction of US Cavalry forces, Hayward clearly avoids the carelessness with which Hollywood allowed its Injuns to bite the dust. Though Maoris are seen to be slaughtered, they are known to be brave, fighting against overpowering odds, intelligent, and, above all, chivalrous.”³⁷ Merata Mita has also praised the film for being progressive in the context of its period. Describing it as “an engaging, high-spirited film”³⁸ she went on to point out that “true to its period, the film is full of overblown gestures with a grandiose depiction of death and heroics. The portrayal of the British command is very much a caricature (quite richly deserved). The outrage that Hayward, and other historians since, felt about the injustice of the British advance is clearly evident in the film.”³⁹ Leaving aside the question of which critic is correct, such a debate may be taken as evidence of how an ambitious New Zealand film can function within the culture – by providing a fictional representation of social reality which at the least throws moral and other interpretative issues into heightened relief. As implied by critics such as John B. Thompson and Laurence Grossburg quoted in my “Introduction” films are like powerful speech acts which trigger off a process of response and questioning. Particularly interesting in this exchange are the attempts by Sklar and O’Shea to compare and contrast Hayward’s myth with that of the typical American western of the period. Both imply that *Rewi's Last Stand* was influenced by this popular American genre, but inflected in a local way. And Mita sees the emotions associated with nationalist politics as providing a serious subtext to what others might see merely as comic stereotypes. All these critics are seeking to offer New Zealand-inflected readings of a film that at least can be welcomed for providing an opportunity for such local critical activity.

Undoubtedly Hayward was broadly representing one of the current perspectives of a nation whose Pakeha population saw the land wars of the 19th Century (then the “Maori Wars”, subsequently “the land wars” and today “the New Zealand Wars”) as

part of the historical evolution of a country which by 1939 had developed into a nation with supposedly harmonious race relations. Subsequent films such as *Utu* would inflect similar incidents very differently, with savagery replacing chivalry, thus creating a striking contextual contrast with *Rewi's Last Stand*. From our point of view, the enduring importance of *Rewi's Last Stand* was firstly its ambition in creating a major New Zealand feature film with characters and incidents that had an allegorical (as well as an entertainment) function, in the hope that the film as a whole would have a strong relevance – and resonance – for the New Zealand population at large. At the same time Hayward demonstrated that this nation had a rich source of dramatic material due to its varied and often violent history and the challenges posed by the mixing of the European and Maori cultures. Furthermore the film served to show that it was possible to produce a major feature film in New Zealand using local expertise, resources and personnel.

Alongside these independent attempts to create features, there was a small but steady flow of film production associated with the government promotion of tourism. Film-maker Michael Forlong, tracing the development of government films, recalled that:

Originally the Government Film Studios were built by a man named Mackenzie who had contracted to do photography and film-making for that department. His original premises were in Lambton Quay but as, of course, he was using nitrate stock the Fire Department insisted that his activities should be moved out of the city area and so he built the Miramar studios which, as it was about 1929, were built as a laboratory and sound stage with offices. For their time the studios were quite advanced although small with little expectation of feature production. Mackenzie was a far sighted and incidentally very pleasant man and he put in what was then quite advanced equipment. Eventually they were taken over by the Tourist Department with Mackenzie as Manager. However there was to my knowledge no feature production although there were some very fine technicians on the staff, notably Bert Bridgeman, an exceptionally talented cameraman, who had shot *Hei Tiki* and who did some notable work on government publicity films in the 30s and also took some exceptional stills for the same department. There were others such as Charlie Barton who was a cameraman with the NZ

Expeditionary Force in France in World War One and Ceryl Morton who had been in the laboratories at the same time. Generally the technical expertise was of a high standard although there was little or no encouragement in New Zealand to do anything very adventurous which made Rudall Hayward's efforts all the more remarkable.⁴⁰

In 1936 the Tourist & Publicity Department acquired the Filmcraft Studios in Wellington and increased the production of tourist and information films including Forlong's 50 minute major documentary to celebrate the country's centenary, *One Hundred Crowded Years*. Having confined itself to short promotional documentaries, "it was quite an event when the Tourist and Publicity Department decided to make an historical film for the New Zealand Centennial, with Bert Bridgeman as Director and Cameraman and Ron MacIntyre as Assistant Cameraman."⁴¹

Forlong recalled:

The film was never intended to be a feature film, although it contained dramatised sequences. It was a long documentary – documentary in the true sense of the word – not an industrial or scenic or propaganda film but a factual account. I was taken on to write the script and later as Assistant Director. As far as I remember I was the only non film studios person on the technical side. I don't remember there being any official budget but we certainly didn't throw money around. We built an early settlement on the airfield at the Mount in Tauranga and a very exact interior (we even used the original drawings for mouldings, etc.) of the main room of Waitangi House in the studio and used such period places as the Turnbull Library, but on the whole much of it was improvised. At Miramar we built a blockhouse to be assaulted by the Maoris and defended by troops using muzzle loaders and on the beach at the Mount a part of a sailing ship. As there was really no professional theatre in those days, most of the cast were either amateurs or radio presenters. I was not limited by any sort of supervision but, of course, as the Government was paying it was assumed that we would present a positive view of New Zealand, and I don't think it ever occurred to us to do anything else. Whatever political beliefs we may have had we were all enthusiastic New Zealanders and we

certainly tried very hard to be objective about the Maoris. I think that I did in particular but it is very difficult to judge our own or other people's actions 50 years later.⁴²

One Hundred Crowded Years was first screened in 1938 and strongly reflected the control which the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser had over the Department, a factor which Michael Forlong found "very annoying and a great mistake ... it meant that he wanted to have control over everything."⁴³ The film was designed to present a positive view of New Zealand during the one hundred years immediately following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Essentially, it was a production which lauded the achievements of nationhood, making no attempt to critically scrutinise the major events of that century. The existence of controversial historical events was glossed over and covered in an oblique reference by the narrator. For example, to accompanying shots of mountains and a farmer with a horse-drawn plough, watched by a dutiful wife, a voice-over informs us that "we would have been more than human to have made no mistakes during the stupendous task of rushing forward a country from savagery to civilisation in one hundred crowded years."⁴⁴

Technically well produced, *One Hundred Crowded Years* is notable for its attempt to incorporate live sound, albeit in a very limited way. In an early sequence, a horseman gallops up to a farmer and his wife shouting, "The Maoris are coming!". The horrified wife leaps to her feet, echoing the cry, "The Maoris are coming!" Her husband shouts at her to "Quickly, get the child!".

Sync sound was very difficult in those days. It was recorded on film and the equipment was usually very bulky and difficult to transport. Unless you had single system recording which usually gave inferior results and was difficult to edit with any sophistication. Of course the production of any film added to our experience. With *100 Crowded Years* we were doing things that were new to us and of course we learnt from that. Any practical film making adds to one's knowledge and experience.⁴⁵

In spite of its jingoistic nature, the production of this 5,000 foot film marked a significant stage in the development of the National Film Unit (NFU) and the

burgeoning expertise of its small band of employees, who in true kiwi style were frequently required to carry out a multiplicity of film-making roles. In 1948, Forlong was able to break away from the limitations of producing government propaganda by directing an innovative film, *Rhythm and Movement* which featured the music of Douglas Lilburn. Forlong recalled that the film, which showed lightly clad female dancers moving in unison to the music “was considered to be quite way out. I specially commissioned the music as I did the music for *Journey for Three* also by Douglas Lilburn. (This was released on 78 RPM disc.) I felt very strongly that we should encourage and develop as much New Zealand talent as was applicable and available.”⁴⁶

In February 1940 British documentary film-maker John Grierson arrived on a visit to New Zealand as the result of an invitation from E. Stanhope Andrews, an education writer and a member of the Wellington Film Society. During the pre-war period Andrews reviewed films for the Wellington newspaper *The Dominion* and continued to promote the role of films as a teaching aid. In the immediate pre-war period he began to correspond with Grierson (creator of Britain’s Empire Marketing Board Film Unit) and to see film as having a wider role than simply as a training medium. Annoyed at the indifferent quality of local documentary productions Andrews used Grierson’s visit to lobby wartime prime minister Peter Fraser. John O’Shea, commenting on the visit recalled:

The upshot of the general concern about New Zealand’s having little or no film identity (which would be valuable for troop and civilian morale – ‘there’s a War going on, you know’) was a visit by the doyen of the British documentary movement, John Grierson, fresh from his triumph with the National Film Board in Canada. With the most obligatory overseas precedent to buttress local arguments presented to the Government, Fraser was persuaded to appoint Stanhope Andrews, producer of the film studios at Miramar, rename them the New Zealand National Film Unit, and establish it as part of the Prime Minister’s Department with the producer having direct access to him. The Government’s decisions from then on were to be of crucial importance to the future of the moving image in New Zealand.⁴⁷

Reporting on his impressions of local film-making gained from his visit, Grierson commented on the preference for produce and scenery at the expense of people.

Over in England, we seem to see and hear a lot about New Zealand but never anything about the human beings that live in it ... I knew the Maoris of Rotorua ... as for the Pakeha – I wondered even more about him. I have been in a lot of countries, and one thing I am sure of is that every country has its own native genius, its own spirit, and that it writes these on the people's faces, in their manners, in the way they see things. Nobody has told me about the native genius of New Zealand, or certainly they have not told me in films.⁴⁸

Pointing out that it is not enough for New Zealand to appear before the world merely as a tourist resort with a butter factory, Grierson urged local film-makers to incorporate their country's activities into their productions.

Do not be ashamed to describe your problems, and what you are doing about your problems. Remember we are pretty imperfect ourselves, and if you appear always in the spit and polish of perfection, we know very quickly that you are either inhuman or you are liars.

Above all you must send us films about people so that we can see their faces and remember that New Zealand is not just a couple of spots on a distant map but a real place with a flash of the future in its eyes and a beat in its heart.⁴⁹

Andrews explained that “I was intensely interested in the theory of communication in a democracy, and Grierson was also. All of the free men couldn't get together in the middle of town and have a discussion because there's too many of us. Grierson thought that surely we could find some means of communicating with each other so that the blokes we sent up the hill to organise things for us could tell us how they were getting on.”⁵⁰

During the war the NFU began producing a series entitled *Weekly Review*, relatively simple films depicting activities related to war-time activities, designed to inform, boost morale, promote the war effort and allow government politicians to appeal

directly to the thousands of New Zealanders who regularly attended the cinema.⁵¹ Stanhope Andrews recalled that, “when we went to work we were told by representatives of the film trade here and by technical people in Australia that it couldn’t be done, that we hadn’t the staff, the equipment, the knowledge or the subject materials to make a weekly short.”⁵² The original team reflected the lack of film-making expertise in New Zealand at that time. “Of old hands who knew anything we had Morton as assistant producer, Barton and Bridgeman as cameraman, and we retrieved Arnold Townsend from a taxi. In the laboratory we had Bob Shennan, and for the rest we were teachers, newspapermen, radio announcers, poets, public servants and carpenters.”⁵³ Like New Zealand’s early film-makers, the men at the newly formed NFU had to create much of their own resources. “We bought hand cameras in second hand shops, hired portable (and clumsy) sound gear from Australia, made bits and pieces in our own workshop, and pressed on through happy ignorance to technical efficiency in the production of a *Weekly Review* which ran every week for nine years, and gathered prestige as it went.”⁵⁴ Typical of the competent wartime productions of the NFU, there are no credits other than “Camera: Pacific Unit”. This concept of anonymity is embodied in the opening sentences of the voice-over, for the film *Guadalcanal: Base for Attack* which explained that as the actions of the United States marines “directly affect the defence of New Zealand, it is therefore fitting that New Zealand cameras should record the final events of the campaign”. The term “cameras” is substituted for that of “cameramen” as if to expunge any suggestion that individuals should receive special credit. Although this could be attributed to the concept of wartime censorship, the explanation is more likely to be part of the NFU’s policy of anonymity least individual members should begin to develop styles which were not in keeping with the Unit’s style.

The production of these short films during wartime, which necessitated shooting under difficult conditions with limited resources, was, in many ways, a repetition of the conditions under which New Zealand film-makers had laboured for decades. Although wartime created its own unique hazards, the production of films which required camera operators to record good quality images while being always mindful of the need to conserve film stock and to undertake constant maintenance of their well-worn equipment had been a constant challenge. The National Film Unit teams that shot and edited the *Weekly Review* were not only continuing a tradition of film-

making on a shoestring, as personified by men like Rudall Hayward, but were also being provided with the opportunity of building their own skills and expertise through the regular production of the series. Andrews pointed out that “as time went on we could put out our 800-900 feet *Weekly Review* with considerable confidence, while in the background, for a month or six weeks, a small group would be making a 2,000 footer, a genuine documentary. It became a smooth operation.”⁵⁵ It was an operation which established itself as a popular aspect of screen entertainment to local cinema audiences and, as John O’Shea recalled, “with its 10-minute *Weekly Review* screened in the main cinemas in the country throughout the war, the National Film Unit became a familiar and cherished institution.”⁵⁶

The *Weekly Review* series, also served another purpose. As well as providing information on war-related activities, it began to accustom New Zealand audiences to seeing their political leaders, and fellow countrymen and women on the cinema screen on a regular basis. Robert Allender, writing in *Landfall* 3 years after the war ended recalled:

Initially the appearance of our Prime Minister on the screen invariably caused loud amusement. It was all very well for Winston Churchill, but fancy our Mr Fraser in the pictures. It was too funny. This reaction did not last long. We soon became accustomed to the notion that New Zealanders were just as much entitled to appear in films as Englishmen or Australians and, once the initial mirth and embarrassment had subsided, we began to notice that although *Weekly Review* was preoccupied with subjects of passing importance, its treatment of most subjects was at least competent.⁵⁷

The initial amusement and embarrassment at seeing Peter Fraser’s image on the screen (doubtless at times, at his own behest) typifies the result of the self-perpetuating cycle in which New Zealand subjects were rarely shown on the cinema screen as they were not considered of sufficient worth. The *Weekly Review*, produced in response to the need for morale boosting wartime propaganda, was to play a crucial initial role in weakening this cycle. By accustoming local audiences to a greater degree of local non-fictional content on their cinema screens, it prepared the ground for the acceptance of fictional New Zealand cinema characters.⁵⁸

By 1946 the Unit had been transferred from Tourism to the Prime Minister's Department. The Unit, by this time, had become extremely well equipped. However times were changing. In Stanhope Andrews's words, "with the equipment came peace and the public service. The days of the hand at the helm were numbered. In future we were to be steered not even by a committee, but by a hierarchy."⁵⁹ This resulted in a growing disquiet regarding excessive government interference in the content of the Unit's productions. As an information area of the government, attached to the Prime Minister's Department, the NFU's role was, according to the New Zealand official Yearbook, "keeping people informed on national affairs."⁶⁰ However it was a role which also "entailed an absence of critical social commentary and an emphasis on the positive achievements of the government in office."⁶¹ As John O'Shea recalled:

Most New Zealanders didn't cotton on to the fact that the National Film Unit was really a propaganda unit for the government. Pacific Films too – for our client's commercial messages. We both made sponsored documentaries. For independents like us the National Film Unit was always hard to stomach. It persisted in regarding its films as being in the public interest. Beyond reproach! Those few of us outside the Government umbrella tended to loath the National Film Unit not for the people but the institution.⁶²

Stanhope Andrews, at this stage, was relatively satisfied with the quality of the productions but others within the NFU found the style and content of the *Weekly Review* too predictable. Wartime conditions imposed both physical and artistic restrictions on all New Zealanders. The single-minded goal of winning the war required a strict conformity and, although prepared to contribute their talents to the war effort, in the early post-war years, artists such as ex-navy man and NFU employee Cecil Holmes became increasingly ill at ease. For Cecil Holmes, the content of NFU productions was as predictable and conformist as their cinematic style. As he later wrote:

The *Weekly Review* consisted of about three items or potted documentaries, sometimes directed, sometimes simply shot by a lone cameraman and structured on the cutting bench. There were certain rigid rules: never take the

camera off the tripod, shoot every scene in long shot, medium shot and close up, when panning, do so from left to right with something moving in the frame if possible.⁶³

Cecil Holmes had worked regularly with cameraman Roger Mirams, notably on a ten-minute film *Mail Run* shot in the Pacific and Asia which documented the work of the RNZAF flights from Auckland to Japan to service the post-war J-Force. In the editing Holmes and Mirams attempted an innovative approach. They decided to dispense “with the tone of official anonymity and introduce a personal voice. The conventional narrator soon gives way to a more colloquial speaker (it is Selwyn Toogood) reading ‘extracts from a diary kept by our cameraman on the trip’. It is a device which allows Holmes to impart something of a left-wing, anti-colonialist perspective to the film’s description of places the plane puts down en route.”⁶⁴

However, by 1947 as John O’Shea recalled:

peacetime film-making under an editorial policy that followed a political agenda undermined the morale of ex-servicemen employed by the NFU. They became restive. The first to move out independently were Alun Falconer, a writer-director, and Roger Mirams, a cameraman. They were both impatient: Roger with bureaucracy and Alun with attempts at what he considered a trifling political change to a documentary they had made, *Mail Run*, about relations between New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours. With [an] assignment from Movietone News, they set up their own film unit and called it the Pacific Film Unit.⁶⁵

O’Shea, writing in 1999 commented that “it could be said – *multum in parvo* – that the defection from the NFU of a left-leaning lad like Alun and a go-getter like Roger started a swing away from the solo voice of socialism towards the multiple voices of 50 years later.”⁶⁶

Later in 1948 Holmes was largely responsible for the innovative NFU production *The Coaster*. Although a derivative of the British documentary *Night Mail* (which featured a poem by W. H. Auden on the soundtrack) *The Coaster* was nevertheless

an excellent production in its own right. The film discarded the standard voice-over, relying instead on the quality of the visuals, the creative juxtapositions of scenes and sequences, the occasional live sound sequence, and the sparing but appropriate use of New Zealand writer Denis Glover's poetry (read, as in *Mail Run*, by Selwyn Toogood). Toogood, who subsequently made a name for himself as a radio and television personality, recalled the process of doing voice-overs during this period: "The soundtrack had to be done in one operation – music, voice-overs and sound effects had to be blended in and put straight on to sound film, an expensive operation in which there is no margin for error."⁶⁷ He remembered the recording of *The Coaster* as being particularly challenging:

Behind all the verse, the sound boys had to bring in a complicated series of sound effects – sea birds, lapping waves, engines running and the like – and add music as well. It was no easy job. We had a run through and it all seemed to fit well together. Sound recordist Claude Wicksteed decided to risk a "take". You could have knocked us over with a seagull's feather when he decided it was perfect, or "in the can" as the industry jargon has it.⁶⁸

Cecil Holmes and his production team capitalised effectively on all these elements to produce a film that not only discarded many of the predictable aspects of the standard NFU documentary, but was notably popular with the New Zealand public. The *Evening Post* reviewer said of the film:

For me the single, most exciting thing in this week's world of celluloid was the Government Film Studio's production *The Coaster*; and I was pleased to see that the audience at the Regent agreed with me, punctuating the film with frequent laughter and spontaneous applause. ... In addition to the usual good photography and intelligent documentary approach, the film is made momentous by the superb narration. Denis Glover, New Zealand's versatile boxer-seaman-poet-printer, wrote the script. His lines, which dovetail neatly into the situations, vary from lofty blank verse to brittle comedy; and Selwyn Toogood is an ideal choice for the narrator. One couldn't help sharing with him the thrill of bringing New Zealand poetry to the New Zealand people for

the first time, and sensing the obvious delight of both the groundlings and the intelligentsia.⁶⁹

The comments by the *Evening Post's* writer signified the increasing development of a New Zealand film culture. Here was a film with a subject matter familiar to many New Zealanders; a subject matter that did not attempt to glamorise the work of the men on our coastal vessels but to depict a typical cross section of national life. Underpinning the visuals, Denis Glover's work, along with that of Fairburn and Mason, contained "explicit reference ... to problems or facts of social life in a New Zealand environment."⁷⁰

The audience's obvious delight in both the verse and the visuals was a significant development in the gradual evolution of a film culture within New Zealand. Here was a subject matter, presented through both images and sound, with which they could identify. The visuals were of New Zealand people in their own environment, and on the soundtrack was a vocabulary and accent which was not that of an Englishman or an American. It was a New Zealand film, made by New Zealand production personnel, for a New Zealand audience. In the same way that New Zealand literature was becoming increasingly accepted, this final art form was also coming to be seen as having a distinctive New Zealand flavour, though generally based (as in this case) on an overseas prototype. It could be argued that *The Coaster*, in following the *Night Mail* formula, was simply replicating an overseas product. However, many forms of art are an outgrowth of previous creations, whether the links are relatively obvious, as in the case of these two films, or more tenuous. In creating *The Coaster*, the filmmakers resisted the safe option of having the film closely resemble its British counterpart. They could, for example, have used a British poem (e.g. one by John Masefield) or had Glover's poem read by a British narrator instead of using Toogood, whose voice, while a professional one, was identifiably antipodean. Instead, although basing the film on an imported formula, *The Coaster* was clearly an attempt to create a production with a maximum degree of local content that would be both an informative and enjoyable experience for local cinema audiences. (Cecil Holmes was eventually to be fired from the Unit due largely to his membership of the Communist party, which was anathema to Fraser's Labour government – as documented in *Seeing Red* Annie Goldson's 1996 documentary on Holmes. A year later Holmes was

reinstated and was given full compensation for wrongful dismissal but, after making one more short film for the NFU he left and continued his film career in Australia.)

Although an excellent film in its own right, *The Coaster*'s quality was probably enhanced at the time by the mediocrity of many other NFU productions, whose attempt at catchy titles did little to disguise the rather predictable nature of the subject matter. Robert Allender writing in *Landfall* in 1948 summed up the NFU's reputation in this way:

Common opinion on the merit of the National Film Unit's work is violent and contradictory. It is unusual to find a New Zealand cinema-goer who considers its production with analytical detachment, but even more unusual to find one who is not ever ready to offer a hot declaration of its worth. There are only two common answers to the question "Do you like the films of the National Film Unit?" - an emphatic "yes" or an indignant "no". Those who say "yes" usually hold that its photography and many of its subjects are excellent. The "no's" are outraged by what they call its "governmental propaganda". Extreme and irreconcilable as these opinions are, their existence proves that the Unit has fulfilled its initial purpose: to depict New Zealand life with sufficient artistic and technical skill to catch the attention of New Zealand audiences.⁷¹

By this time Andrews had himself come to feel that the NFU had failed to live up to Grierson's brief. "So far the National Film Unit has erred on the side of self-admiration. If it is to avoid the accusation that it exists merely to flatter the reigning government, it must seek out the less pleasant subjects ... find time to examine the things of which we have no cause to be proud."⁷²

Three years later in 1950 Andrews resigned, finding the constraints on his own creativity were too much. As far as he was concerned, "It used to be a Film Unit first and public service last. Now, every move had to be approved by somebody else, which didn't sit well with my thinking."⁷³ However, it was men like Andrews and Holmes who laid the foundation for later developments in New Zealand film. While there were basic differences between documentary and drama (or fictional) film-

making, both share some elements of the technical infrastructure. Furthermore, the greater strength of the documentary tradition in New Zealand and the scepticism of the audience towards local films encouraged fictional film-makers to stay close to a documentary approach. (A perfect example would be provided by John O’Shea’s and Roger Mirams’s first feature *Broker Barrier*.) However, there is no doubt that the NFU made a major contribution towards raising the consciousness of the public regarding the role of local film-making. As Allender commented in 1948:

Recently ... the world has taken more critical glances in our direction. At the same time we have looked in the looking glass and found the reflected image not half as displeasing as we expected. Like a child using a mirror for the first time, we want to look again but also inadvertently provided two key men who were to be founders of Pacific Films.⁷⁴

The founders were Mirams and O’Shea, one from the NFU and one from the film society movement. As O’Shea later summed up the NFU, “the vision with which it had started by Andrews was hard to sustain [yet] it had given New Zealanders a sense of film identity.”⁷⁵ The very limitations of its production was a goad to young film-makers such as O’Shea to create work that was more diverse, more independent, and more crucial.

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- ¹ George Cain, *Packsaddle to Rolls Royce*, Auckland 1976, p49 (quoted in Nerida Elliott, “ANZAC, Hollywood and Home: Cinema and Film Going in Auckland 1909 to 1939”, a thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts, University of Auckland, 1989, p18)
- ² Diane Collins, *Hollywood Down Under: Australians at the Movies 1896 to the Present Day*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1987, p44
- ³ *Taranaki Herald*, 1 February 1912, quoted by Jonathan Dennis in *Te Ao Marama*, p127
- ⁴ Clive Sowry, *Film-Making in New Zealand*, Wellington, New Zealand Film Archive, 1984
- ⁵ Rudall Hayward, interview with Ray Hayes, Auckland, September 1961
- ⁶ The length and quality of films such as *Hinemoa* and *The Test* would not qualify them for the modern definition of ‘feature film’. However, they are early examples of this type of production due to their dramatic content and their presentation, in public, as the main attraction or feature of the evening’s entertainment.
- ⁷ The first of a number of film versions of this story, the most recent having been directed by New Zealand director, Roger Donaldson, in 1985.
- ⁸ Clive Sowry, p3
- ⁹ *The Birth of New Zealand To The Piano*, Reid Perkins, *Illusions* No. 25, Winter 1996, p6
- ¹⁰ Gordon Ingham, *Everyone’s Gone to the Movies: The 60 Cinemas of Auckland*, Auckland, self published, 1973, p27
- ¹¹ Otis Ferguson “Before the Cameras Roll”, *Film Theory and Criticism*, p 643
- ¹² John C. Reid, “Film Making in New Zealand”, *Salient*, October 1964, p13
- ¹³ Minette Hillyer, *We calmly and adventurously go travelling: New Zealand Film 1925-35*, MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1997
- ¹⁴ Rudall Hayward, interview, September 1961
- ¹⁵ Chris Watson, “New Zealand Feature Films: Their State and Status”, *New Zealand Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, November 1988, p81
- ¹⁶ R. Sklar, “Rudall Hayward, New Zealand Film-Maker”, *Landfall* 1970, p147
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Rudall Hayward, interview, September 1961
- ¹⁹ Deborah Shepherd, *Reframing Women: A History of New Zealand Film*, Auckland, Harper Collins, 2000
- ²⁰ Diane Pivac “The Bush Cinderella”, Wellington, The New Zealand Film Archive, July 2000, p3
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Merata Mita, “The Soul and the Image”, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p41
- ²³ Kenneth B. Cameron, *Africa On Film*, New York, Continuum, 1994, p183
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ See *Adventures in Maoriland*
- ²⁶ Jonathan Dennis, *Film Show*, Radio New Zealand National programme, 1 August 1999
- ²⁷ Chris Watson, p82
- ²⁸ Minette Hillyer, p41
- ²⁹ R. Sklar, p151
- ³⁰ John O’Shea, *Don’t Let It Get You*, p61
- ³¹ Ibid, p62
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ Ramai Hayward, interview, *Yours for the Asking*, (dir. Alan Lindsay), TV One, 28 September 1980
- ³⁴ For ever and ever and ever!
- ³⁵ Russell Campbell, “In Order That They May Become Civilised”, *Illusions*, No. 1, Summer 1986, p19
- ³⁶ R. Sklar, 1970, p98.
- ³⁷ John O’Shea, *Don’t Let It Get You*, p62
- ³⁸ Merita Mita, “The Soul and the Image”, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p43
- ³⁹ Ibid
- ⁴⁰ Michael Forlong, letter to author, 11 July 1996
- ⁴¹ Ibid
- ⁴² Ibid
- ⁴³ *60 Minutes*, TVNZ, 23 June 1996
- ⁴⁴ *One Hundred Crowded Years*, soundtrack

⁴⁵ Ibid p2

⁴⁶ Ibid (In 1949 Forlong went to England as a guest of the British Council and, on returning to New Zealand continued to work with the National Film Unit until 1951 when the Norwegian Foreign Office invited him to go to Norway. Later he worked on films such as *Dunkirk* with John Mills and Richard Attenborough, and *Alexander the Great* with Richard Burton. Returning to New Zealand, Forlong produced an excellent drama, *Rangi's Catch* which starred Temuera Morrison as a young boy and other notable New Zealand actors such as Don Selwyn and Ian Mune.)

⁴⁷ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p14

⁴⁸ Forsyth Hardy, *John Grierson A Documentary Biography*, London, Faber and Faber, 1979 p78

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ *Onfilm* 1990, p36

⁵¹ The value of films as a propaganda medium had been recognised 20 years earlier during World War I when "hate films were imported from England and America and lecturers were sent round New Zealand to give atrocity stories before the screening of films such as *The Prussian Cur* and *The Lust of Ages* (which showed how the Germans had started the war so they could steal our gold). I can still remember how berserk the audience went when, as a small boy, I saw a film of 'the murder of Nurse Edith Cavell' at the Theatre Royal in Thames." Gordon Ingham, p10.

⁵² Stanhope Andrews, *Here and Now*, p8

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Stanhope Andrews, *Onfilm* 1990, p36

⁵⁶ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p22

⁵⁷ Robert Allender, "The National Film Unit", *Landfall* Vol. II No. 4, 1948, p322

⁵⁸ I was fortunate enough to attend the world première of Roger Donaldson's *Sleeping Dogs* in 1977. The première was a milestone as the film was the first New Zealand feature to be screened since John O'Shea's *Don't Let It Get You* 11 years earlier. During the screening the audience remained relatively quiet, partly I surmise in honour of the occasion. Two weeks later I attended an evening screening of *Sleeping Dogs* at a Queen Street cinema. The audience reaction contrasted strongly with the previous occasion. When New Zealand accents were heard there were giggles from the audience. At other times excited cries rang out as members recognised familiar places. The pursuit of Smith down Queen Street caused great excitement as the audience responded to the novelty of seeing on their screen, a location that was literally right outside the cinema doors instead of being thousands of kilometres away. It was notable that as the film progressed the audience noise gradually subsided as they became engrossed in the unfolding plot, which was strong enough to overcome the novelty of the local accents and locations. Like the screening of Peter Fraser's image in the *Weekly Review*, the showing of New Zealand characters in *Sleeping Dogs* was a milestone in accustoming local audiences to seeing their own people and locations presented in a fictional film which had an exciting storyline; a milestone whose initial foundation had been laid by the wartime documentaries and John O'Shea's post-war features, *Broken Barrier*, *Runaway* and *Don't Let It Get You*.

⁵⁹ Stanhope Andrews, "The National Film Unit", *Here and Now*, Vol. 3, No. 8, June 1953, p8

⁶⁰ *New Zealand Official Yearbook*, 1946, p725

⁶¹ Russell Campbell, "Plain Hard Hazardous Work: Cecil Holmes at the NFU", *Illusions*, March 1988, No. 7, p9

⁶² John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p105

⁶³ Cecil Holmes, *One Man's Way*, Victoria, Ringwood, Penguin 1986, p31.

⁶⁴ Russell Campbell, p10

⁶⁵ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p23.

⁶⁶ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1999, p72

⁶⁷ Selwyn Toogood, *Out of the Bag*, Auckland, Methuen, 1979, p55

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ *Evening Post*, 8 November 1948 (The juxtaposition of Glover's work with visuals of a New Zealand coaster and the crew was to continue the developing links between writers and film-makers within New Zealand. Men such as John Graham who wrote the script for *Runaway* regarded themselves as essentially writers for the print medium rather than screen writers. This tradition was clearly evident when Arthur Baysting's and Ian Mune's adaptation of C.K. Stead's novel *Smith's Dream* became the landmark 1974 feature film production *Sleeping Dogs*.)

⁷⁰ Allen Curnow, *A Book of New Zealand Verse*, Christchurch, Penguin, 1951, p17

⁷¹ Robert Allender, "The National Film Unit", *Landfall*, Vol. II, No. 4, 1948, p323

⁷² Ibid p320

⁷³ *Onfilm*, p36

⁷⁴ Robert Allender, p323

⁷⁵ John O'Shea, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p23

Chapter 2: NEW ZEALAND FILM CULTURE

To understand John O’Shea’s intervention into New Zealand culture, we need to examine the broader cultural context around film-making. The term “film culture” refers to that subculture within the broader context of a society’s total culture consisting of all the activities associated with film-going and film education as well as film-making. The most visible activity is attendance at film screenings. Before 1960 films were viewed almost entirely at cinemas since television and videos had not yet reached New Zealand. There were also screenings arranged by film societies, as well as educational and training films which were used in schools, business and cultural organisations. The degree of sophistication of a film culture is also reflected in the discourse around films which includes reviews, news items about films, personnel and the industry generally. Where film analysis and practical film-making are incorporated into school and tertiary curricula on a formal and structured basis, they too add greatly to the so-called “media literacy” of the culture. Hobbyists and members of amateur film-making clubs also add to public awareness of film-making techniques and a sense of confidence in the possibility of production. All these activities – reviewing, film education, and amateur societies – have developed in New Zealand, but at a slow pace. The key problem has been the fact that films tend to be highly expensive, technically specialised products imported into New Zealand from other countries (mostly the United States), so that “film culture” in this country has tended to be restricted mainly to reception, informed by “fan” knowledge rather than specialised technical or aesthetic understanding. New Zealand has always had high figures for ticket sales, but a film culture skewed towards straightforward consumption. The question of film culture and film industry together with related questions will be explored in this chapter for, as we shall see, John O’Shea’s goal was to establish not only a film industry, but also a film culture.

A Sense of History

Chris Watson has remarked: “If it is accepted that a history of film production and a substantial volume of film material is a prerequisite for a film culture, then the next most significant feature is an identification of that product with the culture that has produced it. It must speak to the people about the people, and they, the audience, must understand what is being said and respond to that message.”¹ Ideally this

implies a sense of history and a knowledge, to a greater or lesser degree, of film styles and genres, the way in which the various components of a film contribute to its sum total, the work of film personnel including directors, actors, key crew members and persons such as composers who, while associated with other art forms, also have specific jobs to do in the construction of a film. Beyond that, this kind of knowledge needs to be seen as an integral component of a nation's total culture. Australian writer Jan Dawson sums up a film culture in this broad way.

What is generally meant by a 'film culture' is, in the broadest terms, a nation's proud sense of its film history and achievements, coupled with an informed critical awareness of developments in cinema throughout the world, and an ability to locate and evaluate the national achievements in the wider, international context. It implies the ability to view films other than as isolated and unrelated events, and is generally taken to flourish in proportion as film is seen/presented in the context of an era, a genre, a director's work, a particular studio style, a school of film-making, or – ideally – all these at once.²

New Zealand is only now developing a maturing sense of its film history and achievements. New Zealand film culture has developed to the point where, while taking pride in the international success of our feature films, (such as *The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors* and *Heavenly Creatures*) we also feel able to praise or criticise them freely. During the early post-war period no such sense of pride existed in the public mind as the nation's film history and achievements had been at best spasmodic. Few New Zealanders could at that time have named a film director other than perhaps Rudall Hayward and even then would have been unlikely to be able to comment knowledgeably on his work. The same period saw small studios established by a few independent commercial filmmakers such as Robert Steele and Harry Reynolds who, like Pacific Films in Wellington, made films primarily concerned with manufacturing, road safety and local events. No courses to train film-makers existed at the time and consequently, in terms of Dawson's definition, New Zealand had a very limited film culture. This does not imply, however, that there was no potential for its development. For example, by this time National Film Unit documentaries were being regularly screened in cinemas throughout the country and discussed in the nation's press.

Nerida Elliot has pointed out that “the first commercial screening of a motion picture took place in New Zealand less than a year after a similar demonstration in Europe, and our first purpose-built cinemas erected in 1910 pre-date some New York picture theatres claiming to be amongst the earliest in the world.”³ Elliott adds that “In New Zealand, the evolution of the purpose-built cinema was almost exclusively the result of an imported culture either directly from the drawing boards of Australian architects ... or indirectly by imitation and British and American styles. It is not possible to speak of a distinctly New Zealand film culture, architecturally or otherwise. Even the names of theatres were diligently copied from theatres abroad.”⁴ Audiences came to take it for granted that the cinema was a place where British and American actors, speaking with non-New Zealand accents, were featured in locations far from New Zealand. During the first half, locally-produced documentaries or newsreels were acceptable but they were only preludes to the climax of the evening – the screening of the feature film. Again and again, the costume dramas, epics, gangster movies, westerns, musicals, dramas and comedies seemed to reinforce the concept that other places were more exciting and dynamic than their own homeland.

This overseas domination of our cinema screens was, as John O’Shea pointed out, well established when he first started attending movies in the 1930s. At the time he asked, “How could we belong to that world? We – and the nearby Maori people – were only ourselves. It hardly ever occurred to us that we, our families, friends and neighbours, were unique and worthy of a story, a song, a drama, or even a painting that would convey what we meant. We barely knew where we were – except as a part of ‘the Empire’.”⁵ The implication here is that the movies practised their particular form of cultural colonialism indirectly, by the sheer weight of numbers, and their domination of the world of everyday experience, habit and common sense. The names and faces of the overseas stars of these films were familiar to almost all New Zealanders who viewed them regularly not only on the screen, but also in newspapers and magazines, or heard their voices on radio (in the case of singing stars such as Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra). The people and activities of “Hollywood”, seemed larger than life, and their right to dominate the cinema screen was unchallenged, except by a smaller number of films from the major British studios. It is significant to note that at this time fewer people travelled overseas, and the arrival of a movie star in this country was a rare and exotic event. As Bill Gosden, now director of the

Wellington Film Festival summed up the situation: “The disparity between life and the movies for New Zealand audiences could be characterised by one, obvious fact: life happened here; movies happened overseas ... the notion of New Zealand stories on the big screen seemed immodest, embarrassing, ridiculous. The literal exoticism of screen entertainment seemed part of its definition – and its appeal.”⁶

This subconscious downgrading of local drama was paralleled in live theatre, where New Zealanders generally acted in plays from overseas using overseas accents. The production of a play set in New Zealand by a local writer was a rare event. As Clyde Scott (then a stage actor) put it: “We were reluctant to show ourselves because we weren’t used to seeing ourselves on the screen. Everything that we saw in [drama] terms was from overseas, either British or American. We looked to overseas for example in everything we did. For example, radio announcers had to speak like BBC announcers, you couldn’t talk with a local accent. We placed little value on what we did and we didn’t feel that we, as New Zealanders, had anything worth putting on film.”⁷ Scott would eventually make his feature film debut in O’Shea’s *Runaway* and then 13 years later in Roger Donaldson’s *Sleeping Dogs*, which in turn saw the screen debut of actor Sam Neill. Neill, a frequent cinema attendee as a child, remembered the dearth of local non-fiction material on local screens:

It seems amazing to me now that all our heroes had foreign accents, that all the adventures happened somewhere else in the world, there was no-one we recognised, no place we knew on the screen. New Zealand cinema in a fictional sense did not exist. The most we’d get would be a short from Wellington, rugby if we were lucky, before the real thing, and the real thing, of course, was from overseas. It never occurred to me for a second that I myself might be on the same screen some day. What we saw implicitly carried the message that because we were somehow strangely absent from the screen, that our own culture was somehow unworthy and we ourselves were less than worthwhile.⁸

Although some theorists might argue that the transaction between the viewer and the screen is more complex than this, the fact that so many New Zealanders subsequently involved in film have provided testimony to this feeling of estrangement show that it

must be taken seriously as a social phenomenon. One way of understanding it is to say that some New Zealanders were intuitively responding to the lack of a fully developed screen culture. Visitors to New Zealand who were already trained in such a culture were able to diagnose the problem clearly. For example, after viewing *Rewi's Last Stand* in 1940, the British documentary maker John Grierson commented that “it was more important that New Zealanders should have produced that film than that they should see one hundred films from Hollywood. Not that good films were not made in Hollywood, for they were, but because in the film they had just seen, a nation had expressed itself.”⁹

As already noted, Dermody and Jacka have said that in a film industry “circuits of money and circuits of meaning are deeply involved with each other.”¹⁰ A film culture is one result of this interaction. Activities (from film going to film-making) must be pondered and articulated. John O’Shea was aware that ideas were as important to the local development of film as money or technical skills. “Occupations in the industry range between what one accepts as being concrete/real and those that are abstract/intellectual – roughly the gap between say, a cameraman and a director, or a gaffer and an editor. But that’s false, too; artistry, imagination, and intelligence are as much part of a cameraman’s or a gaffer’s kit as strong arms, manual skills and patience.”¹¹

Film societies were an important vehicle for the development of new discourses around film. In tracing the development of a film culture in Britain Andrew Higson wrote that “an intellectual film culture did not really emerge in Britain in a systematic form until the mid 1920s, but from this period there was a certain flowering of intellectual debate about and interest in cinema. This can be seen in the founding of the London Film Society in 1925.”¹² Higson makes a distinction between “intellectual film culture” and mainstream “film culture” the former being perfectly exemplified by film society activities. Australia followed a similar time frame to New Zealand whereby “in the late fifties and early sixties there developed a new openness to film culture in Australia … first discernible in the sudden increase in the number of registered film societies.”¹³ Gordon Ingham recalled that the New Zealand film society movement began with film clubs.

[These] arose largely through the Workers' Educational Association. People began to lecture on films and a trickle of Continental films began to arrive. We knew very little about anything except American films and the pretty dreadful ones that had come from England.

Some Russian films had been shown at the Strand [in Auckland] and in odd halls around the city and old silents and so-called classics were screened in the Pitt Street Methodist Hall. But it took some time to overcome the teething troubles of a film organisation run by enthusiastic but not very businesslike amateurs. At times the society was in danger of developing simply into a cult with the motto "foreign films good, American and British films bad."¹⁴

The Wellington Film Society was founded in 1945. Its constitution included as its objects:

To promote and foster interest in the motion picture from the point of view of art, entertainment and education;

To provide screenings of films, especially those not normally available;

To promote or undertake public screenings of special films.¹⁵

O'Shea was an early member of the Wellington Film Society while working as a war historian in the Department of Internal Affairs. He recalled that "though I wasn't yet making film, my heart was set on it and I devoted much time and energy to the Wellington Film Society, editing its *Monthly Film Bulletin*."¹⁶

In 1947 a Film Society was incorporated in Auckland. As Gordon Ingham recalled:

Interest in non-commercial films got a big boost when the first Continental cinema, the de Paris, opened under the Civic Theatre during the last war. At that time there had been an influx of refugees into New Zealand and they flocked to the de Paris. Sometimes you could go into there and see neither Pakeha nor Hori faces; just a small sea of strange looking Hungarians, Poles, Czechs and off-White Russians.

It took New Zealanders quite a while to accept these strangers who for their part were no doubt uneasy in this strange land and anxious to establish some claims to usefulness and knowledge. Some of them proved an irritant at the Film Society discussions ... by professing infallible knowledge of the European film back to just about Waterloo and insistence on sharing this knowledge with us. They were only subdued when [interrupted by] some fellow expert jealous for his share of the limelight.¹⁷

It is interesting that films from Hollywood were known simply as “films” whereas films from elsewhere had to be distinguished as “European films” or (the general term) “foreign films”. Such films remained scarce in New Zealand. During the late 1940s, Ingham recalled that “the Film Society had much difficulty in obtaining films. Lorna Gardiner former film reviewer for *Zelandia* recalled recently Gordon Mirams’ summing up of the situation ‘This week *Battleship Potemkin*, next week *The Cabinet of Dr Cagliari*, the following week *Battleship Potemkin* followed by *The Cabinet of Dr Cagliari*.’”¹⁸

By the early 1960s, public interest in “foreign films” was increasing for a variety of reasons – a gradual growth of sophistication in “film culture”, the arrival of a new wave of important directors (such as Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman, Resnais, Truffaut, Godard etc), and the reluctance of Hollywood to deviate from its emphasis on “family movies”. The Europeans had sex and intellectualism largely to themselves. Colin Broadley, later the lead actor in *Runaway*, became the first manager of Auckland’s first art house cinema the Lido. He recalled that:

People were thirsty for art films, European style films. They had been subjected to so much pap aimed at the lowest common denominator, and they wanted something more. The Paramount, an independent cinema in Wellington, began screening European films and, as the result of its success, it was decided to open a similar theatre in Auckland. The Regent in Epsom wasn’t doing very well, partly due to its location away from the centre of the city. However, the rates were cheaper and it was assumed that people who would patronise art films would be more likely to own cars, thus enabling

them to drive to Epsom. As soon as the Lido opened it became a success. The time was right and the people came.¹⁹

Andrew Higson has pointed out that an important indicator of a developing film culture is “the publication of specialised intellectual or critical film journals (as opposed to trade papers or fan magazines) … and … the inauguration of serious film criticism in daily and weekly newspapers and magazines.”²⁰ New Zealand had had “fan” magazines primarily devoted to write-ups of new popular films and the lives of the stars. However, in terms of a film culture, particularly important through these years were the film society newsletters such as *Sequence* and the very occasional books such as Gordon Mirams’ *Speaking Candidly*. In addition, magazines with serious involvement with the arts such as *Landfall*, *Here and Now*, *Tomorrow* and the *New Zealand Listener* ran occasional reviews and articles about film. The films, film magazines, newspaper film reviews and film-related stories all contributed to the development of a film culture within the nation by stimulating an on-going interest in films as a means of entertainment and an art form. With large numbers of people from all sections of the community attending films, the productions and the actors became regular and frequent topics of conversation.

Until the 1970s film education at any level remained scarce. Interestingly, O’Shea was an early advocate. In 1954 the Wellington Film Society had begun running an annual Winter Film School with O’Shea assisting in the organisation. Held at Victoria University, “the school was intended to be an opportunity for students of the cinema … to forgather and develop their critical appreciation of cinema by studying one particular aspect of the subject in the detached atmosphere of the university and in the stimulating company of others who share their interest.”²¹ From then on the Winter Film School became an annual event. In 1962 O’Shea was invited to be the tutor under the title “From Idea to Actuality”. Previewing the course at the time, *Sequence*, the Wellington Film Society’s monthly magazine, pointed out that “the weekend will be devoted to a discussion of what is involved in translating an idea into a film. Films to be used to illustrate the theme will [include] *Alexander Nevsky* … and *La Dolce Vita*.”²² Reviewing the Winter Film School the following month, *Sequence* pronounced it as being as “successful as the previous ones … [but differing] in one respect … Mr O’Shea screened a couple of his short films which the audience

cheerfully proceeded to take apart. Mr O’Shea agreed with much of the criticism, but was able to explain the difficulties of film-making in New Zealand, and to give reasons why the films had faults. It was the first time that films had been discussed with the man who made them on hand to reveal the secrets of how it was done.”²³ In Wellington, as in other centres, art-house films were becoming increasingly popular. The magazine noted that “the Sunday screening of *La Dolce Vita* was packed. Other films screened at the school were Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil* [and] Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*. In his discussion of these films, Mr O’Shea did much to teach his audience to be active viewers.”²⁴

In 1963 O’Shea conducted a school-based film studies course. In an article in *Comment* entitled “A Stab at Screen Literacy”, he described his attempt to fill a gap in the education curriculum by running a short film course at Wellington High School. The editor of *Comment* in his introduction stated that “John O’Shea is connected with Pacific Films, and is well known as the producer of New Zealand’s most notable feature film *Broken Barrier*, and a recent documentary on New Zealand and the Common Market, *Food For Thought*”²⁵ (1962). O’Shea obviously felt strongly that the need to educate young people in visual literacy was not being met. He had been asked by *Comment* to review a UNESCO book by J.A.L. Peters entitled *Teaching About The Film* and stated that “In reviewing the book, I found myself saying rather unpleasant things about the educational system in New Zealand, claiming that it was doggedly out of touch with the visual images that bombard my own and other people’s children, and that it has made little effort to broaden its curricula to cope with this urgent situation.”²⁶ In attempting to establish some school coverage of film, O’Shea was able to obtain permission to use a room for one lunch hour per week with a group of volunteer pupils, whom he set out “to teach, to elicit from them a more informed response to films, to convey a greater knowledge of the visual mechanisms which, either as art or escape, are so influential on their lives and attitudes.”²⁷ As well as teaching them the methods by which a film conveys its message through camera angles, soundtrack and other elements, O’Shea also made them aware of the economic realities of film-making, an aspect with which he was all too familiar. “The costs of film production [were] an important factor in a small country like New Zealand where the opportunities for visual communication are limited. [By the end of the course the students] began to ask: ‘If I had an idea, how could I communicate it visually?’ and

‘How much would it cost?’ [O’Shea saw this as natural because] a movie camera is an instrument like a pen, a typewriter or tape recorder, except that it conveys visual not verbal information.”²⁸ On the larger prospects for film education at this time he wrote: “I understand the Federation of New Zealand Film Societies is taking steps to secure the inclusion of screen education in the normal curricula of schools. The immediate problem will be a shortage of teachers. Perhaps teachers associated with Film Societies could initiate classes.”²⁹ Obviously there were teachers who were members of Film Societies, who were also doing their best to sneak some film teaching into their schools, but curriculum recognition was still some decades away.

The post-war period, characterised by increasing affluence and a more accessible technology, also saw considerable growth in the ranks of amateur film-makers. In 1946 the Wellington Film Society formed an Amateur Film Unit. “Under the direction of Michael Forlong, they started filming Frank Sargeson’s short story, *Great Day*, and completed it the following year at a cost of £20. The Wellington Film Society donated £5 towards the cost of production on condition that the film be screened to its members, and the screening was arranged in September 1948.”³⁰ It was, however, decided to abandon this initiative as the recently-formed Wellington Cine Club was seen as catering for the less ambitious type of amateur film-maker. Such clubs developed rapidly throughout the country in the post-war years. Although some members used 16mm, the majority shot their films with small 8mm cameras. The subjects of the films were generally confined to records of travels and domestic activities, designed to be shown to family, friends and fellow hobbyists. Their club magazines similarly reflected the amateur hobbyist approach, confining the writing to supportive descriptions of its members’ film productions, though some technical information was also shared. Critical comment was rare and not welcomed by those members who wished simply to enjoy their hobby in a supportive atmosphere. Future film director John Reid, writing in the magazine *Salient* (October 1964) on “Film Making in New Zealand” described the local cine clubs in this way:

Having judged several amateur film contests, I can safely say that most of the makers treat family occasions, travel, animals, butterflies, flowers, or comic domestic situations, in a way that makes any consideration of art, or significance, irrelevant. There are one or two exceptions, such as Mr Fred

O'Neil, of Dunedin, who, by using plasticine models and stop-frame technique, has created his own individual world of fantasy, wit and humour. His remarkable *Flight to Venus* with its serious anti-war message, has won awards and medals all round the world ... [And] in 1959, two young Aucklanders, Paul Leach and Michael Nicolaidi made *Pas de Deux*, a simple love story creating a mood of its own and with sequences of high imagination. This 8mm production was awarded a Gold Star in the Amateur Cine World's Best Competition.³¹

Paul Leach, after spending several years in Canada, would return to New Zealand to become a feature film cameraman, while Mike Nicolaidi became the New Zealand reporter for *Variety* and a member of the New Zealand Film Commission Board. In his conclusion, Reid wrote:

I find it hard to understand why more young people do not enter into the 8mm and 16mm fields. At present too many of the Cine-club people have no interest in the exploitation of new techniques and ideas. While we must be grateful for the work of John O'Shea and hope that he and others like him will make more feature films, it is from the amateur film-maker that fresh discoveries and a freer use of cinema are most likely to come.³²

While Reid's hope in the context of 1964 was a somewhat vain one, it is nevertheless clear from his own assessment of the cine-club scene, that there were some burgeoning film-makers who would take the skills, techniques and insight which they had gained in making films with their amateur equipment and exploit "new techniques and ideas."³³ Ultimately some would play a part in contributing to the development of a New Zealand film culture.

By the time Reid wrote this survey in 1964 (a pivotal year for this thesis) film culture in New Zealand was ready to move to a further stage of development. The foundations were in place – film societies, art house cinemas, some awareness of film aesthetics, and at least the beginnings of film education. Granted, the development of "intelligent film culture" was in many respects as much an importation as Hollywood, being based on European films and the European film society movement. The other

crucial ingredient to make our film culture fully active was nationalism, the theme of the next chapter. This will lead us to O'Shea, as much a nationalist as he was a leading figure in film culture.

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- ¹ Chris Watson, "New Zealand Feature Films: Their State and Status", p83
- ² Jan Dawson, p307
- ³ Nerida Elliot, p79
- ⁴ Ibid, p83
- ⁵ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p15
- ⁶ Sergio Toffetti, "Stories of Light: The Birth of a Nation in Cinema", *Il Cinema Nouva Zelandia*, Torina, Le Nuove Muse, 1989, p67
- ⁷ John Reynolds, *Runaway Revisited*, video documentary, Wellington, Ministry of Education, 1994
- ⁸ *Cinema of Unease*, Top Shelf/New Zealand Film Commission, 1995
- ⁹ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p43
- ¹⁰ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, p17
- ¹¹ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p 26
- ¹² Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1995, p13
- ¹³ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, p29
- ¹⁴ Gordon Ingham, *Everyone's Gone to the Movies*, p19
- ¹⁵ *Sequence*, No. 194 December 1966, p3
- ¹⁶ John O'Shea, *Don't Let it Get You*, p18
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁹ Colin Broadley, interview, 26 February 1995
- ²⁰ Andrew Higson, p13
- ²¹ *Sequence*, December 1966, p10
- ²² *Sequence*, May 1962, p1
- ²³ Ibid, p3
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ *Comment*, Wellington 1963, p42
- ²⁶ Ibid, p43
- ²⁷ Ibid
- ²⁸ Ibid, p45
- ²⁹ Ibid
- ³⁰ *Sequence*, December 1966, p13
- ³¹ John Reid, "Film Making in New Zealand", p13
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ My personal experience bears this out. In 1968, equipped with my new Super 8 camera, I joined the North Shore Movie Club. Although I gained some basic knowledge from watching and discussing films made by NSMC members, I supplemented this by attendance at weekend courses organised by the Screen Writers Guild – where I first met Paul Leach who was one of the tutors. From this initial interest in film-making, stimulated by my membership of the movie club, I then met Geoff Steven and joined the Auckland film-makers co-operative, Alternative Cinema, which he had initiated. There I participated in a range of activities with other members, made two 16mm films with large casts of school children, received a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant to complete an MA in California and, on my return, was president of Alternative Cinema for two years, and have continued a range of film-related activities ever since. The initial impetus? Membership of a cine-club. Therefore, although the cine-club influence on New Zealand film culture may have been peripheral, it cannot be discounted in playing an important part in its continuing development.

Chapter 3: CULTURAL NATIONALISM

“As a New Zealander I belong as much to the societies bordering the North Sea as to those fringing the South Pacific.”¹ (Maurice Shadbolt)

Established as a British colony and largely populated by English speaking immigrants and for over a century relying on Britain as its principal trading partner for its economic security, New Zealand was thoroughly British. Initially the new arrivals regarded themselves as immigrants whose real homes were England, Ireland, Scotland or Wales even though those countries were at the other end of the world. They spoke with accents from those places and brought from their far away homes songs, stories, sports, dress styles, religious mores and practices and many other aspects of their culture. Although Maori culture had some impact on the lives of the new arrivals, they still retained the key aspects of their imported culture. Inevitably a young New Zealand, even after attaining dominion status, continued to look to Britain not only for its economic security but also for its cultural reference points. Thus, as Robert Chapman pointed out, the pattern of New Zealand “was not a fresh growth but grew up from the trunk of the British social system … [which] came ready made from a given tradition and circumstance. It was as old as Great Britain when it arrived.”² Allen Curnow saw this situation as presenting a particular challenge to local writers:

The nineteenth-century colonialists achieved their migration bodily, but not in spirit. It was only within severely practical limits that they could regard New Zealand as a goal rationally proposed and attained; emotionally (or sentimentally) the landing at the antipodes presented itself to them ambivalently. Even as they proclaimed their emancipation, they heard the trap closing behind them. The shock of so distant a migration, and the recoil of the imagination from realities, were to be transmitted through two, three, even four New Zealand generations before poets appeared who could express what it meant to be, or have become, a New Zealander.³

Although there were other immigrant groups, including Chinese and Dalmatians, British culture and mores were dominant. In the 1930s and 40s individuals and

groups from other parts of Europe – including refugee intellectuals and artists from Nazi Germany – began to influence and change the culture.

The development of a New Zealand cultural identity was further delayed by the twin obsessions of the new inhabitants – money and land. In 1863 Samuel Butler noted: “The fact is, people are here busy making money; that is the inducement which led them to come in the first instance, and they show their sense by devoting their energies to the work A mountain here is beautiful only if it has good grass on it If it is good for sheep, it is beautiful, magnificent and all the rest of it; if not it is not worth looking at.”⁴ Dan Davin had a similar perspective, that “the intellectuals among the first colonists were too deeply implicated in pioneering to spare energy for anything except the didactic, the hortatory, the political, and the briefly poetic.”⁵ [This left] “the rawness of a society no longer English and not yet New Zealand.”⁶

The very existence of a colony such as New Zealand contained within itself the seeds of cultural conflict among the colonisers themselves. Henry Symonds, in his analysis of art and the colonialist, cited Simon Slemon’s reference to Alan Lawson’s “writing of white settler-colonial cultures as ‘Second World’ [in which he] delineates the ambivalent experience of the settler subject”. Slemon goes on to state:

Situated at the very site of the operation of colonial power, the male settler is part of the imperial enterprise, its agent, and its beneficiary, without ever acquiring more than associate membership of the imperial club. He is both mediator and mediated, excluded from the unmediated authority of Empire and from the unmediated authenticity of the indigene. From this half-empowered limbo he fetishises yet disparages a Europe which in turn deprecates him while envying his energy, innocence and enterprise.⁷

Although interest in the arts developed increasingly during the post-World War I period, it was still the British Isles to which the bulk of our writers, and artists (such as the film-maker Len Lye) were drawn. In spite of a slowly burgeoning nationalism the image of New Zealand as an antipodean offshoot of Great Britain persisted and was personified in the late 1920s by a controversy regarding the screening of British films in New Zealand cinemas. Following World War I, American films began to

dominate productions from Britain, to the concern of many New Zealand citizens who considered the films from the U.S.A. less wholesome than their British counterparts. In 1928, the New Zealand Parliament passed the Cinematographic Films Bill which reserved a quota for films of British origin in order to ensure their continued and regular presence on local cinema screens. Thomas O'Brien reflected this attitude when, the following year, he chose *Three Live Ghosts*, a British production based on a stage play, as the film which would open his magnificent new Civic cinema in Auckland. The rationale for his choice had more to do with the nationality of the film than with its quality. “The management has taken infinite pains in the selection of this picture to obtain a play which is essentially English as opposed to American: They hold the view that New Zealand being British to the backbone, a film with a British atmosphere will not only be more appreciated but should be shown in this great British theatre.”⁸ The description of the newly opened Civic as a “great British theatre” by its owner, himself a New Zealander, is a clear indication of the attitudes still prevalent among many sections of the New Zealand community at this time.

During the 1920s New Zealand was still what Nigel Hawthorne defines as a “settler state”, economically and culturally dependent on Britain. This created a peculiar ambivalence and instability in all aspects of subjectivity (the so-called “settler-subject”):

New Zealand Pakeha society was more than the search for a new identity by rugged individualistic pioneers seeking freedom from the apron strings of Victoria’s Britain. Language, literature, song, popular culture, educational processes, sporting ties, familial contact, military service, religious observance, gardening habits, and a host of other ties suspended the settler society between the old and the new. In a sense, the identities of person and polity were ... confronting the new yet constrained by the old.¹⁰

This lack of a secure identification and clear sense of direction were key themes for national artists, and would later colour O’Shea’s film *Runaway*.

During the 1930s a cultural nationalist movement began to flourish. A term used by later critics and commentators and not used by the writers at the time, “cultural

nationalism” involved a recognition of New Zealand’s status as a colony and a determination to cut cultural ties and to focus on immediate realities. However, in Stuart Murray’s view, “even as they sought to prove New Zealand’s distinct sense of cultural differences the writers of the 1930s did so by looking abroad for models and ideas. There is no real sense of contradiction here. The history of New Zealand as a settler colony is full of the unavoidable tension that comes with the colonial legacy of facing in two directions at the same time.”¹¹ Typical of this new group were writers like Allen Curnow, Dan Davin, Robin Hyde and Frank Sargeson, artists like Colin McCahon and composers like Douglas Lilburn. Gloria Rawlinson, in her introduction to Robin Hyde’s *The Godwits Fly* saw the 1930s as being a transitional period when “the Pakeha settlements had matured into a subtly different way of life that could not be expressed by the outlook and style of Englishmen in the beautiful but forever foreign country.”¹² Allen Curnow characterised the New Zealand writer as being “subject to the presence of an English and European tradition… [and that] he is of the greater traditions but not in them.”¹³ Although aware of his inherited tradition he is aware of “ever so slight differences. He wants to know what those differences are, for in them the crux of his art may lie.”¹⁴

Such cultural activities marked a period in which New Zealand writers and artists began increasingly to remain at home and draw on their country for their subject matter. Yet, in spite of this developing literary phenomenon, there was no parallel in film production. Rudall Hayward and his contemporaries produced films which recorded the texture of local life, but they were so dependent upon overseas popular culture genres that they retained the ambivalent character described earlier by Hawthorne. Hayward was a popular entertainer rather than an intellectual, and while he must be honoured for his pioneering efforts, he had no appetite for the complex strategies that writers such as Curnow saw as necessary for an artist to free himself from colonial subjectivity. The experience of watching a Hayward film today is thus very mixed, passing from “Empire romance” to broad comedy to flashes of unmistakably local drama. *Rewi’s Last Stand* is a classic example as it unfolds from the cultural cringe of its opening title to its deeply moving climax at a besieged pa. Hayward was an intuitive artist who seems not to have engaged directly with the new nationalist ideas. (It could also be argued that the work of Curnow and Sargeson was

equally a mixed bag, deeply influenced by contemporary English poets and American fiction writers.)

The onset of the Depression (described by Bruce Mason as “that strange and alarming period when the land of milk and honey turned to bread and dripping”¹⁵) had been a key element in the development of the cultural nationalist movement. The disillusion with hitherto accepted social and economic structures of New Zealand society, was an integral part of much of the work by many of the writers who were “driven by the depression to question the rigid but hollow orthodoxy of their society (and) conscious of an outlook distinct from that of London.”¹⁶ Allen Curnow also saw the Great Depression as suggesting “that the much-talked-of bonds of Empire meant little more than an inimical dependence upon Threadneedle and Tooley Streets.”¹⁷ One result of the Depression was to encourage writers and artists to identify with the problems of the common man. Film, as a populist medium, would seem ideal for this purpose. But intellectuals tended to see film as escapist propaganda from Hollywood. Andrew Higson highlighted a similar attitude in Britain which sprang from “a fear of mass production, and what is conceived as a standardised artistically impoverished, trivial and escapist mass culture. This distinction between the ‘serious’ and the ‘popular’ is manifested particularly in the dismissal of the majority of popular American films.”¹⁸ Thus, in addition to problems of cost and lack of a technical infrastructure, film was long viewed with suspicion by the artistic community which concentrated on cheaper media such as small-press productions, paintings, chamber music etc. (Allen Curnow, for example, “never went to a film.”¹⁹) The problem persisted of how to carry “New Zealand literature and art” to the general public who remained largely resistant to it. Writers and artists were troubled by this conflict, but remained hopeful that time would resolve the problem. Many also became directly involved in political activity alongside their work as artists.

The New Zealand Centennial, held in 1940 (when John O’Shea was 20 years old) was an event which had been planned long before the outbreak of the Second World War. The artist Betty Curnow recalled the event as providing a considerable impetus to the further development of New Zealand writing and the arts.

Because of the war nothing [i.e. no artistic products] came to New Zealand at all and the people had to rely on themselves. [Consequently] they were putting things on and doing things because they couldn't leave New Zealand. The other thing was that so many of the men were overseas and the men that weren't had to find something to do and there was suddenly an upsurge of this importance of New Zealand and New Zealand-made things, and we became suddenly aware of it all. During the war so much was written and so many people who were [making art] were more or less forced into being aware of New Zealand. Because of the Centennial ... all of the arts and the productions and everything else were all sort of fostered and pushed up to being really important, and talked about and discussed ... it was all suddenly forced on us, but mainly because we couldn't leave the country and nobody came in.²⁰

Although attendance at plays and musicals had always been a feature of popular entertainment, as Peter Harcourt recalled, “little or no thought was given to the New Zealand play. Although the Depression had stimulated drama in other countries, only student revues (which weren’t taken very seriously) were greatly influenced by it here. [While] New Zealand literature ... was deeply affected by the Depression, there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for the New Zealand play.”²¹ Live theatre was generally an expensive medium, requiring a complex infrastructure, and therefore remaining more conservative in its programming. However, under the enthusiastic guidance of talented individuals such as Christchurch-based Ngaio Marsh, New Zealand plays started to be encouraged. The basing of the Centennial celebrations in Christchurch provided further impetus for this development. As Betty Curnow recalled, “Allen [Curnow]’s play *The Axe* was produced in Christchurch at this time and Ngaio Marsh was there and she was pushing people to write New Zealand plays and productions. [In Christchurch] Ngaio [Marsh] and John Campion were trying to form a New Zealand company.”²² Other anniversaries such as the 1942 Tasman Tri-centenary (celebrating Abel Tasman’s “discovery” of New Zealand in 1642) also produced notable works such as *Landfall in Unknown Seas* by Douglas Lilburn and Allen Curnow. Artists, (using some of the government funding that was available) saw such public events as an opportunity to reach a wider audience.

Of course, such events still served as uncritical public celebrations of links with Britain and the Empire or Commonwealth, whereas the art tended to question those links. This ambivalence began to make itself felt even within official discourses. Stuart Murray highlighted the speech of W.E. Parry of the National Centennial Committee to the Fourteenth Congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the British Empire at the Wellington Town Hall on 6 October 1936 as representing this contradictory attitude. Parry's speech described New Zealand as being "built on the solid foundations of British Institutions"²³ but also reflected critically on the mistakes that had been made. "Here we have a land of glorious beauty... What we have done to that land in certain directions in the process of making our home in it beggars description ... In our efforts to be another Britain in the Southern Hemisphere we have recklessly imported plants and animals which, amenable to control in their natural environment, have run away as a cancerous growth."²⁴ This critical questioning from a pillar of the commercial community was also reflected in Centennial writings.

Although in 1945 many ex-servicemen wanted nothing more than to return home to New Zealand, the cessation of hostilities provided opportunities for some New Zealand writers and artists who could afford it, to travel abroad. Whether to remain in New Zealand or to write with an expatriate's perspective was a decision with which many writers continued to wrestle during the immediate post-war years. Robert Chapman noted another complexity in his comment that "so homogenous and so insistently demanding was the pattern [of New Zealand society] that in order to see it, in order to write about it, it was necessary to escape outside and often away from it."²⁵ Typical was Bill Pearson whose landmark article "Fretful Sleepers: A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and its Implications for the Artist" was written in London in 1951 and first published in *Landfall* in September 1952 (the year in which John O'Shea and Roger Mirams completed their first feature film). Pearson, having completed an MA in English at the University of Canterbury, went to England to undertake post-graduate studies. The cultural and intellectual environment in London caused him to seriously consider settling permanently in England. He found that "it was stimulating to be in London, certainly after the dread conformity of New Zealand, the narrowness, the materialism, the fear of difference, the tyranny of public opinion and all the other horrors that he so eloquently complained of in the domain of Almighty Norm."²⁶ For

Pearson, viewing his homeland from the other side of the globe, New Zealand was a nation of stultifying conformity, a characteristic that had been thrown into high relief by the greater intellectual freedom of the expatriate in England. In 1953 the artist who chose to remain at home had to contend with the New Zealand way of life, “dumb and numb, null and dull, … [with the responsibilities of] family and house and back garden, and the nagging unrecognised satisfactions that a Saturday afternoon in the pub after the football might yet appease.”²⁷

This gradual increase in the spirit of national self-awareness and the questioning of British assumptions and standards was the cultural context in which John O’Shea was to come to intellectual maturity. A university student when war broke out, O’Shea had not yet consolidated his perspective on New Zealand society and his role in it. Unlike his fellow-servicemen Dan Davin and John Mulgan (respectively 7 and 9 years his senior), O’Shea had not produced any significant work prior to the war. Along with writers such as Maurice Duggan and Maurice Shadbolt, O’Shea was to be part of a continuum of cultural nationalists whose work emerged and matured during the post-war era. His overseas wartime experiences enabled him to gain a fresh perspective on the country and the post-war era offered the opportunity to express his view of its uniqueness. “We are New Zealanders. I am a New Zealander , and one can’t help but, if you want to express yourself at all, express yourself as a New Zealander. There are certain shared perception that you have, and you have a sort of common mythology which only New Zealanders would know about.”²⁸

Robert Chapman regarded the wartime experiences of many New Zealanders as sharpening their perceptions of themselves and their country, as the war resulted in “a major disturbance of the social pattern which continued the question fuelled by the Depression. This enabled the 40s artists to build on the work of the 1930s. Still, this growth was a slow and difficult process.”²⁹ The nationalist movement had originally centred primarily around Christchurch, but in the post-war period a number of key writers (such as Allen Curnow) and artists shifted north seeking enhanced career opportunities. Betty Curnow recalled that she and her husband Allen “left Christchurch in 1950 and by that time all the people we knew like the Pages [and] Lilburn had also left ”³⁰ While Frederick Page and Lilburn went to Wellington, the Curnows, encouraged by A.R.D. Fairburn, moved to Auckland. After Christchurch,

Betty Curnow found Auckland to be artistically arid. “All the best painters, musicians and plays and everything that is now important about New Zealand was started from people who were all in Christchurch at that time. Auckland, as far as the arts were concerned, was dead.”³¹ The paucity of interest in the arts in Auckland in the immediate post-war period was typified by Betty Curnow’s description of her first visit to the Auckland City Art Gallery in Wellesley Street.

When I first went into the art gallery I thought it was closed. I opened the door and the whole place was in darkness during the afternoon, except the entrance. A man came over and said, “Can I help you?” and I said “I’ve come to look at the art gallery but it’s closed because there are no lights on.” He replied that it was open and what would I like to see. I said, “All of it” and he went through putting the lights on to different areas and I followed him. I was the only one in the art gallery, and when I left he turned all the lights out and shut the door. In Christchurch, in Regent Street, there was a little coffee place and all the artists would have coffee and we would have small exhibitions there and congregate. There was nothing like that in Auckland at all.³²

The challenge was not only to spread the nationalist impulse to other parts of the country but also to complex public media such as live theatre. In contrast to Christchurch which had Ngaio Marsh and John Champion, Betty Curnow recalled that, “There was no repertory society in Auckland at all, no place to go or anything like that … just acting in little churches.”³³ (Perhaps she would have agreed with John Roberts who referred to Bruce Mason’s opinion that “New Zealand society is inimical to the creative impulse.”³⁴) Betty Curnow’s recollection is not entirely correct as amateur theatrical groups had staged performances since the 1850s and citizens of the young city had, for decades enjoyed performances by visiting actors, stage companies, opera groups and musicians. The emphasis was, however, invariably on works by overseas writers and composers. In 1935 Merton Hodge, a local writer, had his play *The Wind and the Rain* presented. It generated interest not only because it was written by a New Zealander but also because it had been successfully produced in London and New York. However, the play was set in a Scottish university city on the other side of the world! Amateur theatre featuring imported productions continued to be a regular feature of Auckland’s theatrical fare. In 1959 Ronald Baker produced a

rare exception – Allen Curnow’s *Moon Section* – for the Auckland Festival. Curnow explained in his programme notes that it was based on the ironic notion that “New Zealand, both in its foundations and short history, is a remarkable instance of mankind’s attempt everywhere in the world, to over-bid its hands against the fates that decree work, suffering and death to be the conditions upon which life is to be enjoyed.”³⁵ Explaining the less than favourable reviews in the Auckland press, Curnow noted that *Moon Section* was seen as symbolic and obscure whereas, in his view, “its meanings were as clear as they were unacceptable socially.”³⁶ The play was taken on tour where, as Curnow commented, “in smaller centres, as in Wellington, the reception was no worse than ‘mixed’; there was none of the peculiar hostility provoked in Auckland.”³⁷ Although Curnow was not alone in writing plays which were critical of the smug complacency of New Zealand society – Bruce Mason’s *The End of the Golden Weather* had a similar theme – local playwrights had a difficult row to hoe in the face of competition from imported plays and musicals which were seen as less risky at the box office, an important consideration for a relatively expensive medium. However, local writers persisted in their efforts and in 1961 Frank Sargeson, Colin McCahon and Chris Cathcart founded the New Independent Theatre in Auckland which presented two Sargeson plays, *A Time for Sowing* and *The Cradle and the Egg*. In 1963 they presented their third production as part of the Auckland Festival – the Auckland première performance of local writer John Graham’s play *Lest We Resemble*. In the audience were Betty and Allen Curnow who had settled in Takapuna. The play, its author, and the presence of the Curnows, was to have far reaching consequences for John O’Shea, Pacific Films and the New Zealand film industry.

Man Alone

One of the most important motifs in New Zealand’s cultural nationalism is that of “man alone”. One of the clearest aspects of *Runaway* was to be its theme of a man running away. This is so strongly reminiscent of the New Zealand “man alone” theme that the relationships need to be discussed in some detail. In 1939 John Mulgan’s novel *Man Alone* had evoked memorable images of a man moving through what was often a harsh country in search of a place with which he could identify and where he could find peace. The novel’s central character was not an Englishmen, (inasmuch as Johnson had left England and settled in New Zealand) nor Maori, so what, in fact was

he? He seemed to correspond to Allen Curnow's view that New Zealand was "uneasy underneath"³⁸ – a society characterised by "its isolation, its scepticism, its misgiving that the whole enterprise of living together may be inconsequential or meaningless."³⁹ As well as its powerful depiction of the effects of the Depression on New Zealand life, and its vivid New Zealand urban and rural settings, the novel struck a chord with thoughtful readers by its senses of disconnection, threat, isolation. Mulgan encapsulated feelings and situations that turned up in many later novels, and in some elements of O'Shea's first film *Broken Barrier*. Today the "man alone" theme has come to be seen as a cliché, but O'Shea and Graham would not have thought of it in that way in the early 1960s. Rather it must have seemed profoundly relevant to many aspects of the New Zealand experience.

Feminists have subsequently questioned the male emphasis of the "man alone" tradition. It did, however, correspond to a great deal of social experience – it was easier for men to strike out on their own as their employment options were greater and, even if encumbered by family responsibilities, they could more easily walk away. In Mulgan's novel his central character, Johnson is not only on the run from the law, but also troubled by his inability to find much loyalty to society as he experiences it. His decision to "go bush" represents a way of escaping from the authorities and also symbolises a kind of quest for self discovery as he seeks to make sense of his life and find a deeper meaning that his immigration to New Zealand and his brief sexual relationship have apparently failed to deliver.

Mulgan's Johnson was, however, one of many lone male characters depicted in local literature, not all of whom were angst-ridden seekers after self fulfilment. The wandering man could also be depicted as one who enjoyed the freedom of unfettered travel, an antipodean knight of the road who revelled in the new environment where the populace was sparse and the natural habitat considerable. The figure of Johnson embodied both positive and negative aspects. His wanderings made him in some sense an explorer of the country. Other writers using this motif sometimes gave him heroic dimensions, a rebel who engendered sympathy from the urban dweller who saw him as embodying the original immigrant's dream of escape from the judicial and social restrictions of Europe. The "man alone" was also admirably self-sufficient, rarely owning much more than a bedroll, tobacco and a few clothes. Soldier, writer

and politician, John A. Lee was cast in the “man alone” mould. His novels *Children of the Poor* (1934) and *The Hunted* (1936) embody the concept of the rebel against the social and judicial injustices of the time. The novels were based on many of Lee’s own experiences as a boy who had escaped from reform school. On the run from the authorities, he spent a considerable period in and around areas of native bush in the North Island. He recalled that “later I wrote a third person account of at least two hundred pages about this walk and left it with a Nelson Street landlady who gave it to a young New Zealand journalist called John Mulgan, who boarded with her. When I read a book called *Man Alone*, years later, I knew that my story had coloured that depression-written book.”⁴⁰

Whether or not the character had deliberately chosen his isolation, had fled from the responsibilities of family and career, or was on the run from the law was often irrelevant. The appeal, whether fictional or factual (as in the case of the celebrated early 1960s prison escaper the “antipodean Jesse James”⁴¹ George Wilder) was in the sense of adventure and rebellion against authority, though admittedly this could (in more populist forms) be simply an appeal to male fantasies. By the 1960s the “man alone” had gained the additional dimension of fast cars, so that adventure was as likely to happen on the highway as in the bush. Graham and O’Shea’s “man alone” would attempt both escape routes.

Ultimately Mulgan’s *Man Alone* was not merely a populist male fantasy, and the film *Runaway* would similarly have a more serious “undertheme”. Mulgan’s loner personified the outsider who never quite fitted into his society, who was intuitively seeking a deeper meaning, finding it finally in his decision to embrace the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. This dynamics of individual versus society was one reason why New Zealand writers kept returning to this kind of story. Indeed Lawrence Jones has argued in his essay, “Stanley Graham and the Several Faces of Man Alone”⁴², that the motif has such great relevance in societies like New Zealand and Australia that earlier versions existed long before Mulgan gave it a name. Jones has also explained how this figure could be used by a thoughtful writer to highlight the inadequacies of “a society which does not meet his basic human needs for meaningful work, companionship and security, though he is not consciously aware of this.”⁴³

Mateship

A theme that is often the counterpart of “man alone” is “mateship”, two aspects of a society still linked to pioneer times. Indeed, mateship has been described as the quality which enabled New Zealand to emerge as an independent nation in the trenches of World War One. The English writer Geoffrey Moorhouse, highlighted this in his description of the Gallipoli campaign.

The men of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps won such renown there in their own right – not as Britain’s auxiliaries – that they caused people at home and overseas to see the two countries in a different light. They gave the world a new word, Anzac, which would always afterward stand for a peculiarly Antipodean form of gallantry, devoid of European rigidities but well endowed with more attractive characteristics like the ability to improvise, the willingness to try anything once, and something they called mateship which could disturbingly ignore the priorities or rank.⁴⁴

“Mateship” is in this sense the plural form of “man alone” – a solidarity between individual men who face difficult odds in a hostile environment. One of the implications of this is a tension between a man’s relationship with his mates, and his relationship with women. Critics such as Robert Chapman and Kai Jensen have seen this sexual tension as central to much New Zealand literature.

As will be shown, in *Broken Barrier* and *Runaway* both of O’Shea’s central characters operated without any direct reference to their mates. The other men in the story were merely casual acquaintances who, apart from offering some superficial advice, played no major roles in the actions and activities of Sullivan or Manning. In both cases the relationship with women was more important, in the case of Sullivan a relationship that was crucial in his quest for inner tranquillity in contrast to Manning who, in spite of several relationships, was unable to resolve his inner conflicts. In Johnson’s case, although the bulk of the book dealt with a lone figure whose relationships with both sexes lacked any apparent depth, he found his resolution in a socialist cause, a collective mateship motivated by ideology and which developed into what Dan Davin described as “a devotion of friendship built up in blood.”⁴⁵ In *Man Alone* the loner found resolution in a common and meaningful cause. In *Broken*

Barrier, Sullivan, an urban loner, was to find his resolution in love whereas *Runaway's* Manning remained a loner unable to find peace through mateship or love.

The writings of Frank Sargeson also included many characters that fitted the “man alone” concept – personified by Sargeson himself. Undoubtedly his homosexuality, unlawful at the time, caused him to feel excluded and outside the mainstream of society where the bulk of his contemporaries sought solace and security in marriage, family and a home of their own. Having chosen to remain in and write about New Zealand, Sargeson “found a way to be ‘outside’ without being exiled, and … began to write stories establishing a perspective on the pattern, some character types, and some formal conventions for presenting them. The character types Sargeson created were a New Zealand version of what Frank O’Connor has described as the ‘submerged population group’ of the short story, the ‘outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society’.”⁴⁶ Sargeson was also a “man alone” inasmuch as he was breaking new ground. Kevin Ireland, in commenting on Michael King’s 1996 biography of Sargeson, pointed out that, “what Michael King has written about Frank Sargeson really shows pretty clearly that Frank mapped out a certain part of his literary life with great exactitude and with extraordinary fortitude as well, and he stuck to his guns to see it through, but it was hard work in territory that hadn’t been dug over before.”⁴⁷ The description could equally apply to O’Shea who was not only trying to create a local art form for which there was virtually no precedent, but was also having to establish a complex infrastructure to support its continued existence. This link is significantly strengthened by the fact that John Graham, co-script writer of *Runaway*, was a close literary acquaintance of Sargeson.

Although John Graham was aware of *Man Alone* he recalled that “it didn’t occur to me to extend Mulgan’s philosophy into *Runaway*.⁴⁸ However he remembered that “John O’Shea mentioned the book in our conversations and was probably more aware of its place in New Zealand history.”⁴⁹ Both men were certainly aware of New Zealand’s “man alone” tradition. In linking with it they would also have to decide on their approach to its misogynistic overtones. As we shall see, their treatment of “man alone”, mateship and sexual relationships was in some respects original. They were not merely recycling an established set of local literary themes but giving them a contemporary inflection.

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- ¹ Maurice Shadbolt, *From the Edge of the Sky*, Auckland, David Ling, 1999, p11
- ² Robert Chapman, *Fiction and the Social Pattern*, p33
- ³ Allen Curnow, *The Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p20
- ⁴ Joseph Jones, *The Cradle of Erewhon*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1959 pp113-114
- ⁵ Dan Davin, "Introduction", *New Zealand Short Stories*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953, p1
- ⁶ Ibid, p2
- ⁷ Simon Slemon, *Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World*, London, Routledge, 1995, p106. Quoted in Henry Symonds, "Falls the Shadow", MA essay, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 29 September 1999
- ⁸ Quoted in *ANZAC, Hollywood and Home*, p14
- ⁹ Nigel Hawthorne, "Neo-Liberalism, Economic Internationalism and the Contemporary State in New Zealand", Inaugural Lecture, University of Auckland, circa June 1993.
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ Stuart Murray, *Never A Soul at Home*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1998, p13
- ¹² Gloria Rawlinson, Introduction to *The Godwits Fly*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, p ix
- ¹³ Allen Curnow, *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p59
- ¹⁴ Ibid
- ¹⁵ Bruce Mason, *Bruce Mason Solo*, Wellington, Price Milburn & Victoria University Press, 1981, p201
- ¹⁶ Bill Pearson, p9.
- ¹⁷ Allen Curnow, *Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p49.
- ¹⁸ Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema In Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995 p14
- ¹⁹ Betty Curnow, interview, 30 September 1994
- ²⁰ Ibid
- ²¹ Peter Harcourt, *A Dramatic Appearance*, Wellington, Methuen, 1978, p7
- ²² Betty Curnow, interview, 30 September 1994
- ²³ Stuart Murray, p13
- ²⁴ Ibid, p 23
- ²⁵ Robert Chapman, "Fiction and the Social Pattern", *Essays in New Zealand Literature*, (ed.) Wystan Curnow, London, Heinemann 1973 p31
- ²⁶ Peter Simpson, "Bill Pearson's New Zealand Then and Now: Testimony of an Internal Rapporteur", Winter Lecture series, University of Auckland, July 1996
- ²⁷ Bill Pearson, *Fretful Sleepers and other Essays*, Auckland, Heinemann Educational Books, 1974, p17
- ²⁸ John O'Shea, interview, 9 December 1994
- ²⁹ Robert Chapman, *Fiction and the Social Pattern*, p28
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Betty Curnow, interview, 30 September 1994
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ *Bruce Mason Solo*, p ix
- ³⁵ Allen Curnow, *Moon Section*, programme notes quoted in Peter Harcourt, *A Dramatic Appearance*, p87
- ³⁶ Ibid, p88
- ³⁷ Ibid
- ³⁸ Allen Curnow, *Introduction Penguin Book of New Zealand Verse*, p45
- ³⁹ Ibid
- ⁴⁰ John A. Lee, p84.
- ⁴¹ Maurice Shadbolt, *From the Edge of the Sky*, p143
- ⁴² Lawrence Jones, *Barbed Wire and Mirrors: Essays on New Zealand Prose*, Dunedin, University of Otago Press, 1987
- ⁴³ Ibid p303
- ⁴⁴ G. Moorehouse, *Hell's Foundations: A Town, Its Myths and Gallipoli*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1992, p3
- ⁴⁵ Dan Davin, *For the Rest of Our Lives*, Auckland, Blackwood & Janet Paul Ltd, 1965, p209
- ⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Kevin Ireland, interview, 2 May 1996

⁴⁸ John Graham, interviews, 14 September 2000.

⁴⁹ Ibid

Chapter 4: JOHN O'SHEA: THE FORMATIVE YEARS

John O’Shea was born on 20 June 1920 in New Plymouth, the last child of a New Zealand-born mother and a father whose family had immigrated from Ireland when he was a young boy. He spent the first week of his life in New Plymouth then his mother died of septicaemia and he was taken by an aunt to Wanganui where she brought him up as part of her family. O’Shea recalled that:

They were middle class, prosperous people of Irish extraction [who] had an elegant home in Wanganui and were very family orientated. They had four children of their own, three girls and a boy and they were Irish Catholic of course, as were my family. They were very honourable, very worthy, very righteous ... not self-righteous ... but they were unique as all people are unique in a way because though they were narrow minded, they wanted their daughter to be a concert pianist, the other was a nurse and the other stayed at home.¹

O’Shea’s father (referred to in his son’s autobiography only as “J.J. O’Shea”) had stayed with the four other children in New Plymouth working for the New Zealand Railways. Consequently the boy saw little of his father during his formative years. However he did not feel deprived, rather he felt he had “gained two families instead of just one.”² His adopted mother died when he was 14 years old, the year he was sitting the nation-wide matriculation exams. O’Shea’s acerbic sense of humour emerged at an early age as he remembered thinking cynically, “Well, there will be another person in heaven praying for me to pass.”³ He stayed on in Wanganui with his mother’s sister Lucy O’Meara and her husband, “a successful publican and landowner. Genial and energetic, the family constantly had disagreements over politics. O’Shea recalls evenings in the Depression when his uncle and aunt would support Forbes while his own father defended Savage.”⁴ Although the families in which he was raised had a strict code of behaviour, it was nevertheless a stimulating environment for the young O’Shea, listening to and increasingly participating in the family discussions and debates. In general he has spoken of his childhood with affection. He was big for his age and “reasonably good at sport. He got on well with his cousins who were closer to his age than his own brothers and sisters. The family

had a great sense of fun which they brought intact to the new land.”⁵ His father was particularly forthright on the concept of New Zealand being a country in its own right, and not merely an adjunct of the British Empire. As O’Shea recalled, J.J. “hated Churchill of course, having blamed him for Irish problems earlier on and we poo-hooed the idea that Churchill said, ‘I haven’t succeeded to the country’s Prime Ministership to preside over the break up of the Empire’ which was rubbish. The first thing he did, like most politicians, was to do the exact opposite of what they planned to do.”⁶

Like all children the cinema held a great attraction for the boy. However, his family disapproved of this relatively new entertainment medium and consequently his visits were rare. However, fate took a hand.

One happy accident gave him unprecedeted freedom to indulge his cinematic appetite. After doing the high jump at school one day, he felt abdominal pain. It was appendicitis, and after his release from hospital he was excused from cadet training. Every Friday afternoon he was sent to work in the school library and also permitted to travel into the city library. Frequently he ducked off to the movies. He was only 13 or 14 but his bulk meant his age was never questioned. He liked gangster films and admired George Raft, Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney. He jokes: ‘Eisenstein came much later’.⁷

Although adults had warned him that the picture theatre was “a stepping stone to doom and damnation … [he recalled with pleasure] the allure and fascination [which] that prospect gave to my truancy and the ‘adult’ films I was able to sneak in and see! The Majestic and the Regent in Wanganui were unlikely venues for ‘doom and damnation’, but on Friday afternoons they became my haunts and in them I learnt how to look and behave like a cowboy, a G-man, or a gangster.”⁸ As he recalled, “Dimly did one catch on that walking in a certain way, acting like these screen hero-villains, even trying to look like them did not really make one like them. The distinction between illusion and reality started to be vaguely understood.”⁹ This vague understanding became a fascination with the dramatic and artistic possibilities of the medium which, in spite of the pressures to pursue a mainstream career, was eventually to become his chosen career path. As he somewhat ruefully recalled, “I blush a little

when I think how much I must have been mesmerised by the movies that in later life I would go on to try to make them myself while others of my companions of those years followed noble vocations in the law, the church, public life, the military, science, the diplomatic service, or on the land.”¹⁰

One negative legacy of his childhood was a stammer that persisted throughout his life, possibly as the result of being forced to write with his right hand even though he was born left handed. When he left school in 1936 he went to Victoria University to study law. However his stammer made any thought of court work almost impossible and he left the course, switching to an Arts degree. His brief encounter with the law world had, however, left him with one positive aspect. As a law clerk he had worked “for a Mr Lester, a poet with a great breadth of literary and other interests.”¹¹ He introduced O’Shea to the socially aware fiction of Dos Passos and Steinbeck, and books such as *In Dubious Battle* were important political influences.

After leaving school, O’Shea developed a life-long interest in drama both for its own sake and as a means of overcoming his stammer. Although the stammer persisted in day to day conversation he found that when playing a role he was able to speak with a considerable degree of fluency. As he recalled, “I had been in the theatre from early student days and had produced plays in Christchurch and acted (in Wellington) and was very keen having been lured into the theatre by my speech teacher whom I was sent to as a child because I stuttered very badly. I still do from time to time – it’s there but I have made it generally recessive, but it occasionally hits me. It did this morning in front of the Film Commission arguing a case, I noticed I was stuttering a little more than I should have, so I started acting. Of course actors don’t stutter.”¹²

His University years also enabled him to expand his understanding of the major national and international issues of the time. “The Spanish Civil War occurred when I was a young man. I was 16 at the start, so the rise of Hitler was quite a notable element in our lives and Mussolini even more so, because New Zealand stood out against Italy over the Ethiopian war, having made a thing about standing up in the League of Nations and being counted … so one was politically conscious.”¹³ Growing up in New Zealand in the pre-war period, O’Shea was also influenced by the developing nationalism. “Of course at the time one knew very well about the very

strong almost self-conscious movement of literature in the late 1930s and early 1940s in Christchurch, and that was very interesting ... as I grew up during the Spanish Civil War in which Mason, Alders and Kyle of Christchurch grew up, and made a great impression on one." O'Shea also noticed at that time the rebellion against Victorian literary styles: "They got sick of what they called 'Kowhai Gold Poetry', the type of literature that belonged in the really colonial era. It was the sort of youthful expression to which the Centenary of course in 1940 gave a great fillip." However, O'Shea tended to be more involved with politics than literature. "I did read magazines like *Tomorrow* which was an anarchical paper, and I used to subscribe to *The People's Voice* which was a communist paper, and I became very aware of the rise of Marxism. During the years of 1937, '38 and '39 one was vociferous and argued about the Spanish Civil War, and I knew a few communists, and that sort of thing. It was an interesting time." When war broke out he attempted to join the glamorous Fleet Air Arm.

I tried to go into the Fleet Air Arm in fact as an actor; I acted my way through all the interviews, but then I got appointed ... and went out and celebrated and the examiners came too. They were just young men at the time, and of course with a few drinks in me I stammered quite badly ... As an actor I could use my pauses, a Churchillian tactic you might say, so I was able to fool them, but I couldn't fool them any more so I had to wait for conscription. Not that I was very keen to join up at all, but it was the idea of going to Canada to train. We knew we would be killed anyway in the war; it was a foregone conclusion.

Whilst waiting for his call up he recalled that "I thought I'd better get a steady job and the best thing at that time was teaching, so I went to Training College in Christchurch. Because I was born in New Plymouth I had to go to Christchurch. I thought 'you must be bloody mad'. I was living in Wellington, my friends were there, my girlfriend was there, so [I asked] 'Why do I have to go to Christchurch?'. [they replied] 'Oh, it's a rule'. That bred in me a hatred of bureaucracy and their slavish adherence to rules, but one good thing came out of it of course, as most things do turn out all right anyway." The 'good thing' at Christchurch Training College was meeting his future wife Cormie who was Women's Vice President. As happened so often in wartime, the couple were soon forced to part as O'Shea was called up in

1942. He immediately tried to gain a position as a motion picture war correspondent but was turned down and posted to an infantry regiment on combat duty in Europe. By the war's end he was stationed in Dresden and, with a flair for flouting authority, commandeered a jeep and with several well-armed fellow Kiwi soldiers spent a week driving through what was to become East Germany taking in the sights and sounds of the broken remnants of the Third Reich. From there he was posted to Yugoslavia, to maintain the peace between the various Yugoslav factions, on to Cumbria in Central Italy and thence back to New Zealand, where he was re-united with Cormie, marrying her in 1946.

Inevitably O'Shea was changed by his war-time experiences. "I'm sure [the war] had an influence on writers because we became much more familiar with the Maori people for a start in a meaningful way. There was the Maori Battalion who were prominent soldiers and fierce fighters. We didn't know at the time how grievous a loss we were inflicting on the Maori people, who had a whole strand of their best and finest wiped out. That was a very sad loss which has only recently been replaced, when the Maori Women's Welfare League rose to take its place." O'Shea's wartime experiences also caused him to reflect on his role as a New Zealander and New Zealand's role in the world. "I would have been insensate not to have done. One always had a fondness for Europe and it probably made one more assured in one's European ancestry; whereas the Maori were always assured of their Polynesian ancestry and their Whakapapa." In identifying himself as a New Zealander with European ancestry, O'Shea was in fact defining himself very much in terms of his Irish origins.

I'm the refuse of the colonial empire being Irish. We are victims of a colonial flurry so one always had the books at home on the great Irish struggle, and was very aware of these things. The Irish were always landless in this country so they went into the professions – medicine, the law, universities, teaching. They still are largely in these roles, not amongst the landed gentry of the country. One regards with great equanimity the fact that there was no ethnic cleansing in this country between the Irish and the English, although the Irish were looked down upon. But looked down upon by whom? The lower middle-class English that flooded out to this country – the swindlers and sharks that would put the Aucklanders of 1987 to shame by the way they sold

land that they hadn't even seen. A lot of scallywags you might say. I always had a sympathy with the Maori of course because one knew they had been diddled also – not only diddled but starved out and exploited. This was quite clear to me and most other Irishmen.¹⁴

This sympathy was to be a crucial factor in his attitude towards the Maori, and was clearly reflected in his first feature *Broken Barrier*.

During the period when Roger Mirams had worked for the NFU and then created his own film company, John O'Shea had been completing an MA in History at Victoria University, supporting himself by working as a researcher in war history for four years. In 1945 he was a foundation member of the Wellington Film Society, becoming a committee member, and in 1948 chairman of the Film Institute, an umbrella organisation “responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the various film societies, obtaining supplies of film, and acting as a central point of reference for the society movement.”¹⁵ It was through their Wellington Film Society membership that O'Shea first developed a friendship with Stanhope Andrews of the NFU.

O'Shea's job in historical research was coming to an end. He could have gained further employment as a public servant elsewhere, but he was “more inclined towards film.”¹⁶ His contemporaries yearned to travel, but he recalled that at this time, due to the cost, “there was no way you could get out of New Zealand unless you were a Hawkes Bay sheep farmer or got a job on a cruise ship. Not many people did go to Europe just for study purposes, but just to go and live was unheard of, and there was no way you could. You couldn't travel and that was all there was to it.”¹⁷ In John O'Shea's case, he had the opportunity as he was granted a scholarship to Princeton University. Yet he decided to stay in New Zealand for a number of reasons including the practical considerations of having a young family, and the realisation that an academic career would require him to spend a considerable amount of time lecturing – an uncomfortable prospect for a man with a stammer. Furthermore, his interest in the United States was tempered by a growing sense that his own cultural affinities lay elsewhere.

I had been tempted to leave the country ... but I decided not to take it as I was uneasy about living in the States. I had read their literature with great concern, Dos Passos, Faulkner, James T. Farrell, Hemingway, [and] Scott Fitzgerald. Thomas Wolfe was one other who was a very considerable influence in my life – giving me an unnecessary florid style from time to time – and so I was very tempted by the [Princeton] scholarship, but it would mean I would have been a History lecturer and in the university sphere probably for the rest of my days. There was a contrary Irish streak in me I suppose, so I thought, “Bugger this.”¹⁸

On leaving his war history job he was able to gain employment as Assistant Film Censor “which was very important because you couldn’t go to a film school but you had to study films all the time, so I did full-time study on films. *Broken Barrier* was really the outcome of two solid years in the Film Censor’s office.”¹⁹ In the Film Censor’s office he was able, for many hours each week, to absorb aspects of script, screenplay, lighting, camera angles and movement, music, sound effects and editing. As he recalled, “There’s nothing quite like watching all 25 episodes of the old *Superman* series to learn what they did when they made films.”²⁰ Although his practical experience of film production was extremely limited, he developed a sophisticated sense of visual literacy. In 1950 came an offer that was to change his life. Initially he was approached by Roger Mirams’s brother Gordon (a founding member of the Wellington Film Society and a film critic for *The Listener*) to see if he was interested in writing a documentary about aspects of Maoridom. Mirams’s original partner Alun Falconer had left for China in 1950, and he was looking for someone new. In 1952 O’Shea became an actual partner in the company which then changed its name from “Pacific Film Unit” to “Pacific Films” (thereby firmly identifying it with the southern hemisphere and lessening the likelihood of confusion with the NFU). Pacific Films supplemented its income as the New Zealand source of footage for “Movietone News” with the production of training films, documentaries and coverage of All Black test matches. Robert Allender, writing in 1951, recognised the commercial realities with which the fledgling company had to contend.

[Pacific Films is] committed to producing films which will prove popular with large audiences... Within the commercial limitations, Roger Mirams directs

and operates the unit always efficiently and occasionally with distinction. He must produce films which satisfy sponsors and their vanities, yet conceal propaganda so effectively that film exchanges will accept his productions for general distribution and cinema audiences will not complain that they are being shown advertising films. The task is quite easy when the sponsor is a government department like the Transport Department [but] difficult when the film is being paid for by a manufacturer of refrigerators.²¹

Such films were, in O’Shea’s view, important in developing the fledgling company’s film-making skills, even though there was little opportunity for artistic licence. “If you were making a film on butter-making in New Zealand, you made a film about butter-making, if about cheese-making, you made it on cheese-making, progress in pine, you made it about the forests, and so on. It all had some reflection, we did it differently to the way other people would have done the same thing, but basically the client’s message was paramount.”²² In this respect, independent film-making was as constrained as that of the National Film Unit which was required to conform to the views of the government of the day, a key reason why personnel like Holmes, Mirams and ultimately Andrews resigned.

Pacific Films’s best production at that time was, in Allender’s view, *Tribute to Achievement*, sponsored by W & R Fletcher – “a plain, apparently unpretentious film, yet more than one of its sequences contained unexpected poetry. [He saw] Mirams [as] adept at observing and capturing the mundane movement which will make dramatic film images.”²³ This view was endorsed at the time by M. K. Joseph who, in 1950, described Pacific Films as “a small unit with a high standard of excellence.”²⁴ He too had seen *Tribute to Achievement*. “It showed the growth and ramifications of the meat industry, from the mustering of sheep and cattle to the loading of meat into the refrigerators for export. Beside presenting a remarkable amount of material in assimilable form, it used some outdoor scenes of expressive pictorial beauty.”²⁵ O’Shea’s new venture, while not providing him with a lucrative living, gave him hands-on experience in all aspects of film-making. But producing sponsored films would clearly not be enough to satisfy his creative ambitions.

¹ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998

² Brian McDonnell, “John O’Shea: The Father of New Zealand Film”, *North & South*, October 1989, p87

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998

⁷ Brian McDonnell, p87

⁸ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998

⁹ John O’Shea, “A Charmed Life”, p13

¹⁰ Ibid, p14

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998

¹⁴ John O’Shea, interview, December 1994

¹⁵ John O’Shea, interview, 8 April 1996

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ John O’Shea, interview, December 1994

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ John O’Shea, “A Charmed Life”, p29

²¹ Robert Allender, “Disordered Cinema”, *Landfall* Vol. V, No. 4, 1951, p300

²² John O’Shea, “A Charmed Life”, 1994

²³ Robert Allender, p300

²⁴ M.K. Joseph, “Documentary Film Making in New Zealand”, *Arts Year Book*, June 1950, p14

²⁵ Ibid, p16

Chapter 5: BROKEN BARRIER

In 1951 O’Shea and Mirams embarked on *Broken Barrier*¹, the first post-war New Zealand feature film. Fortunately for his financial well-being, O’Shea was able to continue working at the Film Censor’s office during the making of *Broken Barrier*, resigning on its completion to join Pacific Films on a full-time basis. Initially Mirams had intended to make a documentary about the Maori people. However, O’Shea persuaded Mirams to let him write it as a feature drama which they would then jointly produce and direct. O’Shea acknowledged that New Zealand had a strong documentary tradition but he felt the time had come to diversify.

Like all PR activities, [documentaries] are more concerned with the appearance of things. I was sick of seeing documentaries. Many of the NFU documentaries were little more than government propaganda with a rather inconsequential sterile portrayal of New Zealanders. I had also watched films like *A City Speaks* (Paul Rotha) about the city of Manchester, and found them excruciatingly boring. John Grierson had claimed that a documentary was ‘a creative presentation of reality’, but I considered them to be an illusion, only a version of reality. I wanted to do drama and had been attracted by films like Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* ... which, although documentary in style, [incorporated] elements of drama incorporated.²

Of course Grierson based his own definition of documentary on Flaherty, so O’Shea is drawing fine distinctions here – not rejecting the documentary impulse but seeking a more creative approach to it. On another occasion he said that the documentary genre risked being “a parade of half truths. Consequently I felt it was much better to do it in dramatic form. There are plenty of half truths in drama too, but at least you don’t have the pretence of being true and real.”³ O’Shea recalled telling Roger Mirams at their initial meeting (arranged by Roger’s brother Gordon), “‘It is hopeless to write a documentary about the Maoris, it is so boring’, and he said ‘What would you do?’ and I said ‘Let’s make a story out of it. Let’s write a feature in a documentary sort of way because we didn’t have any actors or technicians, or anything.’”⁴ The approach was a practical one – a contemporary story which utilised existing locations and the established skills of technicians accustomed to making

documentaries. The result would be *Broken Barrier*. Thus the documentary with “elements of drama” became the drama with elements of documentary. In developing the script O’Shea was not conscious of being particularly influenced by any New Zealand writer. As he recalled:

One read the literature of the time and one always tried to absorb the spirit of the time so it came from that Roger [Mirams] himself had made, with Alun Faulkner, Cecil Holmes and others at the Film Unit, some very good films, in the Hokianga was one that I recall, and in the Philippines and in Japan at the end of the war, and at about that time they made *The Coaster* with Denis Glover, so one was well aware of the literary environment. But in writing *Broken Barrier* we couldn’t offer [any writer] anything.⁵

The script also had a more personal aspect to it. O’Shea recalled that the story of a love affair between a young Pakeha man and a young Maori woman “was one which had very close relationships to one of my own friends in the services who was injured during the war and came back and married a Maori and wanted to live as that chap [Tom Sullivan] did. My friend wasn’t a journalist at all but he was a man whom I liked very much and it was best to have his story told in that way.”⁶

O’Shea and Mirams, although embarking on a feature film nearly two decades after Rudall Hayward’s *Rewi’s Last Stand*, were still faced with the same serious challenges. Although the advent of the National Film Unit had given some impetus to the development of an industrial infrastructure, it was scarcely adequate to support feature films. The numbers of people with film production expertise had barely increased since Hayward’s time. Although there were no government-imposed restrictions on subject matter (other than tough censorship of on-screen sexual activities) there was also no government funding available – no Film Commission or Arts Council. Such sponsorship as was available to forms of high culture was not going to be offered to the populist medium of film. As O’Shea put it, “Were we not making a film for ‘money’ – that despicable word – hoping to sell it to audiences?!?”⁷ Nevertheless, he and Mirams assembled such resources as they could.

We had little money between us, but we had two mute 35mm 200 foot load Arriflex cameras, one of them on loan from Movietone News, the other picked up from, allegedly, a dead German in the Western Desert and sold to us for £200. Roger had a rickety camera dolly [a piece of plywood on 4 bicycle wheels] and some lights cobbled together from scrap metal. We set off in Roger's little Vauxhall car with as much of the film stock and gear as we could load into it. "Folie de grandeur" was upon us! Bill Parker (Wiremu), whom I had known at university, arranged entree to Maoridom in his tribal area. Another university friend, Tom Ormond, welcomed us to his family's home and farm on the Mahia Peninsula. In the summer of 1950-51, we set about making the film.⁸

No sooner had the film commenced than Pacific Films heard the news that the NFU were planning a production entitled *Aroha* which appeared to be a duplication of the *Broken Barrier* concept. They protested to the relevant government minister about the potential competition being provided by a state funded institution. It transpired that their fears were only partly justified, but the NFU was piqued by their protest. As O'Shea recalled: "Stung by our impudent lobbying and by our very existence, the National Film Unit made life difficult for us. But their refusal to allow us to use their laboratory forced us to rely on Australians and ultimately only stimulated the appearance of local independent facilities-production equipment, stores and laboratories."⁹ In a different environment such as England, a young man with O'Shea's creative energies and left-wing sympathies might have seen state funding and state television as the appropriate avenue, but in New Zealand the bureaucratised and timid atmosphere of the public sector drove him to become an "independent". The advent of a state television service in New Zealand in 1960 would do nothing to modify O'Shea's dislike of bureaucracy. This conflict between public structures and individual energies would persist in the fields of film and television to the present.

*Aroha*¹⁰ was completed and screened in 1951 while Pacific Films was still shooting *Broken Barrier*. The story centres around Aroha (Moana Kahui), a young woman from a rural Maori community who is in her second year at Victoria University, and her attempts to balance her commitment to her own people with her wish to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Pakeha world. The issue comes to a

head when her father, the tribal chief, develops a brain tumour and, on the advice of the tohunga, chooses to die surrounded by his people. Aroha, returning home for the weekend, persuades her father to go to hospital where he can be treated by the Pakeha doctors. He is cured and returns home to take his place as tribal chief. Writing a critique for *Landfall* Robert Allender commented, “In more than one sense, *Aroha* is a splendid film notable for its severe emotional content and its crisp direction ... [however] the acting in *Aroha* is, let us face it, very bad.”¹¹ The production of *Aroha*, designed to present a contemporary issue in a dramatic form, was a new departure for the NFU. Shot in black and white, it still retains sequences (such as the poi dances and hakas) which rely on documentary rather than dramatic techniques to convey their message. Similarly, at times a voice-over by Aroha is used to convey her thoughts and attitudes towards the situations with which she is involved. The camerawork is competent rather than creative, carefully recording each sequence with little attempt to visually interpret or influence the audience’s perspective through innovative angles or movement. Similarly, the editing follows a predictable linear pattern (with the exception of a haka sequence in which the movement of the dancers is rapidly and rhythmically intercut with the meeting house carvings). Although *Aroha* makes extensive use of lip sync sequences, which provide it with a degree of dramatic credibility, the acting is stilted and awkward; partly a reflection of the bland screenplay. While the film deals with a potentially controversial issue, the writers opted for a low key approach in which the difficulties are quickly resolved with a minimum of controversy.

Occasionally the film shows some spark. In an early sequence, Aroha, who is living in a Wellington Maori girls’ hostel, announces to the other girls she’s going to board with a Pakeha family. Her action is challenged by her friend Maku.

MAKU: She’s going to live among the Pakeha now. She’s deserting her Maori friends!

AROHA: Don’t be silly, Maku. Why can’t I have Pakeha friends, too?

MAKU: What will others of the tribe say? They will not let you leave. The daughter of a chief should stay with her own people!

AROHA: But I'm not leaving my own people! I don't forget the people who gather on the marae. But today we're living in a Pakeha world. Some say we should keep apart. But we can't grow up as two separate races in the same country.

MAKU: So you want to become a white Maori?

AROHA: No, I want to learn all that I can. It's no use being silly and narrow as you're being at the moment.

The conflict of cultural loyalties was a theme already explored in *Rewi's Last Stand*, where Ariana, also a princess, was torn between her love for Bob, the young Pakeha, and her loyalty to the tribe caught up in a conflict over Waikato land. In *Aroha* it was treated in a rather heavy-handed didactic way, not seriously challenging the government's support for assimilation ("we are one people"). There is a similar debate later in the film at a dance:

TAHU: Maybe you're wrong about doing things just as well as the Pakeha. I reckon you should forget about all that stuff and stick to the old Maori ways.

AROHA: Old ways? Easier ways you mean. If we can't be bothered learning to do things, we'll just have to put up with the jobs no-one else will have and the houses no-one else will live in. Is that the future for the Maori people?

TAHU: I don't just sit around. I've got a pretty good enough sort of job.

AROHA: Tahu, you're just a petrol pump attendant and now you're going to be a taxi driver. You went away to college. Now is this all you ever want to do?

TAHU: I like it here with my own people. We could be pretty happy here.

AROHA: But I don't want to stay here and be "pretty happy". Why should I bury myself in the country just because I'm a Maori? ... Maoris are not kept out of anything!

The film is not, however, insensitive to Maori traditions. In a final sequence in which Aroha's voice is heard over a series of cultural meeting house activities, she states that the Pakeha visitors attending the function do not know "what it means to know and be part of a tribe and your people. The security we feel in the old things, that have been handed down from the past to this generation." The film's final statement echoes a similar perspective. "As the Maori people remember their past in singing and dancing, their future lies waiting. It will take the form they desire, for it is theirs to shape as they will; theirs to form for their descendants and their race".

Aroha deserves credit for tackling a complex topical issue. Post-war New Zealand, with the increasing numbers of young Maori migrating to the cities to find employment and to enhance their career opportunities, created a climate for exploring these issues in a serious manner. In the period following World War II, the mood of a unified society whose citizens of both races had found common cause against a dangerous foe was still the prevalent one. The military exploits of the Maori Battalion had ensured a renewed respect for their people within mainstream New Zealand society. However, cultural diversity was not a popular concept in the immediate post-war years. *Aroha*, although not long enough to qualify as a feature film, was quite a daring project for the NFU, and was not typical of the general run of its productions. However, the Film Unit in 1951 was simply not going to raise disturbing questions about government policy. Consequently its inability to realise the full dramatic potential of its subject left plenty of room for O'Shea and Mirams to explore cultural tensions more fully.

Shooting *Broken Barrier*

Lacking the financial and technical resources of the National Film Unit, O'Shea and Mirams were unable to use the lip-synch technique for *Broken Barrier* employed by *Aroha*. As an ingenious solution they used scripted voice-over commentary which articulated the thoughts and feelings of the characters. In O'Shea's words:

We did have one day's synch sound shooting – with a huge disc-cutter which took three of us to lift into position on the Nuhaka marae. Having to hump gear across the paddocks and dig trenches and little bridges for the massive dolly tracks, we were thankful we had thought up the idea of ‘spoken thoughts’ rather than dialogue recording ... which was beyond our pockets anyway.

On the Mahia Peninsula, our hosts and most of the people who helped with the gear and kai were happy to appear in the film. Later, when we were shooting in Wellington, friends assisted our low budget by appearing in the film. We stuck to the storyline as best we, with all the weight of our inexperience, could.

Much later in the year, friends lent us money to help us complete the film and our mates at Movietone News lent a hand. The chief editor at Movietone did a fine-cut of our edit in Sydney and matched the negative at night in his kitchen. We just had enough money to record a score in Sydney, then some sound effects and a number of voices when we returned to Wellington. We laid some tracks – all optical in those days – at the NFU (two sync tracks and eight wild tracks that had been hustled together on non-sync tape recorders). We finished the mix at 2.30am on 10 December 1951.¹²

Thus, like Rudall Hayward, O’Shea and Mirams had had to face the barriers of industrial infrastructure, lack of personnel and a difficult socio-political climate. Their decision to use the voice-over technique was a direct response to the infrastructure difficulties while the extensive use of volunteer assistance was, like Hayward, the only viable option in compensating for lack of personnel and related resources. The refusal by the NFU to allow Pacific Films to use their laboratory facilities was an indication that the system, rather than being indifferent to O’Shea’s efforts, was in fact deliberately placing obstacles in his path – obstacles that he would have to overcome if he was to continue to see how far he could go in making New Zealand feature films.

The experience of *Broken Barrier* actor Terence Bayler encapsulates O’Shea’s approach to overcoming the key barriers. While the use of volunteers was to be a crucial factor in maintaining financial viability, O’Shea was aware that he could not obtain the services of key actors on the same basis. They had a living to earn and therefore needed to be paid. Bayler, who played the lead role of Tom Sullivan, like the rest of the cast had no film acting experience. He was, however, very familiar with the theatre. His father Harold had been closely associated with the Wanganui Opera House from 1918 to the 1950s. The theatre was a venue for touring professional shows, so even as a pre-schooler young Terence “was used to the backstage atmosphere, getting free tickets sometimes, and sitting in the sun on my father’s lorry while he attended a Sunday morning meeting of the stagehands’ union.” As a pupil at Wanganui Technical College, Bayler continued his burgeoning interest in the theatre by acting in school plays, and at Victoria University studied with Maria Dronke who had acted in Max Reinhardt’s company in Germany. His first professional work was in radio drama for the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, (a popular source of revenue for actors in the pre-television era) and he continued to act with university and other amateur groups. Bayler, a 20 year old, had already made a name for himself in the theatre, and had been granted a New Zealand Government bursary to study in London at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and concurrently for a Diploma in Dramatic Art at London University. As some months were to elapse before his departure, he’d been doing temporary and seasonal jobs in a bakery, a woolstore, and in a printing works putting loops on calendars. While rehearsing a play for the Wellington Thespians, Bayler received a message to ring Roger Mirams.

Mirams and O’Shea offered him the lead role in *Broken Barrier* which was an attractive proposition as it not only offered the young man an opportunity to develop his acting ability in a new medium, but also gave him “a chance of travelling in New Zealand before I left. [However] John O’Shea drove a hard bargain: I was to live with his family, and be paid £5 a week – I stipulated that he’d supply my cigarette tobacco too – he countered by demanding that I should baby-sit when he and Cormie wanted to go out.” O’Shea was obviously having to watch every penny. However, as Bayler pointed out, “the deal wasn’t as bad financially as it now seems: My bursary to study in London was £360 a year to cover all living expenses and fees”. Although it was his acting ability that had attracted the offer from O’Shea, there was also a family

connection; O’Shea’s uncle had been Bayler’s best friend and O’Shea was also an ex-pupil of Wanganui Technical College. Bayler, who was aware that there were almost no local actors with experience in films, considered in retrospect that he was approached partly because he was not tied up with full-time employment. “A few of us worked occasionally in radio drama or commercials – fewer still were full-time NZBS employees. I would presume none of these people would have wished to abandon their ‘real jobs’ to travel round the country filming – I never heard of anyone else being approached to play Tom.”



Plate 3: Rawi (Kay Ngarimu) makes a purchase while Tom (Terence Bayler) waits outside

The shoestring nature of the budget was reflected in the production procedures. In spite of its being a feature film, Bayler recalled, “there were no other members of the crew. Occasionally Wiremu Parker as adviser and Bill Hopper as stills photographer joined us when they had free time from their careers as, respectively, a broadcaster and a newspaper photographer. Otherwise there were just the four of us – Kay (Ngarimu), John, Roger and me in Roger’s car with all the equipment.” All the other actors had to find the time to appear in the film during weekends or days off. Consequently, the production had to be undertaken with maximum efficiency as well

as clear communication. In Bayler's words, "even such key characters as the forestry worker, played by Bill Merito, had probably only a day or so on the shoot. [Consequently] it had to be a team effort in that no-one could be a passenger. But for the same reason, the roles were clearly defined; there were no assistants to take over from Roger, lighting or operating the camera; no-one other than John behind the camera to watch and check continuity, and nearly always Katy and I, or both of us, were in front of the camera. When not, we helped."

In 1996 Bayler viewed Sam Neill's documentary on New Zealand film, *Cinema of Unease* in which a tracking shot from *Broken Barrier* is featured. It depicts Bayler and Ngarimu on a hilltop. He recalled it as a shot "that John and Roger were very proud of [and added] as the distinguished audience of international film-makers and critics watched the clip, it amused me to remember that on the day we shot that scene I'd helped to carry our camera, home-made dolly and track up the hill, lay the track, then play the scene. Then I held a reflector for Katy's close-up, and helped to carry the gear back down the hill."

In relation to the controversial nature of *Broken Barrier*, as a depiction of racial problems in a nation that prided itself on having the best race relations in the world, Bayler recalled an amusing incident. "About halfway through the shoot, two elderly women on a marae asked me what the story was. I told them it was about a Maori-Pakeha marriage. 'Ah, you're playing the Maori boy' said one. 'No' said the other. 'You're a Samoan boy aren't you?'. It seemed to me that if I, as well as Katy, were perceived even on the marae to be Polynesian, there wouldn't be much conflict in our story, so I hurried to tell John this worrying news. Eyes narrowed over his usual dangling cigarette, he solved the problem with one line [which was incorporated into the soundtrack] 'Tom Sullivan, an Irish name, and he had that sort of dark Irish look that appealed to the Maoris'."

The use of the documentary approach in which the actors' thoughts and feelings were articulated by a narrator as voice overs, posed a challenge for Bayler, who had been trained in conventional stage technique. "I don't think we had a script, just a storyline. Obviously, being without sound we avoided a conversation taking place, we ad-libbed it. I think the voice-overs were written to match the final edit – I wasn't

there for that... For John I tried to provide a character who was awkward and inhibited, but capable of learning. For Roger, I tried to hit the marks." During the production, visual opportunities were seized whenever they presented themselves. "We picked up some stuff as available – I seem to remember Roger stopping the car to set up his camera and pick up various picturesque shots of bush, coastline or mountains. I'd be required to cross the frame in front of these landscapes. I suggested that we were tending toward travelogue and this could be counteracted by an unromantic shot of my sock with a hole worn in it, and dirty toes showing through. This idea was adopted, to my delight as a twenty year old!"¹³

The technique of spoken thoughts was adopted for several reasons, the most immediate being the technical difficulties involved in recording live dialogue. Although this was a common technique in imported feature films, it was still an expensive and exacting process (as was the dubbing or post-synching of dialogue in a studio after the shooting had been completed). The decision to avoid these difficulties was based, as O'Shea recalled, on "a combination of the fact that we didn't have the equipment, [and] we couldn't hire the equipment, and the equipment was terribly heavy and cumbersome in those days. The technique was derived from a knowledge that I had from theatre; from plays by Pirandello in which you have innovative ways of handling dialogue, and also from plays by Eugene O'Neill [as] they also occasionally used the thoughts of people rather than what they actually said. In *Broken Barrier's* case though, you did see people speak to one another with their lips moving, but you didn't hear what they said ... but you got the thoughts that were in their minds There had been a [1946] film [*Lady of the Lake*] featuring Robert Montgomery who was an actor and a director who had used a similar technique in which he expressed the thoughts of the camera in a subjective role... It's a device that's not used much at all these days ... [and] in those days it was quite unusual and unexpected."¹⁴ This technique was risky as the public could have regarded it as clumsy or unsophisticated, but its use was sufficiently skilful and natural in its idiom for viewers to accept it as a convention, at least up to a point. The documentary style of the film may have helped its acceptance, since this was a time when documentaries often had elaborate or ingenious voice-over commentaries.



Plate 4: Poster for *Broken Barrier*'s world première

The Reception

Broken Barrier made a significant impact on the New Zealand cinema going public. With an eye to obtaining maximum publicity, O'Shea arranged a full blown world première on 10 July 1952 "with the governor-general, Sir Bernard Freyberg present, hordes of black ties and evening dresses, a brass band, floodlights, marching girls — and a packed house."¹⁵ The event was a success. Considerable interest was aroused and good "word of mouth" helped to attract a sizeable audience over the next few

weeks. “Even the distributor and the exhibitor were surprised when the film was so well received by the première and subsequent audiences.”¹⁶ (For example, the film ran for 3 weeks in the Regent theatres in both Auckland and Wellington). *Broken Barrier* was a courageous effort not only in extending the shoe-string production techniques but also in continuing the early tradition of making films with a strong Maori theme. By featuring incidents of racism, O’Shea and Mirams signalled their intention to not only entertain but also to raise challenging social issues. *Broken Barrier* took considerable risks not only in terms of its technical shortcomings but also in terms of the questions it raised about complacent assumptions of racial harmony in New Zealand.

Under the heading “*Broken Barrier* : A Film Of N.Z. Life” Tom Bolster of *The Auckland Star* reviewed both the première and the film the day after its launch in Wellington. Describing it as a spectacular event he then pointed out that the audience was motivated to a large extent by curiosity. “The novelty of seeing themselves would probably have brought them out on a cold night. But it was *Broken Barrier* as a film in its own right that held them and finally sent them home warmed by the experience.” Bolster was particularly impressed by the scenic shots taken on the Mahia Peninsula. However, for him the main strength of *Broken Barrier* was its ability to show a realistic and honest view of New Zealand life. In his first example he cited the dance hall sequence at the marae and the depiction of Tom’s isolation. “The first class sequence … suggests his loneliness in the course of intercut close-ups from the young Pakeha to Maori carvings on the walls of the marae. The reversal of the familiar racial roles – with the Pakeha in the minority – is excellently expressed. Maori culture achieves meaning as the passage unfolds.”

Bolster also commented positively on other scenes including the “landlady’s disapproving glances up a winding staircase at a lover’s meeting … [and] the abrupt announcement of plans for marriage at a Pakeha dinner table”. While curiosity was the initial motivator for many audience members, in Bolster’s view their expectations were exceeded. “As an audience last night we responded to these portions not because they were brilliantly acted – but because they had an essential honesty. This, it seems to me, is *Broken Barrier*’s great virtue, its simple forthright, yet undogmatic honesty.” Interestingly, he noted the cinematic links between O’Shea’s/Mirams’s

production and the films of neo-realist film-makers Rossellini and De Sica. “As a film, *Broken Barrier* has a number of weaknesses you might expect from a first film. It has the compassion of a Rossellini or Desica [sic] making film on a similar basis in Italy at the close of World War II without the passion.” Despite some reservations, Bolster concluded his comments on a positive note. “The result is a milestone in New Zealand film-making – a picture that should appeal to Dominion and overseas filmgoers alike because it is honestly and unpretentiously New Zealand life.”¹⁷

This viewpoint was echoed in the *Otago Daily Times* in a review written 2 days after the film had commenced its Dunedin run in the Empire Theatre on 4 September 1952. Under the headline “Good Start From the Barrier” the paper complimented Mirams and O’Shea, stating that they “have very wisely adapted a peculiarly New Zealand theme – the question of Maori-Pakeha relations. On the simple romance of a Maori nurse and a white journalist, they have managed to make some pointed comment on a problem which many people would like to think does not exist in this country.” O’Shea would have been pleased with the paper’s comment that “by capturing an authentic New Zealand atmosphere, it will enable patrons to indulge in that most gratifying experience – identifying themselves with the scenes and happenings on the screen”. The paper acknowledged that, “Because of the difficulties and cost of recording dialogue and action simultaneously, direct speech has been dispensed with, and the reasonably effective substitute of ‘spoken thoughts’ bolstered by an off-screen narrator, has been adopted”. Obviously this posed no major difficulty as the paper described it as “not a perfect device, but it is ingenious and it suffices”. Kay Ngarimu and Terence Bayler were complemented as making “an admirably natural young couple, and [that] the acting throughout is commendably natural”. High praise was reserved for Mirams’ photography: “the real star of the piece”. At the commencement of the review the paper acknowledged “unhappy memories of earlier New Zealand attempts to make a feature-length film” and suggested that patrons might therefore avoid *Broken Barrier*. However, it was abundantly clear from the review that the paper was sure that those who attended the screening would not be disappointed in a film that could be “viewed with a certain modest pride”. The review was noteworthy not only for its positive perspective on *Broken Barrier* but also for its acceptance, with little comment, on the central theme of Maori-Pakeha relations – as personified by the characters of Rawi and Tom. It accepted without further comment, the film’s

'pointed comment on the problem' and proceeded to compliment the acting and the photography. The final sentence described *Broken Barrier* as "a brave attempt which deserves to succeed on its own merits."¹⁸

A perceptive review of *Broken Barrier* was written at the time of the film's release by Margaret Dunningham in *Landfall*. Although the publicity for *Broken Barrier* had stressed that the film "is not a documentary – a featurette – or a Tourist Travelogue", Dunningham commented on the strong link between the documentary style of many of the sequences and Roger Mirams's work "as the most distinguished of the New Zealand Film Unit cameramen In many ways *Broken Barrier* is a most worthy successor to those old National Film Unit documentaries. In this film, produced for the Pacific Unit [sic] and with apparently a very small budget, Roger Mirams has lost none of his skill as a cameraman."¹⁹ Comparing the opening sequences to several well known documentaries of the time, she pointed out that "if these opening scenes remind us a little too forcibly of *Song of Ceylon* or *Man of Aran*, well — what better documentary films could we be reminded of? Visually *Broken Barrier* is always in good taste. It escapes the vulgar and the obvious, is often very beautiful and sometimes – as when the heroine takes the two children to school on her horse – it is acutely and sensitively observed."²⁰

One of the film's most powerful sequences involved Tom Sullivan taking his new Maori girlfriend home to meet his parents for the first time. Exploiting the driveway which led up to the large white parental home, the camera angles evokes the threatening atmosphere of the meeting, especially for Rawi. With the parents looming large on either side of the frame, the young couple are shown from a high angle proceeding slowly up the driveway looking uncomfortably upward towards the Sullivans. Carefully selected camera angles and lighting more than compensated for the lack of dialogue in the opening scenes of the sequence. The remainder of it is however weakened by its length and the exaggerated characterisation of the Sullivan parents and the "snooty sister", as well as being held back by lack of dialogue. As Margaret Dunningham commented, "The absurd household at Lowry Bay would be a formidable obstacle to ninety percent of New Zealand girls. John O'Shea may have done this deliberately to gain the wide sympathy of cinema audiences for his Maori heroine ('Poor kid, fancy her having to deal with a snooty crowd like that.')"²¹

Dunningham, like many viewers, was ultimately frustrated by the lack of dialogue. “The device by which post-synchronisation gives us the thoughts, but never the conversation, of the boy and girl, is successful up to a point … [but] the fact that we never know what they say to one another makes it much more difficult to convince us that these two have more in common than a night in the long grass.”²²

Dunningham also made an interesting comparison between *Broken Barrier* and *Aroha*. Describing the latter as a “much less distinguished New Zealand National Film Unit film”²³ she went on to speculate that *Aroha* “seems to have been made with a Maori audience in mind. Its theme is expressed in the sentence the Maori undergraduate uses to her Maori fiancé – ‘We can do anything if we want to.’” [She added that] “extensive and effective use of dialogue is the best feature of *Aroha*.”²⁴ It is interesting to note that Dunningham refers to it as a “documentary” despite its dramatisations. In contrast, Dunningham was clear that “*Broken Barrier* is not a documentary film.”²⁵

Eleven months after the première of *Broken Barrier*, the monthly literary magazine *Here and Now* carried an article by an unnamed author entitled “Broken Barriers”. It was written on the assumption that all the magazine’s readers would have seen the film, or at the very least knew of its contents and subject matter as it simply refers to it as “the film”. The article took the unusual form of conversations which had taken place between an unnamed Pakeha and the cross-section of other New Zealanders with whom he discussed the production. These remarks were then commented on by the article’s writer. The article began by stating that “the film had been seen in the district, where the Maori people exceed the European in number. The following conversations took place between various Maoris and Pakeha with whom they are quite at home – or at any rate, to whose presence they are quite accustomed.”²⁶ The first conversation was between a Pakeha and a housewife who is married to a Maori.

Housewife: Alright I think for a Pakeha to marry a Maori girl. Maori marry Pakeha girl – I don’t know. Somehow not right ...

Pakeha: It's not the colour. I mean, people do want to have something of the same sort of background. If they've got that, I can't see what difference the colour makes.²⁷

Neither party had any firm opinions, just a sense that marriage between the two races had the potential for problems, as shown in the film. The next conversation was between the Pakeha and Joe – who was described as being a tradesman and a local football representative. The Pakeha asked Joe what he thought of *Broken Barrier*.

Joe: Pretty good, the way they made it. Only the Ngarimu sheila, she made altogether too much of the race business.

Pakeha: How do you mean, Joe?

Joe: Well, like, that stuff's all over and done with now. Not like thirty years ago – they got a down on the Maoris then. All that's wrong with the Maoris now is education and that's coming right.

Pakeha: You reckon there's no discrimination against Maoris nowadays?

Joe: Pakeha and Maori, no different today.²⁸

The writer then commented on the passage by pointing out that Joe's opinion no doubt reflected the fact that he mixed largely with footballers and freezing workers, thereby typifying a New Zealander for whom race was a minor issue. However the next conversation was designed to show a contrasting opinion from Peter, a professional man and representative footballer. Having stated that he thought the film was pretty good he then commented unfavourably on the ending. He was asked to explain.

Peter: Oh, well. He went native. Anyone can go native. What the hell were they [the film-makers] trying to prove anyway?

Pakeha: Not trying to prove anything. Just to draw attention to a problem and make people think about it.

Peter: Yes, but anyone can go native. She went back to the mat and he went with her. What does that prove?

Pakeha: You'd like to see her accepted by Tom's family?

Peter: Well, that's what the picture's about isn't it?

Pakeha: Yes, but it wasn't made in Hollywood. It was made by adults for adults. It's about the way things really do happen.²⁹

Peter having, like most of his contemporaries been raised on a Hollywood diet of escapist movies with happy endings was portrayed as being unsettled by the film's content and the conclusion. His racist comment about the young women going "back to the mat" is patently absurd as she was shown as coming from a prosperous farming family. However *Broken Barrier*'s depiction of both young people as being well educated and socially acceptable was a deliberate choice by Mirams and O'Shea and had unsettled many viewers – an aspect that was neatly analysed by the *Here and Now* writer. "Surely the reason for selecting both a Maori family and a Pakeha family living well above the general level of comfort was to make it plain that the problem is colour-bar, not dirt-bar."³⁰ The writer then concluded with an opinion shared by other reviewers who were attracted by the film's realistic portrayal of New Zealand life. "The film – never mind its artistic merits at the moment – over-simplified things, but it made a good beginning to the study of reality in New Zealand."³¹

At this early stage in New Zealand's feature film development, the lines between fiction and documentary were still blurred as film-makers moved from one genre to another, used the cheaper techniques of documentary, and worked with an aesthetic of "realism". We may also speculate that "realism" may have helped a film like *Broken Barrier* to gain acceptance from New Zealanders who were more accustomed to documentary than to fictional representations of their society. O'Shea's later

feature-films would move more boldly towards stylisation, but their reception would be more mixed.

John Reid, writing a decade later, referred to it as a “well intentioned presentation of race relations in New Zealand [which] suffered somewhat from a certain naïveté in script, but had first class photography, especially of the backgrounds, sound acting and efficient cutting. It was the most mature film of feature length to be so far made in this country. The problem of cost, however, meant that the sound had to be post-synchronised, and this diminished its effectiveness.”³² Writing 40 years later, filmmaker Merata Mita noted that “the film did surprisingly well on its release in 1952 and this I attribute to the fact that it hit the raw nerve of the country at the time. The fact that it played to record audiences and was Kerridge’s box-office leader for the month indicates that audiences here were ready for well-made local films about themselves. Much has been said and written about *Broken Barrier* – from the white racist viewpoint that the film suggested miscegenation, to the strident Maori voice complaining that the film only skirted the issue of racial prejudice. Like *Rewi’s Last Stand* before it, the story is told from the perspective of a white New Zealander, and is naive and romantic. However, within the context of its period and the unpalatable subject it presented to the public of Aotearoa, the film was indeed a timely portent.”³³

Maori critic, Cushla Parekowhai has also taken a positive view of *Broken Barrier*: “Where *Broken Barrier* looks towards the romantic integration of ‘light and dark’ as a resolution of the personal and political issues of Maori/Pakeha relationships, this deceptively naive response need not be dismissed as dated and one dimensional. Even if the contemporary assertion of Maori aspiration and search for meaningful self-determination seems justly strident, *Broken Barrier*’s significance should be regarded in a historical context. For in its time *Broken Barrier* did represent a remarkable achievement in the consciousness raising of a New Zealand public that widely refused to acknowledge the existence of racial inequity and discrimination. Because, as *Broken Barrier* gently describes, with characteristic humour, humanity and art ‘he iwi kotahi tatou’ (we are one people) – in those days we certainly were not.”³⁴

John O’Shea pronounced himself well satisfied with his first efforts at feature film production. “In many circles, *Broken Barrier* was considered as a ‘dirty movie’. It suggested miscegenation, almost as reprehensible in those days as uttering a four letter word. Still, the film played to record audiences throughout the country, was Kerridge’s box-office leader for the month, and we were able to pay all our accounts and the money we’d borrowed from friends” (including the Campion family with whom O’Shea had a long association). As O’Shea later pointed out, it was difficult to say whether or not *Broken Barrier* made a true profit. “It was not made for much money, and we put quite a lot of time into it. You can hardly reach a bottom line on a thing that goes on for three years, because you do other things. And without the free labour of our friends on *Broken Barrier* we wouldn’t have had a chance of completing the film.”³⁵ What O’Shea and Mirams had achieved was the production of a full length feature film shot entirely in New Zealand, using local personnel and resources. He was, however, able to release the film at a time cinema attendance was high. (Television would not reach New Zealand for another 8 years.) Revenue from the film was not sufficient to allow Pacific Films to move straight on to another project, and energies and favours were temporarily exhausted, but the experience had been generally a positive one.

Aesthetics

What artistic precedents were set by *Broken Barrier*? We have already spoken of its documentary elements, but we can also see it as linking New Zealand film with Italian neo-realism, a movement which had considerable international influence after World War II, and whose products were well known to O’Shea through his work in the film society movement. A key exponent of the style was Roberto Rossellini whose film *Rome: Open City* (1945) was set at a time when the Allies were approaching German-occupied Rome and shot almost entirely “on the actual locations … represented in the film.”³⁶ Rossellini worked under limitations at least as difficult as O’Shea’s, since film stock was scarce, no studios were available, and actors with cinema experience were difficult to find. Rossellini turned these difficulties to advantage by using local people to supplement his key actors. The sense of local authenticity in films such as *Rome: Open City* created considerable interest in other parts of the world, and *Open City* grossed “\$5,000,000 in the U.S. alone.”³⁷ Other Italian directors such as Luchino Visconti worked with similar aesthetics. For example, his film *La Terra*

Trema (1948) about a family of poverty-stricken Sicilian fishermen was filmed entirely on location and used non-actors exclusively. The impact of such films on thoughtful viewers grew out of the challenge they posed to Hollywood slickness and glamour and their willingness to highlight the problems of their society. Perhaps as a reaction to the propaganda films which had filled the screens of the war years, they made little attempt to “explain the causes or propose solutions.”³⁸ The approach “which Rossellini had first improvised partly by necessity and accident, partly out of conviction”³⁹ rapidly gave birth to a new genre. Cesare Zavattini, script writer of a powerful neo-realist film *The Bicycle Thief* (1949) contrasted the conventional story film with the new genre. “Now it has been perceived that reality is hugely rich, that to be able to look directly at it is enough; and that the artist’s task is not to make people moved or indignant at metaphorical situations, but to make them reflect (and, if you like, to be moved and indignant too) on what they and others are doing, on the real things, exactly as they are.”⁴⁰

For O’Shea, the neo-realist style had much to commend it as a model for local film-making. Although the problems of poverty were less pressing in New Zealand, the lack of a film production infrastructure was even more acute than in Italy. In his essay “John O’Shea: Towards A Poetics of Documentary” Laurence Simmons reinforced the link between *Broken Barrier* and the Italians.

Broken Barrier … consciously employs many documentary codes of filming used by earlier neo-realistic film-makers. Codes such as on-location shooting, the use of non-professional actors, the aerial or bird’s eye point of view shot and ‘objective’ (i.e. non-associative) points of view, the rejection of theatrical or openly cinematic conventions, the use of travelogue or ethnic music, standard camera angles and long shots, connecting narrative voice-overs, the repression of the signs of the apparatus of production, and a rhythm of editing that never seems to force the pace of the narrative. It is not surprising, then, to learn that Roger Mirams, behind the camera in *Broken Barrier*, was an official New Zealand camera operator in Italy during the Second World War and an avowed fan of the work of Roberto Rossellini.⁴¹

Like a number of neo-realist film-makers, O’Shea had had considerable documentary experience. Furthermore, apart from the obvious resource problems, he was increasingly drawn towards European precedents as an alternative to Hollywood. By emulating the characteristics of neo-realism he had not only been able to produce a viable film within tight practical constraints, he had been able to give it a contemporary look. Although *Broken Barrier* dealt with people in a more prosperous community, Italian films by this time were also starting to shift their attention “from the lower classes and poverty to the upper classes and the unsatisfying and corrosive values of much of modern life.”⁴² O’Shea, an aficionado of contemporary European cinema styles, was destined to follow this trend in his next feature.

Both O’Shea and Mirams, 41 years later recalled their motivations for making *Broken Barrier* in distinctly different terms. Mirams stated that “inherently I was thinking of it … as a commercial subject which could be exploited – you could have the publicity, you could be a bit shocking and that was in there too. I don’t think I was a real do gooder or anything like that.”⁴³ O’Shea, on the other hand, while aware that the film had to have entertainment and dramatic components, was very concerned about its social message. “The more Maoris moved into the city, the more Pakehas tended to discriminate against them. It wasn’t that they didn’t like the Maoris, they liked them in their own place … and many Pakehas didn’t like the idea of them marrying their daughters.”⁴⁴ These comments probably over-simplify the difference between the two men, but they make it clear that O’Shea’s ambitions for New Zealand film were basically serious and more cultural than commercial. After another four years of making short films with O’Shea at Pacific Films, Mirams left for Australia in 1956 to film aspects of the Melbourne Olympics. O’Shea recalled, “Our partnership ended at that time because he decided to stay in Australia because it was so moribund in New Zealand and there was so little opportunity to do much.”⁴⁵ O’Shea, now the sole determinant of the young company’s direction, encouraged by the reasonable success of *Broken Barrier* and the growth of his own film making expertise, set out to develop Pacific Films as a base for future feature film production.

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- ¹ VHS copies of *Broken Barrier* are available through the New Zealand Film Archive.
- ² John O’Shea, interview, 9 April 1996
- ³ John O’Shea, interview, 22 August 1996
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ John O’Shea, interview, 9 December 1994
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ John O’Shea, *Don’t Let It Get You*, p40
- ⁸ John O’Shea, “Archival Extracts”, New Zealand Film Archive publicity flyer, circa May 1988
- ⁹ John O’Shea, “A Charmed Life”, p25
- ¹⁰ VHS copies of *Aroha* are available through the New Zealand Film Archive.
- ¹¹ Robert Allender, “Disordered Cinema”, *Landfall*, p299
- ¹² John O’Shea, “Archival Extracts”
- ¹³ Terence Bayler, letter to author, 28 April 1996
- ¹⁴ John O’Shea, interview, 22 August 1996
- ¹⁵ John O’Shea, *Don’t Let It Get You*, p41
- ¹⁶ Ibid, pp41-2
- ¹⁷ *The Auckland Star*, 11 July 1952
- ¹⁸ *Otago Daily Times*, 6 September 1952
- ¹⁹ Margaret M Dunningham, *Landfall*, December 1952, p326
- ²⁰ Ibid, p326
- ²¹ Ibid, p327
- ²² Ibid, p327
- ²³ Ibid, p327
- ²⁴ Ibid, p327
- ²⁵ Ibid, p326
- ²⁶ “Breaking Barriers”, *Here and Now*, Vol. 3, No. 8, June 1953
- ²⁷ Ibid
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ Ibid
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² John Reid, “Film Making in New Zealand”, p15
- ³³ Merata Mita, “The Soul and the Image”, *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand*, p44
- ³⁴ Cushla Parekowhai, “Te Ao Marama”, *Il Cinema Della Nouva Zelandia*, University of Turin, 1987, p130
- ³⁵ John O’Shea, interview, 22 August 1996.
- ³⁶ Jack C Ellis, *History of Film*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1979, p242
- ³⁷ Ibid, p243
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ Ibid
- ⁴⁰ Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema”, *Sight and Sound*, October-December 1953, p64
- ⁴¹ Laurence Simmonds “John O’Shea: Towards A Poetics of Documentary”, manuscript, circa 1995
- ⁴² Jack C Ellis, *A History of Film*, p248
- ⁴³ *Breaking Barriers*, TV documentary, Bryan Bruce Productions Ltd, TV One 27 June 1993
- ⁴⁴ Ibid
- ⁴⁵ John O’Shea, interview, 9 December 1994

II. THE MAKING OF *RUNAWAY*

Chapter 6: *RUNAWAY: THE ORIGINS*

In November 1952, a few months after the completion of *Broken Barrier*, John O’Shea wrote a storyline which he labelled “Treatment No. 2”. It was set in a mining town near the Franz Joseph Glacier.

[The film] opens dramatically with the sequence of a screaming woman who, bursting through a doorway and staggering, falls prone to the ground with a knife in her heart. She has possibly been murdered by her husband Alex, who now visits the rehearsal of a play by local amateurs and persuades its star, and one suspects his lover Helen to flee with him. Alex and Helen take the train at Moana for Canterbury but are spotted by the police and are forced to escape as fugitives across the railway tracks. They trek through the swamp and bush of Westland, eventually coming across a deserted deerstalker’s hut, but the deerstalker, disturbing them on his return, raises the alarm to the police and they are pursued up the glacier. Helen falls down a crevasse and Alex is forced to leave her behind. “I can’t wait”, he declares as the projected film ends.¹

The treatment was to lie dormant for a further decade. Clearly this was a departure from the *Broken Barrier* concept. The story had more of a “thriller” flavour, with dramatic conflicts and locations. Maori and Pakeha relationships appeared not to be a key element. Such a project had the potential to move closer to popular film theatre (murder and pursuit) or alternatively to “art form” (life imitating art with a strange unresolved ending) – or most likely a combination of the two (like Carol Reed’s *The Third Man*, to mention a favourite of O’Shea’s).

In the decade between *Broken Barrier* and *Runaway*, O’Shea had continued to extend his knowledge of film production styles and techniques, as well as making a living as a film-maker. He recalled that “I had always wanted to make feature films and during this time I took the opportunity to continue to develop my craft.”² Although he had realised a dream by making a feature film so early in his film-making career, he was also well aware of the gaps in his knowledge. Consequently he and Mirams (until the latter’s departure in 1956) set out “to study assiduously and train ourselves in the technical and administrative skills of an industry.”³ Pacific Films proceeded to

produce a series of documentaries on a wide variety of subjects ranging from road safety to rugby – the company shot all of the All Black rugby tests between 1956 and 1960. As their camera assistant and studio manager Eric Anderson recalled:

Those were the days before television. Roger, John and I would shoot a test on a Saturday, get the film back to Wellington for processing, and by Monday John would be editing and recording the commentary and I would do the negative matching and arrange the distribution. By Tuesday night the completed film would be screening in all the major theatres in New Zealand. It was a mammoth task and none of us had any sleep during the 36 hour turnaround period.⁴

O’Shea realised that he couldn’t repeat voice-over technique in his next feature film. Consequently, he and his staff made a point of developing their skills in sound recording.

We did a lot of live sound on our documentaries but we post-synched it. We had sound, of course, by that time, synchronised sound, and we did a few odd things but it was cumbersome to do. We made a lot of road safety films, about two dozen, and many of them had dialogue sound in them and synch sound in all of them of course. It was a way of learning your craft and exercising it. So by the time we came to make *Runaway*, we knew what we were up to.⁵

O’Shea’s income from Pacific Films was far from lucrative. He recalled that “I never used to lose sleep through the 1950s and 60s when I was learning my craft. Even in those months before Easter there was never going to be enough money to keep going past the middle of next week.”⁶ Earning a living as a full time film-maker required all his time and energy. “When I started to make films myself, I withdrew from all critical writing and administrative work with the film societies but used the [National Film] Library incessantly. It was a boon to any film student and I had a lot to learn.”⁷ O’Shea was greatly assisted by Walter Harris, the head of the National Film Library. Harris at the time “also provided an essential distribution and storage facility for the recently formed New Zealand Film Institute, the forerunner of the Federation of Film Societies.”⁸ O’Shea recalled that Harris “managed to extend the rules of borrowing to

enable a bona fide film-maker who needed to learn what to do to borrow a stack of films over every weekend he was home.”⁹ Harris’s generosity not only benefitted O’Shea but also the neighbourhood children. “Many kids in the neighbourhood used to revel, along with ours, in movies at home. What havoc we must have wreaked to tiny minds when I think back to frequent repeat screenings of Jacques Tati’s *Jour du Fete*.¹⁰

Cookery Nook

One of Pacific Films most notable productions was *Cookery Nook* a 1955 film influenced by British comedies. Made for the Christchurch firm T.J. Edmonds, O’Shea recalled that “it must have some sort of record as being one of the longest-lived sponsored documentaries ever made for a client.”¹¹ Later described as a “marvellously subversive, almost surreal, classic New Zealand 1950s suburban comedy”¹², the 15 minute film demonstrated some of the new skills Mirams and O’Shea had developed since the completion of *Broken Barrier* three years earlier. The simple storyline featured an harassed husband reduced to baking afternoon tea for his visiting general manager when his shrewish wife decides to take herself off to visit her mother in Ashburton. Unable to cope in the female domain of the family kitchen, he is rescued from his predicament by his daughter and her team of intermediate schoolgirls, who had been seen earlier in a sequence showing them undertaking homecraft training at their school.¹³

Viewers today who may be inclined to take exception to *Cookery Nook*’s “political incorrectness” would miss the thin vein of satire that flows through the entire production. Much of the humour is slapstick, such as the scenes of the flour-bedecked husband, with unlit roll-your-own protruding from his lower lip, clumsily manipulating increasingly resistant large lumps of dough. Furthermore, the film is also a gentle satire of the documentary genre. For example, during sequences which show the schoolgirls undertaking their training in the arts of housewifery, the voice-over is sonorous and deeply serious, mimicking the deeply earnest voice-over styles of wartime and training films. Economic realities meant that O’Shea had needed to find a major sponsor to commission and finance *Cookery Nook*. However, rather than make an earnest little film that predictably highlighted the “sponsor’s fine products”, he had ingeniously incorporated humour and satire while still meeting the

requirements of Edmonds “sure to rise” baking powder. Asked 41 years later, if he had endeavoured to make *Cookery Nook* as a “subversive, surreal comedy”, O’Shea replied

I’ve always had an attitude towards surrealism. I think it’s a very dominant feature of the art forms practised in this country … I looked at a programme on kiwiana on television a couple of nights ago [*Kiwiana* directed by Shirley Horrocks 1996]. I was struck then by the surreality of it all. It’s going beyond quirkiness when you have a gumboot throwing competition in Taihape, for God’s sake! It’s as if Salvador Dali emerged out of a cowshed. I think people don’t realise what a strange, weird country we live in, beset by multi-racial or bi-cultural situations, we take the strangest routes to express ourselves. One gradually comes to realise how surreal New Zealand is. [However] at the time the film was not advanced to P. J. Edmonds and Company, the sponsors, as a surreal comedy. It was advanced as a comedy and it was treated in that sort of a way … But it is a bit quirky, isn’t it. An upside down cake! I’ve always thought New Zealand was a country in which no-one ever quite knows the time, and I’ve always thought of Salvador Dali’s most famous painting, with a lot of limp wristwatches, draped over things as though they’re bent and they all tell different times. I wish that people would be more aware that they are living in a place which is so exquisitely delightful, because you never quite know what’s going to happen. Even the Round Table will turn upside down!¹⁴

Cookery Nook displayed a new level of technical expertise by its use of lip-synch and its clever montage of dolly shots which feature a cycling cavalry squad of schoolgirls riding to the rescue of the beleaguered male. Also, its playful humour implies a sense of freedom and a willingness to take risks that extends the scope of O’Shea’s film-making into new areas of stylisation.

Tony Williams and Michael Seresin

Late in 1959 O’Shea met two young men, Tony Williams and Michael Seresin. They had, at separate times turned up at Pacific Films expressing an interest in the process of film-making at a time when young New Zealanders tended to regard this as a frivolous or unrealistic career choice. O’Shea recalled that as an occupation it was

generally regarded in its local form as valueless — “it didn’t really add up to a tin of beans, but it provided interest for … young men like Tony [who] were tremendously interested in recording and photography.”¹⁵ O’Shea knew Tony’s father Ulrik, who was “a senior officer in the broadcasting service and a well known programme maker.”¹⁶ In response to his son’s increasing interest in media production, Ulrik Williams approached O’Shea, and said, “God, what am I going to do with this kid?”¹⁷ O’Shea replied: “He can work for us if you like, I’ll take him on as a junior.”¹⁸ Knowing his father was only part of the reason for the young man being hired, for O’Shea was adamant that “I never just take people on. I’ve always got to trust them, even Michael Seresin. He was a young man who had a look in his eyes.”¹⁹ As Seresin recalled, “You were hired because John liked you personally, secondly because you were enthusiastic about films and working.”²⁰ Seresin also remembered that “we had to do everything … now the film industry is one of the most stratified in the world … but we did everything then. You were like the tea boy, the cleaner, the grip, the secretary, and the assistant editor.”²¹ In O’Shea’s words

Pacific became a sort of alfresco film school. Tony Williams made a very teenage film on our Bolex. Then a year or so later, Tony and Michael Seresin worked together on a film in Noumea – they were both about 20 years old – it was quite respectable – *Noumea is Noumea* … And [in 1963] when Tony was 21, appropriately for his age, he made a very avant-garde offering, with Robin Maconie doing the music, called *The Sound of Seeing*.²²

Short as it was, the film represented an important departure from the narrative or educational styles of documentary that continued to dominate New Zealand film-making. *The Sound of Seeing* has been described by Roger Horrocks as having “a rapid, cryptic style that was truly startling in its day. The film followed ‘a painter’ and ‘a composer’ wandering around the North Island. Ignoring tourist attractions, the two artists searched for unusual sounds and visual patterns. As they put sounds and images together, the audience could follow the process through various montage sequences.”²³ In other words, “all this was presented rather than explained, with lots of striking images and music but no dialogue or commentary. In a spirit of experimentation Williams had gone back to basics – to the sights and sounds of the local environment and the ‘eyes and ears’ of the film medium.”²⁴ The film also set an

important precedent by being “accepted as the first independent film to screen on New Zealand television. *The Sound of Seeing* drew complaints about its lack of clear story line, yet some viewers recognised it as a manifesto for a new kind of local film making”²⁵ thus making an important contribution to the development of an indigenous film culture.

O’Shea was responsive to this kind of experiment because he had kept up with the latest European styles brought to New Zealand by the film society movement or by the first local “art house” cinemas. He was interested in the work of directors such as Bresson, Fellini, Resnais, Godard and Antonioni. The camera work as well as the symbolic rather than realist styles of this new wave of European directors greatly appealed to him. While the demands of the marketplace required Pacific Film productions to concentrate on topics such as road safety, travel and All Black test matches, filmed in a straight-forward way, O’Shea became determined to experiment with the new styles in his next feature film. Like many post-war intellectuals, O’Shea was drawn to the European films by their underlying seriousness, their formal and stylistic adventurousness, and their critique of social conformity and mediocrity. In contrast, most Hollywood films seemed stuck in a conservative state of mind in the wake of McCarthyism, and stylistically they tended to conform to a familiar studio approach. The European New Wave did not confine themselves to neo-realism but they did follow the Italians’ preference for filming on location (rather than in the studio) and finding innovative solutions to lack of budget and limited equipment.

O’Shea was still actively involved with the Wellington Film Society. In May 1963 he had been part of a panel at a Film Society Discussion Group (attended by between 50 and 60 people) which viewed and then discussed the French film *Last Year in Marienbad*. O’Shea was reported as saying that, “he found little that was new in terms of cinematic techniques although he did indicate that he thought that the film represented an emphasis on ever sharper cutting in the editing room.”²⁶ (The film contained many starting juxtapositions and apparent discontinuities). O’Shea’s next comment was particularly interesting: “that the symbolic aspects of the film were consciously intended by the film-maker to be, not incoherent, but incomplete in the sense that their implications for the viewer would depend on what he was able to bring into the cinema with him in the way of experience and knowledge.”²⁷ In other

words, the structure, theme and plot of *Marienbad* could be interpreted by different viewers in terms of their own knowledge of the world, and that the film-maker was entitled to make films for active, thoughtful viewers. These ideas obviously had a special relevance to the New Zealand situation – for on the one hand, New Zealanders would bring their own local knowledge to the viewing of a New Zealand film, but on the other hand they seemed generally reluctant to do the kind of work that a European art film required.

There appears to have been some misunderstanding as to the meaning of O’Shea’s comments. In the July 1963 issue of *Sequence*, he wrote to the editor:

[I would] like to apologise to those present at the recent discussion of *Last Year in Marienbad* for so ineptly paraphrasing my remarks that they were interpreted by Mr Downey [P. J. Downey, President of the Wellington Film Society] as an agreement that “the film was not a complete success”. As I recall, the phrase I used was “in a certain sense Resnais had failed”, going on to say that this was because film-going habits round the world do not in general extend to seeing films more than once. In my mind Resnais’ film has an intellectual opacity which many people, including myself, could not penetrate in a single viewing.²⁸

O’Shea defended Resnais’ right to create a multi-layered work of art. His letter went on to draw an interesting comparison with literature (particularly relevant because *Marienbad* was the product of a collaboration between Resnais and the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet).

We do not expect great literature to reveal its full richness the first time we hear it read to us. In fact our schools analyse and prod many great literary works so remorselessly that they sometimes lose their emotional impact in the process of intellectual comprehension. Yet, because *Hamlet* deserves our closer study to reveal its many facets, one does not say it is “not a complete success.”²⁹

O’Shea insisted that viewers had a responsibility to meet the film-maker half way:

My reference to “failure” was intended figuratively. It related more to audiences who, puzzled by *Marienbad*, failed to break their film going habits by seeing it again. The same familiarity we extend to other works of art – paintings, literature, music – should surely not be denied to those few films whose wealth of meaning and capacity to elicit a response at intellectual and emotional levels cannot be grasped in the tumult of screening.³⁰

Downey replied briefly to O’Shea, apologising in turn for “unintentionally misrepresenting him.”³¹ Accepting the accuracy of O’Shea’s comments, he concluded that “understanding a discussion depends as much on the expectations of the audience as viewing *Marienbad* itself does.”³²

The discussion and brief correspondence generated from the *Marienbad* viewing provides an intriguing insight into O’Shea’s perception of the art-house film. Earning his living as a film-maker in New Zealand, the majority of his productions were training films and news footage, where the intentions had to be crystal clear to a broad cross-section of viewing audiences. Although he had been able to include some innovative and creative elements in some productions, the basic demands of his clients had to be met. Yet he still refused to see film-making only in market or audience terms. A film could be successful in artistic terms even if it was a failure at the box office. These issues held a special resonance for a New Zealand film-maker in the 1960s, and were not at all the truisms that they might have seemed in some European contexts. There is also the implication that O’Shea yearned to have the opportunity to direct such a film himself. By now he was recognised by Film Society members and others in the artistic and intellectual community as being a person whose film-making experiences enabled him “to reveal the secrets of how it was done.”³³ Yet, as a man of considerable intellect and creativity, who had acquired a growing expertise in the craft of film production, he wanted to prove to himself and others that he was capable of producing a film that, as well as being entertaining, could also be multi-layered and intellectually challenging. Yet, the problem of “the expectations of the audience” (in Downey’s phrase) would return to haunt such an undertaking.

Think About Tomorrow

In 1960, six years after *Cookery Nook*, O’Shea wrote and directed a 20 minute production *Think About Tomorrow* to mark the Centenary of Westland (on which Tony Williams worked as a sound recordist). Set primarily in Hokitika, the film was important as an indication of O’Shea’s developing skills as a film-maker. *Think About Tomorrow* was a dramatised documentary but, in several scenes, the dialogue was synched with the actor’s lips. As O’Shea recalled, the sound was not recorded on the set but in the studio in post-production. Although, at times, the synchronisation was less than accurate, it showed O’Shea’s determination to master this problem. *Think About Tomorrow* was a Pacific Films production, sponsored by Feltex Carpets. The celebration of the West Coast Centenary had created great enthusiasm among the local population, who had gone to considerable lengths to produce costumes and had re-created a “Canvas City”. It provided O’Shea with an excellent opportunity to extend his skills in directing drama without having to incur major expense in terms of actors, costumes and sets. Pacific Films was able to shoot a recreation of events within the local environment with the assistance of plenty of willing extras who were able to provide their own costumes.

The film covered a broad spectrum. Commencing in contemporary Hokitika, through the eyes of Arthur Benjamin, one of its senior citizens, it flashes back to the early days, depicting scenes of gold mining and sand mining on the West Coast beaches. Although the early section had a documentary style, the introduction of the fictional character Tim Shanahan, an Irish gold prospector (played by actor Harry Lavington) provided O’Shea with the opportunity to dramatise some sequences. For example Shanahan, after being shown prospecting for gold, arrives at the Bank of New Zealand in Canvas Town where a banker is seen leaning against a doorway. The banker acknowledges the miner in a mimed sequence, with voice over, but, as they both enter the premises, the sound of the miner’s heavy boots are heard. The transaction between the two is then mimed with no attempt at sync or atmospheric sound.

In a later scene the newly-wealthy miner is shown encountering a long-limbed bar girl outside the Cafe de Venice. In a simple lip-synched sequence, a conversation, albeit one sided, takes place in which the miner compliments the girl with, “A fine looking young Colleen y’are. Does my heart good to be seeing you”. He then invites her

inside a seedy establishment. The interior sequence shows a variety of miners and bar girls dancing to a piano accordion. The sound of the instrument is mixed with the ebullient crowd noise. This serves as a background to two brief lip-synched interior scenes. Although the synch sound is inaccurate in places the scene is generally convincing. One of the best sequences shows a group of travellers assembling outside the Longford Hotel and boarding a horse drawn stage coach. The stage coach, the actors' costumes and the building (which for the film had had its fire escape removed and a large lantern placed over the entrance) help to provide a convincing dramatisation, reinforced by an excellent soundtrack that contains overlapping snatches of dialogue as the passengers sort out their luggage, board the stagecoach, and shout their farewells. In a tracking shot, which includes horses' hooves and the jingling of the harness, the stagecoach then leaves the hotel to the farewell shouts of the onlookers. All the sound was recorded in a studio after the visuals had been shot.

The Weekly News, a widely read magazine, devoted a full page and eight photographs to *Think About Tomorrow*. Writer Alfred Flett, in an article written under the heading “A Film Makes History” had high praise for the film and its director: “I give Mr O’Shea every credit for his ingenuity. He has taken every legitimate shortcut and used every cinematic trick in story construction to make us believe it is possible to re-live history at the rate of five years a minute. He very nearly succeeds. And the fact that it doesn’t is not stated as adverse criticism.” Adding that “the most serious obstacle to the development of New Zealand’s talented motion picture industry is lack of money” Flett went on to comment that “*Think About Tomorrow* is an excellent example of what could be done in this country … if the money can be found. It is an intelligently made film, photographed in magnificent colour”.

Flett also surveyed the New Zealand “film industry” pointing out that “One of the studios is Government-owned and the other relies for its existence on commissioned work from commercial organisations This financial limitation means that both the National Film Unit and Pacific Films can only make short subjects which the exhibitors welcome as programme fillers but for which they are not prepared to pay very much money.” Flett considered that; “It’s a pity that the £1,000 spent here and the £1,200 spent there cannot be pooled till an appreciable sum accumulates … enough to permit our local producers, actors and technicians to make a feature film

worthy of top-billing in our cinemas and ... who knows? ... maybe in cinemas overseas." *Think About Tomorrow* had left him in no doubt that the talent to achieve such a goal already existed. "I saw enough craftsmanship in *Think About Tomorrow* to make me wish it had been financially possible for us to have seen this subject treated as a full-length feature by the same technicians and actors ... It is a breathless journey. What could have been an outstanding motion picture emerges as a very good programme filler." He concluded with a passionate appeal.

The question we've got to decide is whether we want a number of short subjects which with the best will in the world can show us only glimpses of our country and its people and its history, or fewer films in favour of bigger and better productions.

My vote is for "bigger and better" because it has been proved time and time again that we have writers, directors, actors and technicians to give us motion picture entertainment equal to much that comes out of Hollywood or Pinewood.

And who will deny after seeing *Think About Tomorrow* that we have the raw material of exciting entertainment right on our doorstep.³⁴

O'Shea recalled that he and the crew of *Think About Tomorrow* had invested a considerable amount of energy in "playing around with sound [as] it was quite a huge thing for us to do."³⁵ Those who worked on the film included Richard Campion (the well-known theatre director), Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Williams (sound recording) and Harry Livingston (actor). O'Shea was grateful for the enthusiasm of Westland's citizens who had re-constructed a gold rush town, and demonstrated their skills in using traditional equipment in black sand and sluice gold mining. But mindful of the sponsors, Mobil Oil and Feltex Carpets, O'Shea had to ensure that the film contained no controversial material. The voice-over which accompanied the final scenes (which included a daytime shot of the 4-lane Auckland Harbour Bridge almost totally devoid of traffic) emphasised the good fortune of young New Zealanders who lived in "a modern and prosperous nation."³⁶ Shots of an ambulance arriving at a hospital were accompanied by the comment that "the physical well being

of its citizens is a concern of the state which provides medical aid for all.”³⁷ Mainstream and conventional, with sentiments which echoed those found on many National Film Unit documentaries, *Think about Tomorrow* nevertheless reflected O’Shea’s admiration for Richard John Seddon as a prime minister who had seen “the need for legislation to provide care for the sick and the helpless, for old age benefits hospitals and clinics.”³⁸ Although not always at ease with state control of institutions such as the NFU, O’Shea believed in the state’s responsibility towards the welfare of its citizens, an aspect that emerged strongly in the latter part of the film. Nevertheless, one could imagine his impatience to make a film that questioned the more complacent assumptions of this “modern and prosperous nation”.

Food For Thought

O’Shea said of this period: “[I continued to] learn my craft and exercise myself in all sorts of skills. It was a matter of making a lot of documentaries, road safety and sporting films, with the aim of doing what I really wanted to do which was making the drama of Pakeha and the problems that faced New Zealand.”³⁹ As a nationalist O’Shea was very aware of current political problems. He recalled that at this time “Britain offered its last ‘gift’ to New Zealand, also something of a poisoned chalice – a revision of trade treaties that would limit entry for our little country’s surplus food ... We were about to be stranded in the South Pacific.”⁴⁰ As a result of his concern, in 1962 he made a documentary *Food for Thought* “on New Zealand’s opposition to Britain’s entry into the European Community. Many people knew we’d lose our markets and life in New Zealand would never be the same again.”⁴¹ *Food for Thought*, financed by the Meat Producers’ Board under the chairmanship of Sir John Ormond had a more specific purpose. As O’Shea recalled, “Sir John was staunchly in a favour of it; he said they needed to strengthen [Prime Minister] Holyoake’s spine because he was a spineless bastard and he needed to be encouraged to stand up to the British who were expert at processing people.”⁴² Using maps, charts and newsreel footage, the film provided a concise historical account of the trade relationship between New Zealand and Great Britain. It also included, using a vox pops technique, comments from a cross section of the local community which ranged from “Britain will always stick up for New Zealand” to “It’s bound to have a severe effect on us”. The strength of O’Shea’s personal feelings regarding the impending problem was represented in the quality of the research and the attention to detail. Sequences

which highlighted the contrasting methods of New Zealand and European agriculture and the difficulties of developing new markets, included footage shot in Europe, Canada, Japan and Singapore (shot under contract by crews in those countries).

The most notable aspect of *Food for Thought* was the innovative use of cartoons, which neatly summarised both the historical and current situations. O’Shea obviously saw that this technique would not only provide audiences with a clear understanding of complex issues, but could also entertain them. The subject also provided O’Shea with further ideas. As he recalled, “though the ominous plight facing the country was more the preoccupation of farmers than film-makers, it [would become] a springboard for the first feature film that had been made since 1952. *Runaway* was thematically related to the plight of Pakeha New Zealanders. As the ties with Britain were severed, each of them faced the probability of having to choose where their future lay.”⁴³

The expanding skills of the Pacific Films team were evident from the content and personnel involved in the production of two precursors to *Runaway*. Tony Williams, who was Producer’s Assistant on *Food for Thought*, had advanced to the role of director a year later in an innovative road safety film *Keep Them Waiting* (the script and production being undertaken by John O’Shea). This film made extensive use of innovative production techniques (including flashbacks, reversals, undercutting and cross-cutting) and local actors. The soundtrack featured local composer Robin Maconie’s music, which very effectively underscored the visual tension of sequences which built towards a major traffic accident. (In that same year, Maconie collaborated with Tony Williams in their avant-garde film *The Sound of Seeing* and it was his music that was to be featured two years later on *Runaway*.) As part of his crew, sharing the credits for Photography with Terry King, was Michael Seresin. The combined talents of Williams and Seresin were to be a vital factor in the visual quality of *Runaway*.

The arrival of television in 1960 and the decision the following year to screen commercials and short documentaries provided Pacific Films with sufficient revenue for O’Shea to contemplate another feature. *Broken Barrier* had, in the character of Tom Sullivan, echoed the “man alone” theme. O’Shea was toying with extending this concept and having developed the initial idea in 1952, had mooted it to a number of

his friends. As he recalled, “It was just before the War that the seminal work of Kiwi identity appeared. John Mulgan’s *Man Alone* was to provide a continuing theme for novels, plays and films. That, having survived the Great War and the Depression, there was something abstract and spiritual stirring among the sons and daughters of middle-class New Zealand could only be expected.”⁴⁴ It was his intention to embody these “abstract and spiritual stirrings”, in his next feature film.

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- ¹ Laurence Simmonds, "Scenes of Origin: The Genesis of John O'Shea's *Runaway*", *The Big Picture*, Issue 8, Autumn 1996, p13
- ² *Runaway Revisited*, soundtrack
- ³ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p26
- ⁴ Stephen Upston "Pacific Films: The Role of Eric Anderson", *The New Zealand Film Archive*, August 1962, p5
- ⁵ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p8
- ⁶ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1999, p15
- ⁷ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p29
- ⁸ Ibid
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ Ibid, p28
- ¹² *Five for Five: "A Centenary of Cinema Celebrations"*, New Zealand Film Commission, 1996
- ¹³ I saw the film for the second time at a public screening on 28 August 1996 (as part of the NZ Film Commission's "Five for Five Centenary of New Zealand Cinema" exhibition) with a male colleague whom I'd first met in the 1970s at Alternative Cinema, the Auckland Film-makers Co-operative. He described it as "wonderfully politically incorrect", a comment that was reinforced by the dark mutterings from various female patrons scattered about the theatre as they witnessed scenes of intermediate schoolgirls in spotless school uniforms learning how to correctly serve tea and cakes as part of their training as future wives and home makers. Other patrons laughed at the quaintness of scenes which showed Rangiora housewives on a factory visit dressed as replicas of their British counterparts in hats and gloves, and at the wonderful archival footage featuring radio icon Aunt Daisy in full flight describing the recipe for an upside down cake.
- ¹⁴ John O'Shea, interview, 22 August 1996.
- ¹⁵ John O'Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ¹⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁹ Ibid
- ²⁰ *Breaking Barriers*, Bryan Bruce Productions, "Work of Art" Television One, 27 June 1993
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² John O'Shea "A Charmed Life", p 26
- ²³ Roger Horrocks, "Alternatives: Experimental Film Making In New Zealand", *Film In Aotearoa New Zealand*, p57
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ Ibid
- ²⁶ *Sequence*, May 1963, p3
- ²⁷ Ibid, p4
- ²⁸ *Sequence*, July 1963, p5
- ²⁹ Ibid
- ³⁰ Ibid
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Ibid
- ³³ *Sequence*, June 1962
- ³⁴ *The Weekly News*, 29 November 1961
- ³⁵ John O'Shea, interview, 1 April 1998
- ³⁶ *Think About Tomorrow*, soundtrack
- ³⁷ Ibid
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ John O'Shea, interview, 8 March 1993
- ⁴⁰ John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You*, p18
- ⁴¹ Ibid
- ⁴² John O'Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ⁴³ John O'Shea, "A Charmed Life", p30
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, p15

Chapter 7: JOHN GRAHAM: SCRIPTWRITER

On 4 November 1962, John O’Shea received a letter from Betty Curnow (an artist and wife of writer Allen Curnow).¹ Betty had developed a friendship in Nelson with fellow nurse Cormie O’Shea during the time when her fiancée, John, was on active service in Europe. After the O’Shea marriage in 1946 the friendship continued. Betty Curnow knew of O’Shea’s ambition to make his second feature film on a New Zealand subject and had been impressed by the play *Lest We Resemble* by Auckland writer John Graham. “What is prompting this letter is that it is the first New Zealand play I have seen which to me (a public spirited New Zealander) could be a film or perhaps I should say there seems to be the essence of a film in it. There could be almost mostly outdoor shots except only one scene which is inside at night or evening.”²

Betty Curnow had already spoken to the author: “I mentioned this idea to John [Graham]. He was very enthusiastic at the idea and would I am sure be prepared to put in all the writing that would be necessary.”³ While not greatly impressed by the production of Graham’s play, she felt that “the play itself has plenty of tension and dramatic moments – also seemed to me to be ‘fair dinkum New Zealand’ in its urban sprawl situation and clash of generations without wisecracks or clever remarks for laughs and the New Zealand roughness not overplayed.”⁴ She concluded her summary by stating that the play had “no Maoris.”⁵ Presumably she had seen *Broken Barrier* and knew of O’Shea’s commitment to depicting New Zealand society the way he saw it which inevitably included aspects of Maoridom. As she recalled, “I thought there probably should have been Maoris in the play … Up here there were so many Maoris. In Christchurch there were none … I pointed out the weakness on that issue, especially from up here [in Auckland].”⁶ Emphasising her lack of knowledge regarding “film problems”, she concluded “this is only a seed dropped, whether on fertile ground or stony I have no means of knowing. Over to you.”⁷ Her letter put particularly strong emphasis on the New Zealandness of the project – Graham’s play was “fair dinkum New Zealand” and O’Shea had a track record of local commitment. Both the idea of creating a new national culture, and this letter from one “public spirited New Zealander to another” is typical of the sense of a collective project shared at this time by those writers and artists who had chosen to stay in New Zealand

and contend with its “roughness”. The country had poems, novels and paintings – and plays were emerging. Now films could be the next push.

Regardless of the absence of Maoris from the play, O’Shea responded enthusiastically less than a week later on 10 November 1962. “Thank you so much for your letter enclosing cuttings about John Graham’s play. Apart from your evident enthusiasm for it, I was interested in the theme as one with its roots really in New Zealand life – apart from the film-making advantages of its being set mainly in exterior locations.”⁸ O’Shea added: “your seed has certainly fallen on the ground. Whether the ground has enough fertility remains to be seen, Anyway I’d very much like to read the play and if I see any possibilities in it discuss it with John Graham … Could you perhaps ring John Graham for me and ask him to post it by air to [Pacific Films].”⁹

From the time of their first contact, O’Shea and Graham began a constant dialogue with each other through letters, phone calls and occasionally face to face meetings. Reconstructing the chronological development of their ideas is difficult today due to a number of factors. Firstly, both of them had the infuriating (for the researcher!) habit of simply heading their letters with the name of a day of the week rather than the full date. Consequently, establishing the chronology of their correspondence was particularly challenging. Furthermore, because their correspondence was supplemented with phone calls and meetings which were not minuted, inevitably there are gaps in the written record of script development. I have attempted to fill these gaps by extensively interviewing the two men, but both were in their mid – 70s when I began my research. Over the intervening years I have exchanged letters with both of them, had many discussions on the phone, and have met them on a number of occasions both socially and for the purpose of recording (on audio and videotape) formal interviews. Although they were mentally alert and enthusiastic participants in the research process, it was not easy for them to recall details of events that took place 30 years earlier. From the evidence it is clear they collaborated enthusiastically on the development of the initial *Runaway* concept through to a script outline, and finally a detailed screenplay which incorporated major and minor characters, actions and dialogue. This collaborative process, took place over a fourteen month period prior to the commencement of the filming of *Runaway*.

O’Shea had been previously endeavouring to write a screenplay from James K. Baxter’s *The Wide Open Cage*. As he subsequently explained in a letter to John Graham:

[I got it to a] workable state, but then became beset by many misgivings. Sources of finance found it a bit far out with its emphasis on alcohol, copulation and Catholicism. Though I liked it myself, and would have been prepared to go ahead with it, it wasn’t so good in my eyes that it warranted the sacrifice of all we have built up to get it produced. I fear that is the consequence of producing a feature – I’d have to gamble all of Pacific Films on it ... and feature film selling is a dicey business, as you’re faced with an immediate fact that production costs CANNOT be recovered in the home market.¹⁰

Baxter was a logical choice as a key figure in the national literary movement, who had turned to writing plays. However his work – like much of the other ambitious writing of the period – was dark and angry in its portrayal of a complacent New Zealand society. The difference between the thousand or so readers or attendees of a Baxter play and the hundreds of thousands of viewers (ideally, millions world wide) required by the expensive medium of film was going to be a very difficult gap to bridge. Furthermore O’Shea didn’t feel fully engaged by *The Wide Open Cage*. “I was never that happy with it. Although Jim [James K Baxter] knew I was doing it and said ‘OK’, it was very encroaching on people’s lives, and I don’t think art should encroach on people’s lives. I don’t really care for that.”¹¹ Thus the scene was set for a significant collaboration between O’Shea and Graham who, although eager to work together, had yet to actually meet. The indications were, however, promising. They were of a similar age with a keen interest in the arts and literature and held similar views on post-war New Zealand society.

Since many details of Graham’s background and previous writing are relevant to the *Runaway* project, I shall discuss them in some detail before returning to his work with O’Shea. John Graham had been born in Timaru in 1922 where he completed his primary education and then at Christchurch West High School. At an early age he became interested in radio technology and during World War II he was seconded from

the New Zealand Army to the Ministry of Supply, being sent to Japan with the J Force troops in 1946. At the end of his military service, Graham returned to New Zealand for about a month and then travelled to England where he worked as manager and producer at Letchworth Repertory. From there he spent a period in Paris “mixing in literary and artistic circles with friends of Valéry, Rilke and Eluard. [He recalled that] the shock was enormous, to come off the tussocks of New Zealand and step into the centre of a circle of sophistication and learning.”¹² From Paris he returned to England where he studied art at the London School of Art and extended his knowledge of radio technology by working as a television and electronics technician. He came back to New Zealand in 1951, motivated “by a desire to return home as [he] didn’t identify with the English class system at all.”¹³ As he recalled, “Looming behind this decision to return was the spectre of remaining an expatriate and being tied to a God-awful existence on a lower-runged segment of English society. I could see no future for my family in remaining in a country that was becoming increasingly hostile to my expectations.”¹⁴ Employment as a technician enabled him to earn a living while continuing to write for small local and overseas publications. Although he began at a time when increasing numbers of writers were turning to New Zealand subjects and characters for their material, he recalled:

I never regarded myself as any part of a “Nationalist” movement. There was no coterie of writers to which I may have belonged. I would have been more of the Mulgan stamp as a “man alone”. There were friends who were writers and artists, and I often socialised with them. There was no sitting round a table talking literary theory. There was living to be done. There was wine to drink and crops of potatoes to be sown. I think I might be regarded as something of a primitive in respect of the esoteric.¹⁵

It is interesting that few of the writers today routinely described by critics as “nationalist” would have agreed with the label at that time – either they were too critical of the country, too sceptical of all “isms”, or too strongly individual to want to be part of a movement. In Graham’s case the denial of nationalism did not stop him from constantly addressing national problems in his writing. He was, however, also very involved with European issues. He had got to know the German-Jewish refugee poet Karl Wolfskehl, who had spent the wartime years in Auckland. Wolfskehl had,

before the rise of the Nazis, been highly regarded in his native Germany, earning the title of the ‘Zeus of Schwabing’ (Munich’s Montmartre), and praise as a “writer of legendary stature and powerful personality.”¹⁶ Graham had first learned of the poet’s 1938 arrival in New Zealand from Gerda Eichbaum a German-Jewish girl in a Wellington refrigeration warehouse where he was employed. On returning to Auckland in 1944, he met and developed a deep friendship with Wolfskehl. Graham recalled him as a “wonderful person, a man of enormous knowledge and a giant in our midst.”¹⁷ He described Wolfskehl as “a huge man with very splendid features, almost as if they were carved out of marble. We became close friends. He was the kind of father I would have loved to have had. He was my spiritual father without a doubt.”¹⁸ For Graham, who had left school early without gaining any formal qualifications, Wolfskehl provided a considerable intellectual stimulation. He recalled that the man’s “vast knowledge of literature and the arts was shared with me. His interest in many fields beyond his immediate work (he was writing a great deal at the time) was never cursory. Everything he saw and touched had significance for him.”¹⁹ Unfortunately the poet died in 1948 when Graham was in London. Subsequently Graham’s friendship with and writings about Wolfskehl aroused strong interest among intellectuals in Germany.

Although focusing in his own writing on local subjects, Graham closely identified with a number of overseas writers. “I read a lot in those days, mainly American writers of the 1930s. What they said of their time and place had a very real relevance to the New Zealand scene. Writers like Sherwood Anderson, Clifford Odets and Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe had something very poignant to say for me. The frontier-like structure of their America and the way it was described rang a bell within my own heart.”²⁰ Graham’s interests were closely in line with those of other writers such as Frank Sargeson who saw the American regionalists as providing a relevant model for New Zealand. At that time another poet, Kevin Ireland, was also living in Devonport. Graham recalled that Ireland suggested to Graham that he should meet Frank Sargeson. (Ireland and his friend Maurice Shadbolt had been introduced to Sargeson in 1956 by the writer Maurice Duggan.)

One afternoon we went to Esmonde Road. With bowed heads we made our way through a wild honey-suckled hedge and down a narrow path through a

garden of tomatoes, green peppers and potatoes to the back door of a small cottage.

Looking back on that first entrance and remembering many more later ones I see that hedge, smell its blossom, and again bow my head as I enter. To me, at this distance, that hedge stood as a symbol between that man it sheltered and the surrounding suburban respectability that he was never a part of. To enter his small domain and the world it contained, one needed to bow one's head in an act of obeisance.

On the wooden step at the back door was an old earthenware jug with a slip of paper under it. On it was written, "shopping, back soon."

Graham and Ireland waited.

[Shortly] a small man in shorts with an old army haversack came down the path. On his head was a pith helmet, the type worn by the British in their tropical colonies of long ago. We followed him into the cottage where he offered us each a glass of Lemora, a heavy sweet wine made from citrus fruit.

The interior of Sargeson's cottage²¹ contained "shelves of books that had spilled out to cover parts of the floor". Graham also noted a "painting of a seagull perched on a pile by Keith Patterson, one of a horrible garish dragon of a woman, one of James Baxter and sketches of others." As for the conversation:

I can't recall what we talked about that first meeting except to recall that Frank asked me many questions concerning my background and what I had done. I detected a hint of scorn when I mentioned that I was married with two children. He gave the impression that I had done the wrong thing in taking on the responsibilities of parenthood, although he never stated this directly. I was to learn much later his ambivalence towards the female sex.

Each man was sounding the other out. In Graham's words:

That first meeting was a cautious probing on his part and I believe now that something of his training as a solicitor determined his initial approach to people. There was an on-guard suspicion that may have had something to do with a calculated response to strangers. At the same time there was an almost brittle facile shrugging off of matters that didn't really interest him. [I became] a regular visitor and a friendship developed. I had had a few short stories published in various periodicals and these interested Frank. I do not recall that he expressed any great enthusiasm for anything I had written. He offered suggestions and pointed out variously where he thought I had gone wrong.²²

Graham's account is a vivid example of Sargeson's role during those years as a cautious but charismatic mentor of an emerging local literature. (Michael King's 1995 biography of Sargeson, *Frank Sargeson: A Life*, described many similar meetings, some less successful than Graham's.)

For all their personal differences Sargeson and Graham shared many similar experiences and attitudes. New Zealand in the 1950s was going through a period of post-war conformity when the nation was intent in creating internal stability and rebuilding a welfare state founded on a steadily rising national prosperity. This was still not an easy environment in which to be a writer. Granted, it seemed a huge step forward for the generation of New Zealanders who had survived a debilitating depression and a brutal war. The previous decades had disrupted their careers and left them with little in the way of material possessions. But now the arrival of peace and prosperity was accompanied by a widespread social conservatism. These were the "baby boom" years and it is understandable that the majority of the population, many of whom were taking on the responsibility of a young family, craved economic stability and suburban tranquillity. This valuing of material over cultural or spiritual values did not make things any easier for artists and mavericks like Sargeson and Graham.

Peter Perdue, a prominent post-war trade union leader pointed out that during the war New Zealand soldiers "had good clothing, good pay, a reasonable democratic sort of citizens' army ... [and] when they came back they wanted to reinforce that. What

they'd seen in Europe hadn't impressed them very much and they wanted New Zealand to be a place where they could have homes, education and jobs."²³ By the early 1950s, this had largely been achieved. As Ian Richards, Maurice Duggan's biographer, pointed out: "In a period of remarkable economic, political and cultural stability among Western nations, New Zealand was one of the most stable. Unemployment was not to rise above 1 percent over the next two decades."²⁴ When John A. Lee contrasted the 1950s with the previous decades, he highlighted the fact that "where workers walked seeking work, now employers, in page after advertisement page, plead to the reluctant for help."²⁵ Laurence Simmons stressed the simultaneous development of the consumer society: "As early as 1954 we can find a National Party electoral pamphlet boasting that 'People are spending more on consumer goods – and there are many more to buy' and pointing to increased petrol imports under the first National Government as an indication that a new dream was about to be realised."²⁶ As Michael King pointed out, there was a price that had to be paid for prosperity: "In the 1950s, the efforts to heal the social wounds of the war and the Depression that preceded it drew us into inflexible orthodoxies and stodginess."²⁷ On the whole, the country's citizens did not value open discussion of controversial matters; their cultural perspectives were narrow and their options limited; they tended to be intolerant of eccentricities and dissidents (and 'foreigners') in their minds. Daily newspapers and editorials reflected this illiberalism and further pressed their drab weight on public opinion."²⁸

This is the background against which Sargeson and Graham were writing – often with a strong sense of irony – about the developing country. It was an almost universal attitude among ambitious New Zealand writers to question the growth of post-war materialism and complacency. However, for many urban and rural New Zealanders who were raising families in the post-war years, adherence to traditional Christian and secular values was sufficient. For others, it was not. Dan Davin had already expressed this attitude strongly in his first novel *Cliffs of Fall* published in 1945. His chief character, Mark Baker, a university student discontented with his parents' beliefs, gives his opinion of them to his younger brother:

Our parents are able to work through their lives heartened by the belief that any questions life might raise the catechism could answer. For that reason and

precisely because of their ready acceptance of some such authority, their lives were happy. You and I asked the same questions. But we examined the answers. Our parents said: We must work hard for little because these are the stations to which God has called us. We say: God? Or was it Mammon?²⁹

Kevin Ireland, who grew up on the North Shore during the post-war era, recalled it as an era in which most people gave a high priority to security and conformity.

That meant not just economic security, although they had that at the time, they wanted a security of their beliefs ... There was great pressure in the 1950s (and people forgot this) towards conformity. There was a great pressure to do as everyone else did. You had a short back and sides haircut. Men of the older generation always wore a hat walking down Queen Street. I remember as a young man in 1951 I'd never walk up Queen Street without a tie on, and yet I would call myself pretty stroppy, pretty bolshie, by those standards - certainly not by today's - so there was an extraordinary Puritanism in the air. There was a terrific pressure towards conformity ... [On a global scale] you have to remember that in 1951 the Cold War was at its height. McCarthyism was at its height. There was a terrific persecution of the left by the right, throughout the Western world, and of course in the Eastern world the same thing was going on in reverse. It was a great era of intolerance, and intolerance ruled.³⁰

Later, writing about the 1951 waterfront strike in his novel *Blowing My Top*, Ireland used the Holland government's over-reaction as a classic example of 1950s conformity. Holland used the armed forces to confront the waterfront strikers, an action which was supported by all the major newspapers and the majority of the public. In a draconian move, he also introduced emergency regulations (under the powers conferred in the Public Safety Conservation Act 1932), which allowed the government to rule by decree and to totally ban access to the news media by the wharfies. Ireland commented:

It was a total suspension of our civil liberties. People forget this. In 1951 we lived in a totalitarian dictatorship run by Sid Holland ... He didn't even recall

Parliament for almost six months. He ruled totally without Parliament. There was no debate. There was no possibility of debate in the press because it was illegal to present the wharfies' case, and they did have a case. But there is an extraordinary thing; I remember going to a meeting of the Auckland University Association, where they called a full debate on the Emergency Regulations. You weren't allowed to debate the rights and wrongs of the wharfies' case, that was illegal. You could end up in Mt Eden cracking rocks if you tried to do that; that's exactly how far the Emergency Regulations went. [However] you could debate the Emergency Regulations so we had a meeting up there and I saw the pale Hitlerite hands of the students, the future brains of the country, going up to vote 9 to 1 in favour of the suspension of their civil liberties, and this is in a institution of learning. Inside ourselves we were a load of conformists frightened to hold our hands up for liberty. The resolution of the waterfront strike, and the defeat of the wharfies was greeted with general relief in the households of suburban New Zealand. Stability had been maintained and the curve of prosperity, temporarily interrupted, could now resume its upward progression.³¹

This conformity was to endure for the next decade and would provide the unspoken context for Graham and O'Shea's film, as it does for Sargeson's writing of the period.³²

Sargeson, even though he lived in suburbia, was in Graham's view a striking individualist. Michael King confirms this in his biography: "To most of the residents of Takapuna, where he lived for more than 50 years, he was simply an eccentric figure in a beret who lived through a hole in a monumentally untidy hedge in Esmonde Road."³³ Sargeson's uneasy relationship with suburban Takapuna is borne out by my own childhood memories. Born on the corner of Ewen St and Lake Rd I was raised in Cameron St, two blocks from Esmonde Rd where Sargeson lived. I vividly remember as a child walking along Lake Rd to Takapuna Primary School and seeing this rather strange bearded figure with a rucksack over his shoulder and a black beret on his head. Such clothes were out of place in the 1950s as Takapuna and its environs, even in the pre-harbour bridge days, were rapidly embracing the values of the rising, respectable middle classes. In Graham's words:

[Sargeson's] harking back to his experiences as a young man on his Uncle Oakely's farm supplied him with a vision to off-set the crudities that he witnessed about him in Takapuna; the 'go-getters', the prejudices of Puritanism and the sterile despair of the suburban world. Why he remained so long surrounded by what was largely anathema to him points up the strange dichotomy that existed in his nature. While he would often rant about the social fabric, a part of him respected it - almost fearing the consequences should he not do so. And there was the economic consideration. No. 14 Esmonde Road was his home long before the feed to the motorway passed his door. The cottage was his, and a small income from the state kept him alive. I don't think it would have been easier for him if he had gone elsewhere.³⁴

Graham's description of Takapuna as embodying "the sterile despair of the suburban world" reflects the fact that he shared Sargeson's ambivalence towards his surroundings. Less than a kilometre away, on the edge of Takapuna Beach was the Mason house where Bruce Mason spent his childhood. Mason's famous one-man theatrical work *The End Of The Golden Weather* (1962) contains many fond childhood memories of pre-war Takapuna, but as a whole the work also targets the inability of the community to understand difference. Though the memories were pre-war, the play had an implied relevance to post-war conformism..

Sargeson was going through a difficult time in this environment when he first met Graham. Graham recalled:

He had not written anything for some time, implying that he was finished as a writer and that there was nothing more he wanted to say. At that time I had leased about seventeen acres of old market garden and orchard in Birkdale where I was attempting to wrest a living from the soil. Frank visited me one day and was transported by the surroundings. He came the next day and for the next six months he would bus from Takapuna and spend the day working with me weeding and hoeing and adding another dimension to my life, and then bussing back to Esmonde Road at the end of the day.³⁵

Sargeson himself later spoke warmly of Graham's friendship, describing him as "J":

[a man] to whom I am much indebted for my survival during the difficult fifties. This was J, reddish-haired, appearing perhaps a little slight because he was so lean and tall, but an unimaginably strong and energetic man: it was an extraordinary excitement to discover that he too had been a friend of Karl Wolfskehl. J was renting a large area of former orchard land surrounded by suburban housing; yet with a good number of ancient fruit trees remaining, and all secluded within sheltering belts of trees. It was an idyllically beautiful place to find remaining in any suburb; and no more disposed to take kindly to the constrictions of the prevailing social pattern than I was, J was attempting to establish himself as a grower of strawberries and tomatoes (and if he succeeded there was the chance that his tenancy could be converted to freehold ownership). There was to live in, for the meantime, a farmhouse, much decayed, but with the convenience of water and electricity laid on; and among several old buildings of varied size and condition, an airy shed partially filled with old hay. Besides J and his wife there were three children and another soon to be born. But what was unusual and of momentous interest to myself was that J too had written plays, and had strong and exciting notions of converting one or other of the buildings on the property into something that would serve as a theatre; a place where he would present his own plays together with others by New Zealanders; work which, well-produced, might have the good fortune to be acknowledged as worthy contributions to home grown theatre so far to be found up and down the country only in patches: oases maybe, but parched – suffering abominably from financial drought. It was J's intention, or at least his hope, to make a small fortune out of bumper strawberry and tomato crops; then all resources would be put into one almighty attempt to get the theatre launched.³⁶

Graham seemed determined to realise his dream. As Sargeson recalled:

[I became] much infected by J's limitless devotion to his *idée fixe*, together with his clear recognition that nothing could be achieved without submitting to the imperative of hard work, that I became immediately ready to help to the limit of my resources (perhaps a little money, but more practically, my labour). For about three months I was not to be found cultivating my own

garden, nor for that matter attending except cursorily to affairs strictly my own. I wrote nothing, not even a letter, and household chores were neglected until all was a scene of squalor and chaos. Harry when he visited was alarmed and began to suppose I had gone mad. But the experience was a wonderful tonic. Before his growing adventure J had been engaged in a variety of occupations: formally trained as a school teacher, he was also very ready in everything that related to electronics – or for that matter the plainer laws of mechanics: provide him with a piece of wire (or even string), and there appeared to be no gadget which was supposed to go and didn't that he couldn't remedy. At almost any kind of job he was as rapid a worker with his hands as anyone I have ever seen ... But while he wrote another play all such matters of practical routine could suddenly without fuss be dropped, and usually for three days; for it was nothing unusual for one act to be written each day, an accomplishment which I saw as truly marvellous, since I had thought myself fortunate in writing two three-act plays within two years. Nor did such speed of composition prove necessarily a disadvantage; for some years later, and soon after the performance of my own plays, I assisted in the presentation of one of J's, which besides proving itself to be indubitably 'theatre' was afterwards presented successfully on radio.³⁷

Although the gardening was hard, Sargeson recalled that the setting "could not have been more delectable: for swimming there was the inner harbour only a few hundred yards away: within easy motoring distance (it needs no saying there was a car, a skeletal old-model that would go because J had seen to it that it would); [and] there was a Dalmatian wine-grower."³⁸ This wine-grower may well have provided some of the material for Graham's play *Lest We Resemble*.

Unfortunately, Graham's plans for a theatre came to nought and both he and Sargeson lost money on the venture. However, during that period there is no doubt that the two men had a positive influence on one another. Sargeson, due to his relative isolation, relied for much of his material on the visitors to his Takapuna residence. During his regular conversations with Sargeson over the years, Graham was often questioned in detail as to his life experiences and his attitudes towards issues of the day. As he recalled:

[Sargeson] would read me passages of the work he had been working on, and on many occasions I was surprised to hear inserted a phrase or idea that had been expressed during some previous conversation. I did not regard this use as being in any way an act of plagiarism. In fact I believe that I felt privileged to know that I was able to contribute something to his later work. My only regret is that some of what Frank used might have gone into my own work. But that is another story. He was a writer and he was vigilant enough to use whatever came his way in order to state his vision.³⁹

Two men who spent so much time conversing together over a long period are bound to influence one another. Graham's own comment was that "if anything, I don't believe F.S. influenced me as much as I may have influenced him. That doesn't mean that we didn't strike sparks off each other."⁴⁰

Lest We Resemble

The immediate post war years had seen few significant changes in Sargeson and Graham's North Shore community, isolated from the rest of Auckland by the harbour. (When Allen and Betty Curnow moved to Takapuna in 1950 they lived about a kilometre from Frank Sargeson's cottage in Esmonde Road, and Betty Curnow recalled the lack of transport. "We were living in Herbert Street which is down the bottom of Jutland Road; no car, buses, ferries and all that sort of thing, and I had a terrible job to get anywhere."⁴¹) Many of the inhabitants, for whom Takapuna had a tranquillity that was further enhanced by its beautiful beach would have taken issue with Graham and Sargeson's view of it as a place of "crudities", filled with the "prejudices of Puritanism". However, Graham, recalling the immediate post-war years, noted that: "There was a belief in most of people I knew, that now the war was over, life would be so different. They believed this with their hearts, not realising that the euphoric dream would need to have an awakening. The hangover was not long in coming."⁴² Graham's 1962 play *Lest We Resemble* explored themes such as the conflict of values and lack of meaningful communication between the generations, the identification with the land and the challenge of change; symbolised by the inroads which the bulldozers of the suburban developers were making into the tranquil vineyards of a Dalmatian family in Henderson. Graham recalled that, "Somewhere about this time Robin Dudding and Tony Stones, regular visitors to the [Birkdale]

farm, set up a small magazine called *Mate*, and I found my way into it with a few short stories. For me to be recognised in print and to have about me, my family and friends was reward enough for the long hours of labour in the field.”⁴³ Graham, as well as finding reward for his literary efforts had also developed an interest in the Dalmatian families that had established the Henderson vineyards. “I had bought an old Pontiac Roadster and a group of us would travel around the harbour to the Henderson vineyards where we had become quite well known to ‘a few of the winemakers’.”⁴⁴ It was during the period when Sargeson was working on his rented 17 acre Birkdale property, that Graham wrote the play *Lest We Resemble* (completing it in 1962). He recalled that “Frank was amazed at the white hot speed in which it was written; an act a night after a day in the field. Frank took the hand-written script home with him and returned the following day with a typescript that he had knocked out on his machine with the ‘wonky e’. I like to think that my excursion into the field of theatre played a part in his subsequent return to writing for during that period he was to write *A Time for Sowing* and *The Cradle and the Egg*.⁴⁵

Lest We Resemble was John Graham’s first play. It derived its title from the speech of Maori Chief Wiremu Kingi, to Governor Grey. “These lands will not be given up by us … lest we resemble the sea-birds which perch upon a rock: When the tide flows, the rock is covered by the sea and the birds take flight, for they have no resting place”. This quotation (which looks forward to *Runaway*) was incorporated in the play’s final sequence where, in a dream, Ivan Mirkusich, an elderly Dalmatian wine maker, agonised over the future of the Henderson vineyard which he has worked all his life to establish. Set in West Auckland in the early 1950s, the play explored the relationships between two generations of the Mirkusich family and their sharply differing perceptions of their circumstances, priorities, hopes and aspirations for the future. For Ivan Mirkusich, the father, the vineyard was the centre of his existence. After years of toil, it had become a prosperous business, and he could not understand why his son Tony did not share his constantly espoused values of hard work or his pride in the constant improvement of the vineyard and its level of productivity. Ivan, with his Dalmatian background, was a complex figure, but he typified the strong work ethic and material priorities of mainstream society. Tony and his sister, Zarka, while obviously respecting their father and his achievements, did not share his zealous devotion to the vineyard and sought to extend their horizons by widening their

experience of life. Zarka was engaged to a local young man, but was restless at the prospect of a marriage that would do little more than prolong her eternal suburban existence.

ZARKA: Always the grapes. Nothing but the grapes.

MARY: They give us our living.

ZARKA: And our prison ... All our fun has to wait until tomorrow, and when tomorrow comes it's still the same day. There's always something else. Another job that can't wait.⁴⁶

Later in the play, Zarka expanded on this theme as she faced her future as a suburban housewife. Her brother Tony shared her restlessness and had made a decision to travel to England.

TONY: I'm off to England ... Away at last ... I can do all the things I've ever wanted to do. Living here's been like living in a room without windows.

ZARKA: Will we be like them? Or will we, as Tony says, be locked in a box ... a grey box with concrete and hedges and a footpath, keeping us prisoner until it's over?⁴⁷

The father was unable to comprehend the restlessness of his children, particularly his son. He assumed that Tony would take over the running of the vineyard and be grateful for the opportunities that his father's unrelenting toil had provided for him. His friend Bill echoed his feelings and his sense of resentment that the young should have access to the good life without seeing the need to invest years of hard work.

BILL: Pity it is so easy for them these days. Get educated and have an easy life. No yacker. No worries.⁴⁸

Tony eventually decided to stay after his father suffered the humiliation of a jail term as the result of being tricked by two plain-clothed policemen into selling wine on a

Sunday. The traumatic events suffered by the family provided him with a purpose and a motivation in spite of the fact that his father had never taken him seriously and rejected any of his attempts to engage in a genuine dialogue.

IVAN: There is nothing to say. Now it is better to say nothing.

TONY: No-one's likely to get hurt that way. For the time being anyhow. Let's postpone the inevitable pain. Let's hide behind our nice comforting illusions.⁴⁹

Threads common to New Zealand literature are apparent. There are echoes of *Man Alone* and Bill Pearson's essay comments in "Fretful Sleepers". Graham in fact used the phrase directly in the latter part of the play:

TONY: My own dreams! Postpone them and clean up the mess. And let the fretful sleep go on.⁵⁰

The sense of the failure of the "New Zealand dream" was also apparent in Ivan's comment near the end:

IVAN: All the country is like sour wine, and I remember it was so good a long time ago. I remember the land it grow good grapes and I make good wine from them. But something has gone wrong with everything and I don't know what it is. And it could have been so good for our children.⁵¹

The personal and literary affinity which John Graham established with Frank Sargeson is also apparent in the *Lest We Resemble* script. One of Sargeson's best known short stories, "The Making Of A New Zealander" which received one of the prizes for literature created for the 1940 Centennial celebrations, dealt with a young Pakeha's encounter with Nick, a young Dalmatian who was attempting to perceive himself as a New Zealander.

Yes, I said, but you don't go back to Dalmatia.

Oh, no, he said, now I am a New Zealander ...

Nick and I were sitting on the hillside and Nick was saying he was a New Zealander, but he knew he wasn't a New Zealander. And he knew he wasn't a Dalmatian any more.

He knew he wasn't anything any more.⁵²

Stuart Murray has described this story as belonging “to a particular moment in New Zealand writing [being] a key interrogation of the concepts of settler identity and belonging. Its language is one of the first sustained attempts to capture the specific linguistic registers of New Zealand English in literary production.”⁵³

The styles of Sargeson and Graham have considerable similarities. Dan Davin, spoke of the “simplicity, the obvious authenticity with which Sargeson uses speech rhythms and the vernacular of the anonymous every-kiwi.”⁵⁴ Similarly, in his play, John Graham endeavoured to encapsulate everyday New Zealand speech in a way that was still novel for the New Zealand stage in the 1960s. For example:

BILL: But you've got something to be proud of alright. Look at me and that girl of mine. Gave her everything she wanted, and she turns up in the family way. Some bloody no good swine. It nearly killed the old girl that did. Made her take on the church.⁵⁵

As the play reaches a climax, Tony found a purpose to his life and decided to follow his father's lifelong dream of taking over and expanding the vineyard. But then, it was too late. Ironically, the disillusioned parent had already sold the land to housing developers. Tony was left to rage:

TONY: You think you have solved everything? You think by selling the farm you have done the right thing? You have let go everything that held us to the past, everything that meant something – a tradition – it's all gone. And you'll let the bastards rape it. Rape it until there's nothing left.⁵⁶

Graham's involvement in the "tiny intimate world"⁵⁷ of Auckland writers and artists enabled him to muster the resources to stage *Lest We Resemble*. Colin McCahon, Chris Cathcart and Frank Sargeson founded the New Independent Theatre in 1961, each contributing £20, and initially staging two of Sargeson's plays *A Time For Sowing* and *The Cradle And The Egg*. Encouraged by the positive reception given to both plays, the theatre group then agreed to support a production of *Lest We Resemble*. McCahon was curator of the Auckland City Art Gallery at the time and it was through him that they "wangled the gallery space and put together a cast and crew comprising friends and people who'd played a reasonable role in amateur theatre."⁵⁸ Directed by Chris Cathcart, *Lest We Resemble* ran for six nights, with Frank Sargeson acting as stage manager and "mentor for the production."⁵⁹ The lead role of Ivan Mirkusich (the Dalmatian father) was played by Lorenz Von Sommaruga (who as "Laurie Sommers" established a prosperous Auckland motorcycle franchise in the post-war years). Sommaruga had acted in a large number of plays as an amateur, but *Lest We Resemble*, he recalled, "was the only New Zealand play I ever did. I was really pleased with the part which was very satisfactory for me."⁶⁰



Plate 5: Lorenz van Sommaruga as Ivan Murkusich in *Lest We Resemble*

*Lest We Resemble*⁶¹ was part of an ambitious programme to launch what the *New Zealand Herald* called, the first of “an annual series of ‘little festivals’ at the Auckland City Art Gallery in conjunction with its annual exhibition of contemporary art which has been held at the Gallery in November of each year recently. The festival will hinge, of course, on the exhibition itself, which will comprise examples of contemporary New Zealand painting and sculpture, a survey of work throughout the country by both established and younger painters.”⁶²

With its high level of New Zealand content the festival provided a showcase for the kinds of work being done at that time. In addition to Graham’s play there were recitals of works by contemporary composers Ronald Tremain, David Farquhar and Douglas Lilburn. Lilburn’s work included a sonata, two songs based on poems by Ruth Dallas, and the *Sings Harry* song cycle on the poems of Denis Glover. Also included in the festival was a reading of the works of “younger poets – fresh, unfamiliar and often beating new trails in the New Zealand scene”⁶³ read by two of the actors from *Lest We Resemble*, Lorenz Von Sommaruga and Anna Soutar. Chris Cathcart, the play’s director, also gave “readings of prose and verse from early European times to the present day, including ‘a Maori history of racial conflict in New Zealand and other neglected but outspoken New Zealand literature’.”⁶⁴ Among the overseas work in the festival was Eugene O’Neill’s play *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* with the lead role of Mary Tyrone being played by Alma Woods (who was to play the owner of the boarding house on the Hokianga in *Runaway*). Finally, of particular note was the concluding event of the festival’s activities, which featured an evening screening of New Zealand films.⁶⁵ According to the *New Zealand Herald*, these were “selected from National Film Unit and private productions, intended to give an indication of the high standard of film making in this country – the Film Unit has, in fact, won over 70 international awards.”⁶⁶ Graham said of this first festival, “It was something out of its time. Although festivals of this type are common enough now, we didn’t have them then. It was much harder to arouse interest in anything indigenous thirty years ago.”⁶⁷

In 1952, writing from London for *Landfall*, New Zealander Bill Pearson had bemoaned (among other things) the lack of local drama. Concerned about the almost

automatic way in which New Zealanders turned to Britain and the U.S.A. for their frames of reference, Pearson remarked:

A play that presented without sentimentality the patterns of New Zealand life would possibly bore an English audience: A New Zealand small town would ‘tsk-tsk’ it off stage. Of course we are a cultural colony of Europe and always will be. The importation of unreality has been confirmed by popular fiction, films and one-act plays. No artist can work without an audience willing to co-operate: If he is honest his audience must be honest; they must be prepared to speculate about themselves. This is something New Zealanders will not do.⁶⁸

The cultural climate of New Zealand in 1962 had changed little in the decade since Pearson’s analysis (except that the nation was looking increasingly towards the U.S.A. for its popular cultural forms rather than Europe). Anna Soutar described her experience as one of the leading actors in *Lest We Resemble*: “The production of a New Zealand play was very unusual. It was hard to impress a hometown audience with a play unless it came straight from London’s West End. Therefore we staged it in a gallery as an exhibition piece, presented in the context of fine art rather than theatre.”⁶⁹ In the programme notes, Graham wrote “The material of my play has been taken from the world we live. It is a drama of conflicts that exist in a transient environment and as such will make its own statement. I have no anticipatory prelude to attach to it. The post-script will come from you, the audience.”⁷⁰ This programme note was a clear indication of Graham’s attitude towards the post-war New Zealand community. He implied that the experiences of the Dalmatian family were representative of New Zealand generally, its “conflicts” and “transient environment” and therefore urged the audience in terms reminiscent of Pearson’s essay to reflect upon themselves.

The *New Zealand Herald*’s review of the play was a cautious one. Under the heading “Vineyard Drama Does Not Quite Reach Maturity”, the reviewer noted that “Mr Graham set his dilemma forcefully and convincingly in a long first act”,⁷¹ but the second act was the one “which matters, and here one was left with the impression that Mr Graham had fired all his ammunition. The conflict was still unresolved, but there was insufficient development to carry the play along.”⁷²

Isobel Andrews⁷³ in her *New Zealand Listener* review offered qualified praise.

Lest We Resemble ... concerns the near-obsession of a Dalmatian father with his land and the consequent conflict between himself and his family ... Quiet moments are few ... There is little change of mood ... if, say the play had opened on a happier note, the quarrelling would not have tended to monotony and the general impact would have been stronger ... [Nevertheless] it is among the best plays I have seen depicting a recognisable New Zealand community ... and all honour must go to New Independent Theatre for its policy of giving New Zealand plays a “fair go”.⁷⁴

Peter Harcourt, a well known actor and theatrical commentator, writing 16 years later, supported her comments.

[Isobel Andrews] was right to pay tribute to the New Independent’s motives if not its achievements. Without that, there could be no advance in style or technique. The Sargeson plays were possibly too literary, the John Graham one lacked skill in construction and dramatic expression. But at least they were being *performed*, their authors could see them and watch reaction to them, gaining from an audience (as much a part of a play as the writer, the producer or the actors) an insight into how they could do better. The New Independent was one of the earliest examples in the sixties of the sense of nationalism which, without becoming too aggressive, played an ever-increasing part in the development of a New Zealand theatre.⁷⁵

As it turned out, Graham’s play would also play an important part in the development of a local film industry. On the basis of the reviews, one might conclude that the dramatist had much to offer O’Shea in terms of his ability to evoke a “fair dinkum New Zealand” and to write convincing dialogue, but that his skills in dramatic construction (or “development” to carry a story along) were not yet fully mature.

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- ¹ Appendix 1
- ² Betty Curnow, letter, 4, November 1962
- ³ Ibid
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ Betty Curnow, interview, 30 September 1994
- ⁷ Betty Curnow, letter, 4 November 1962
- ⁸ John O’Shea, letter, 10 November 1962
- ⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁰ Ibid
- ¹¹ John O’Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ¹² NZ Teen Scene, 18 February 1964
- ¹³ John Graham, interview, 14 September 2000
- ¹⁴ John Graham, *Letters to A Distant Cousin*, Dunedin, University of Otago, 2000, p83
- ¹⁵ John Graham, letter, 10 November 1994
- ¹⁶ New Zealand Listener, 8 August 1998, p46
- ¹⁷ John Graham, interview, 22 July 1998
- ¹⁸ New Zealand Listener, 8 August 1996, p47
- ¹⁹ John Graham, *Letters to A Distant Cousin*, p38
- ²⁰ John Graham, letter, 10 November 1994
- ²¹ Frank Sargeson’s cottage in Esmonde Road, Takapuna has been preserved in its original condition. Visitors may obtain a key from the Takapuna library.
- ²² John Graham, “Work in Progress”, 1993.
- ²³ Dean Parker, Francis Weavers, *Shattered Dreams*, Auckland, Trade Union History Project Video, 1990
- ²⁴ Ian Richards, *To Bed At Noon*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1997, p207
- ²⁵ John A. Lee, *Delinquent Days*, Auckland, Collins, 1967, p2
- ²⁶ Laurence Simmonds, “Don’t Let It Get You: Livin’ and Lovin’ in New Zealand’s First Film Musical”, *Music in New Zealand*, Spring 1994, p25
- ²⁷ Michael King, *Hidden Places*, Auckland, Sceptre, p195
- ²⁸ Ibid, p51
- ²⁹ Dan Davin, *Cliffs of Fall*, London, Nicholson & Watson, 1945, p36
- ³⁰ Kevin Ireland, interview, 2 May 1996
- ³¹ Ibid
- ³² Kneebone, one of the main characters in local writer Gordon Dryland’s novel *An Absence of Angels*, regarded himself as a non-conformist. Nevertheless, as he dressed for a university student party in the early 1960s, he described how “I took my jacket from the bed and stopped to straighten my tie before the mirror.” Gordon Dryland, *An Absence of Angels*, Auckland, Collins, 1965, p56
- ³³ Michael King, p140
- ³⁴ John Graham, “Work in Progress”, p2
- ³⁵ Ibid
- ³⁶ Frank Sargeson, *Sargeson*, Auckland, Penguin, 1981, p286
- ³⁷ Ibid, p287
- ³⁸ Ibid, p288
- ³⁹ John Graham, “Work In Progress”, p 5
- ⁴⁰ John Graham, letter, 2 March 1995
- ⁴¹ Betty Curnow, interview, 30 September 1994. As a 15 year old Takapuna Grammar schoolboy, I used to ride my bicycle to various local properties where I would earn a few shillings mowing lawns and cutting hedges. One of my regular clients, in Herbert Street, who reminded me of this when we met 40 years later, was Betty Curnow.
- ⁴² John Graham, *Letters to A Distant Cousin*, p42
- ⁴³ Ibid, p86
- ⁴⁴ Ibid
- ⁴⁵ John Graham, “Work in Progress”, p5
- ⁴⁶ John Graham, *Lest We Resemble*, Auckland, self published, p6-7
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, p20

⁴⁸ Ibid, p13

⁴⁹ Ibid, p50

⁵⁰ Ibid, p57

⁵¹ Ibid, p70

⁵² Frank Sargeson, "The Making Of A New Zealander", *New Zealand Short Stories*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1953, p258.

⁵³ Stuart Murray, *Never A Soul At Home*, p15

⁵⁴ Dan Davin, *New Zealand Short Stories*, p5

⁵⁵ John Graham, *Lest We Resemble*, p14

⁵⁶ Ibid, p68

⁵⁷ John Graham, interview, 9 October 1995

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Lorenz van Sommaruga, interview, 11 October 1995

⁶¹ Appendix 3

⁶² *New Zealand Herald*, circa November 1962

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in spite of extensive enquiries, I have been unable to identify the films' titles.

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ John Graham, interview, 9 October 1995

⁶⁸ Bill Pearson, "Fretful Sleepers", *Landfall* 1952, p212

⁶⁹ Anna Soutar, interview, 17 October 1995

⁷⁰ John Graham, "Programme Notes", *Lest We Resemble*, circa November 1962

⁷¹ *The New Zealand Herald*, 5 November 1962

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Isobel Andrews, writer, playwright and regular contributor to the *New Zealand Listener*, was the wife of Stanhope Andrews of the National Film Unit.

⁷⁴ Peter Harcourt, *A Dramatic Appearance*, Wellington, Methuen, 1978, p118

⁷⁵ Ibid, p119

Chapter 8: *RUNAWAY: THE SCRIPT TAKES SHAPE*

On receipt of John O’Shea’s response to her letter, Betty Curnow had suggested that John Graham send a copy of his play to O’Shea together with a covering letter. Graham, delighted at the thought that his play might become a film, replied promptly sending *Lest We Resemble*, a letter and “a few lines in haste to accompany the script”¹ in which he expanded the play’s original concept to a broader perspective. He commented:

At this stage, I would appreciate your comments, hence the early posting. I think it opens better and develops a stronger theme. However, you tell me. A lot of what I previously put down can follow, but expanded of course. I consider it now, as it has developed, as man against his cultural environment and this environment against the geographical background of the country. Running away because he can’t accept it … nor it him.²

30 years later, Graham was to write:

In a way I suppose it [the film] was a kind of epilogue to the play, in that a change in the order of society and its values was apparent to me and a few close friends, and that, that change was felt to be of such significance that it needed to be written about. But I think at the time the symptoms of change were not so much thought about as intuitively felt. There was a bewilderment, a groping for an understanding of what couldn’t adequately be expressed.³

In his original letter, he emphasised his willingness to get to work: “If you can give me your comments on the enclosed as soon as possible I can get to work on alterations and enlargements.”⁴ It appears that John O’Shea replied promptly (possibly by phone) and told Graham about his own “Runaway” idea. Graham’s script and talk of “running away” had evidently reminded him of the treatment he had written almost exactly a decade earlier.

Graham was initially uneasy, being confronted by a rather vague new idea that might replace his own already developed play. His next letter focused on the theme, as

though assessing whether or not it could serve as a container for what needed to be said:

I have been thinking over your idea “Runaway”. The more I think about it, the more intangible it becomes. To me at this stage too much comes forward and the theme becomes so diverse that I find almost the reverse side of the theme coming up and shouting ”what about this, what about me, have you forgotten this, are you going to ignore that?” and so on. Unless one generalised in a grand manner I feel at this stage that there is too much to try and grab hold of. But then perhaps such a film should generalise and that the “particular” theme I try to find in a run of ideas is to be ignored or at least not allowed to come too far forward.

He added:

I think your theme of “Runaway” should come through in this way: as an undertheme to a major, simple one. There is much of the Runaway in the Tony of my play which you have. This could be emphasised enormously in visual statements, but no doubt you have already seen this. Again the overall theme of the running away from the land by the old man could be amplified visually.

Initially Graham’s play had contained an old man as one of the key characters. While wanting his script to represent something like the concept of “man alone”, he also wanted to give it a fresh approach and to stress commitment to the land as the direct counterpoint to “running away”. The proposed film thus needed both a “theme” and a counter or “under theme”. “That is the way I feel your film could come to life. I don’t think you can take a typical situation of New Zealand life, say a sheep farmer and his family, a Maori off the marae, a bunch of footballers, and make a drama of it without resorting to fantastic clichés or great untruths. And neither will make the film you want.”⁵ In this process of “groping for an understanding of what couldn’t [yet] be adequately expressed,” Graham was proposing a complex approach, reminiscent of musical form and relying strongly on “visual attachments”. This was not going to be a simple, orthodox film.

It was, however, decided that the film would be focused on a key male character, initially called “Manny” but eventually changed to “David Manning” (perhaps a distant echo of “Everyman”). As John Graham recalled:

The character [of David Manning] was really taken from some of the adrift young people who essentially didn’t belong to the social mores as such ... Also a great deal of my own anarchy came into ... the writing of the character ... David is something of an anarchist in the way he turned his back on the social mores, and abandoned everything he was bred to believe in [and consequently] he was generally in a state of anarchy, rebellion.⁶

Despite Graham’s sympathy for the idea of commitment to the land, he clearly felt closer to the Tony of his play and the David of O’Shea’s story. This was, in a sense, his own generational experience. “I essentially ... felt much the way that he [David] did and I also wandered, in that respect, without all the drama that was visited upon him because of his actions. There was a sympathy with the character as he was created.”⁷ Gil Cornwall who was to play the part of businessman Tom Morton in *Runaway* confirmed Graham’s analysis: “John had definitely got a chip on his shoulder ... I don’t say it’s wrong, I’ve got one on mine too, but I haven’t lived my life to it. That shows he’s more honest than me.”⁸ Cornwall had known Graham in London in the late 1950s and, although returning independently had renewed his acquaintance back in New Zealand.

Graham, evidently felt that there were, by now, predictable New Zealand storylines, and his use of a Dalmatian family in *Lest We Resemble* had been an attempt to do something fresh. Although aware of the play’s shortcomings, he still hoped it might provide the basis for the film – he argued that “the theme was valid, and ... the situation was real enough to attract further attention.”⁹ The two men continued to discuss the concept under the working title *Born Under Capricorn*, but Graham was certainly increasingly drawn to O’Shea’s suggestion. “I don’t quite know where this is leading to, but if what I am trying to say is still unresolved it places me close to your own impasse with ‘Runaway’.”¹⁰ His letter closed with an enthusiastic comment on the title: “Looking at the title ‘Runaway’ I am envious, and wish that I had had the nous [sic] to use it instead of *Lest We Resemble*. It’s a winner!”¹¹

John O’Shea’s written response came a month later.

I agree with all you say about the theme of “Runaway” being evident in both Tony and his father. I am quite happy myself about what you call a “re-sale”, except that with this other title the material could perhaps be shaped more cogently to the underlying theme. I do agree that the Dalmatian theme is quite valid and don’t think I’m hopelessly set against it. Neither do I know quite where it is leading to, but with thoughts crawling in your mind perhaps we will be able to resolve the theme.¹²

What is clearly implied by such comments is the desire of both men not merely to create a strong story-line but to make a film which will in its themes encapsulate the contemporary New Zealand situation. This serious and ambitious intention helps to explain why the process of finally deciding upon the story line was so tentative and complex.

By this time a draft script, which included some characters, scenes, and basic guidelines for visuals and dialogue was beginning to take shape. Following a pattern which the two men had by this time established, Graham wrote the next draft and sent it to O’Shea for comment. O’Shea responded the same day he received it. “I think it is resolving more into the shape that will enable us to show what we want to show – as you say, a man against the cultural environment and this in turn against the country.”¹³ At this point O’Shea signalled his intention, somewhat obliquely, to give symbolic implications to the images without losing touch with realism: “The film moves away from symbols in every shot – that’s fine. It is as much a statement as anything else, and we can try to explore the statement and let it reveal its own symbols – especially as it’s set against a recognisable background.”¹⁴ O’Shea’s film-making experience is evident later in the letter when he emphasised in his guidelines, the need for the imagery to remain subtle: “I felt that my influence could have led you to being too explicit – so the first 12 pages are a pretty obvious statement in dialogue of themes that the visuals during the film should reveal.”¹⁵ Like Graham, O’Shea was keen to avoid clichés, be they local or imported. “Moreover, if you’ve seen the recent crop of British ‘kitchen sink’ dramas, you might feel as I do that this genre of revealing the harsh contours of decrepit urban life has run pretty thin.”¹⁶ Style as well

as theme of their film was taking shape slowly and cautiously as they continued to sound each other out. But by now O’Shea was starting to suggest specific scenes: “My immediate suggestion is that the film starts half way down p.13 – parked car, sandhills, Manny lying on his back etc. – at this point the titles can flow quite easily with the theme either stated musically or even sung.”¹⁷ (This is, in fact, how the film would begin.) O’Shea’s letter also enthused about the opening sequence of Michelangelo Antonioni’s film *L’Avventura*¹⁸ “masterful start [and] wonderful thematic state of discontent”¹⁹ and imagined an equivalent in terms of New Zealand contrasts.

I’m sure we can use the visuals of New Brighton beach – the sand hill, the jetty (is it still there), the empty ice cream cones, the fluttering waste paper, sea birds, patterns of wind blown sand and patterns of house tops, the proximity of the wild and the tamed – contrast all against the assured bewilderment of Manny.... (Thinks again). If it was Brighton, they could catch transport. No need to steal a car. Better one of the further out beaches – and car breaks down away from transport. No doubt that was your idea anyway. Actually any beach spot in New Zealand would provide that desiccated atmosphere.²⁰

At this stage Graham’s script incorporated the stealing of the car and Manning’s arrival at a remote part of Westland. O’Shea commented that, “Catapulting Manny into bush and Haast so soon after the start would be difficult, but if we can stretch out the visit of police as suggested, it should be OK.”²¹

Graham also sent O’Shea “the words for a theme song ... as a possible idea to give your composer friend.”²² Wiremu Kingi’s quotation used in *Lest We Resemble* was adapted by Graham to form the basis for the initial draft of the theme song for *Runaway*, designed to represent the main character’s restlessness and his search for personal peace .

Runaway birds with drifting wings
 Lift your wings above tide and sand
 And drift away, drift away bird.

Shifting, drifting with the tide,
Nowhere to hide.²³

O’Shea’s response was positive.

I do think you’ve got a pertinent and close image for New Zealand by identifying the Runaway with the birds. Again, by changing start, do you think sea birds are better than pigeons, which to me are tame and almost domesticated, usually associated with multiple drippings and back yard coops. If the song went like this, do you agree it takes away the personal identification:

Drifting, lifting wings
Winging with wind and tide from sky to sand.
I lift my eyes and drift with every lifting wing,
And I sing, and I sing...
Runaway birds with drifting wings.
Lift your wings above tide and sand
And drift away, drift away bird.
Shifting, drifting with the tide,
Nowhere to hide.
Runaway bird on Runaway wings,
On Runaway wings, Runaway.²⁴

It’s interesting to note that the seagull is a common symbol in New Zealand writing, an inevitability due to its numbers and the close proximity which all the country has to an extensive coastline. Post-war writers such as Dan Davin, Bruce Mason and C.K. Stead referred, in various ways, to the bird’s ability to fly free, symbolising the longings of land-locked humans. In Davin’s *Cliffs of Fall*, the young, angst-ridden student watched the gulls as they “flew straight and high, their disciplined arrowhead cleaving into the east and away from the falling sun.”²⁵ Mason used the gull’s flight and sound to comment on the luckless Firpo’s attempt to be a “made man” through athletic prowess in a race on the beach. “A woman stands watching the public mocking of the unfortunate figure. ‘Poor soul’, she says suddenly, turning to her

friends. ‘But they say people like that are very happy.’ A single gull wheels overhead with a long harsh cry.”²⁶ Again C.K. Stead’s 1964 short story *A Fitting Tribute*, described in its final stages a crowd of people watching a fantasy-like event in which a young man, Julian, having secured a pair of wings, flies free over the Hauraki Gulf. ‘He rose a little higher with each stroke of his wings ... I stood there with everyone else watching him get smaller and smaller until we were only catching flashes of colour and losing them again and finally there was nothing to see.’²⁷

At this stage, both O’Shea and Graham were at pains to maintain a harmonious working relationship. They both obviously wanted to comment honestly on each other’s ideas, while at the same time ensuring that their frankness was not hurtful to the originator. This tact is personified by one of O’Shea’s final paragraphs: “Let me know how much you welcome this type of comment and savage reshaping suggestions. Thanks for surprising me so soon”,²⁸ and echoed by Graham’s response. “Your ‘savage reshaping suggestions’ are exciting. I am glad that you have reacted to the rather ponderous opening sequences which I see now as unnecessary ... Sure; cut it, and begin where you suggest. It opens on action not build up.”²⁹

Graham’s next sentence is a revealing one, especially in the light of the final production.

The success of the film will depend on what can be implied as against that which could be overtly stated. All the goods must not be crammed into the window, there is a lot of space behind. And I think it is in this space and depth that we should explore for the little treasures. To this length I have considered scenes in which Manny is not directly connected which could say so much more than the well directed dialogue of conscious intent, or the actual telling of a story related to the main protagonists.³⁰

It is evident that both men wanted to make a film that ranged widely, rather than a straight forward narrative. For Graham, the construction of a film script was a new and challenging experience. As he recalled later, “I read through quite a few scripts. *Odd Man Out*³¹ was very good, a very fine piece of scriptwriting, and it gave me some kind of lead as to what was required ... One visualises the picture as one is working

on it and one sees it, either in black and white or in colour ... as you're working through it. It is an imaginative exercise.”³²

By 14 October 1963, Graham and O’Shea had produced a synopsis of the film which would serve as a basis for the development of key aspects such as settings, dialogue and camera work. In a letter accompanying the synopsis which O’Shea sent to Graham, he pointed out that “it is in the format of a usual film man’s synopsis, completely and purposely lacking in artistic flourish or moral penetration.”³³ He continued that “there is no reference to the ‘play’ [and] its very sparseness ... tends to the narrative line—and this is something that may be an advantage to you in writing dialogue.”³⁴ O’Shea then sought to clarify the basis of their collaboration.

You will notice that I have on the front page of the synopsis joined our names as co-authors of the screenplay. As I will be producing the film and, unless financing it forces an overseas man on me, directing it, I need to have your confidence that you will allow me revisionary rights when we actually start shooting. Where possible, these revisions will be referred to you for consideration.³⁵

Much was to hang on these understandings, though that would not become clear until much further down the track. The two men had obviously met in Auckland prior to the completion of the synopsis as, after some explanatory paragraphs on financing the film, O’Shea concluded with “thanks again for the bed.”³⁶

The four page synopsis, was written as a narrative.³⁷ There was no division into scenes and no reference to visual style. The two men had obviously decided to base the film around the character of David Manning. He was the runaway, and all the other characters and events were to be defined by his attitudes and responses. This gave a unified narrative thrust to the film. The story was to span the length of New Zealand, commencing in Auckland, moving to the Hokianga, then south to Hamilton, Wellington and Hokitika, then to the Franz Joseph Glacier where Manning would meet his fate. Manning’s initial reason for running away was only partly the result of his misdeeds. He was a young man who, as the result of “the expensive tastes of his girlfriend, Jan Bryant, manipulated an account in his office to keep up payments on

his sports car". Concerned at being found out, he asked his father for help but received scant sympathy. Similarly, his sister and brother-in-law, "an earnest schoolteacher", also refused to provide assistance. In desperation he confessed to his boss, but, "as he works in an accountant's office, mishandling of money is unforgivable". He was dismissed and obliged to repay the £120 which he had "borrowed".

The synopsis stressed that Manning, as well as wishing to run from the situation in which he found himself, also felt the urge to "escape from the atmosphere of city life" which he saw as the cause of his predicament. The implication is that he was disillusioned with a lifestyle in which hedonistic pursuits are unfulfilling and an insufficient compensation for the constraints of conformity. Hoping to escape from the city pressures, he headed north for Rawene, "a small predominantly Maori town" where he took a job as a Post Office linesman. Soon he became deeply attracted to Isobel, a young Maori woman and the sister of Joe Wharewera who befriended him. Isobel had lived in Auckland but she elected to return to her home and family. She kept Manning "at arm's length", sensing that his negative attitude to city life was more superficial than hers. In spite of her apparent indifference to his advances, Isobel's boyfriend, Tana Hohira, saw that she was attracted to Manning and resented it strongly.

The sexual complications were increased by the interest which a rich young woman, Laura Kenyon, showed in Manning. Seeking some excitement in her otherwise unfulfilling life, she "blatantly and vigorously ... attempts to bring him under her sexual control". Initially rejecting this local femme fatale, he eventually succumbed to her enticements when "Isobel rejects him finally and again urges him to reconcile himself with his city life". The scriptwriters, keen to maintain the theme of Manning's disillusionment with the city, emphasised his eventual rejection of Laura on the grounds that she "too much resembles Jan, the girl who started his troubles". Ultimately, her insensitivity and rudeness led him to "assault her violently."³⁸ He then panicked, stole Isobel's car, and headed south.

Elements of the "man alone" concept became increasingly evident at this point in the synopsis. Unlike John Mulgan's chief character Johnson, Manning was initially a

man escaping from a prosperous environment where, in spite of his illegal action in taking the money from his firm, he was not in serious trouble and he would have had little difficulty finding further employment. Now, however, he was a man on the run from the law, having compounded his assault on Laura by the theft of Isobel's car. Johnson headed on foot into remote bushland. Manning by contrast travelled in comparative comfort on the main highway. He had previously "confided [to Isobel] a shadowy dream he [had] of establishing himself as a person in the countryside he knew as a child, in the rugged mountains and fiords of the South." Thus his destination was motivated by not one but two factors, escape and romance; his need to get away from the law and his dream of finding fulfilment in the wilds of Westland. Abandoning the car in Hamilton, he caught a southward bound night train where he became depressed by the conversation of the Maori passengers who are "hopefully setting off for city life". At Taihape, noticing the police and the station master boarding the train, he made a run for it, stealing a suitcase of men's clothing from the platform. "Unable to sleep in a dingy boarding house in Taihape, he set off to hitchhike south."

At this point, the scriptwriters re-emphasised the negative side of contemporary, city-based society in the character of Tom Morton who picked up the hitchhiking Manning. "An aggressive and relentless businessman, Morton reiterates the moral persuasions of David's father, but in a cruder and more belligerent way". As a fugitive from justice, Manning's realisation that "he has cut himself off from the chances of success in this sort of world are ruthlessly borne in on [him] and they bear him down". Morton complained to Manning about having to drive to Wellington and across on the ferry to his wife in the South Island. To emphasise his negative mood, he purposefully "swerves the car to kill a small animal crossing the road. The excitement brings on [a heart] attack but he is unable to bring the car to a stop".

The script then returned briefly to Taihape where the boarding house-keeper went through the contents of the suitcase that Manning had left behind and found "a set of scoutmaster's clothes and the empty sheath of a scout knife."³⁹ This brief scene was presumably designed to serve several purposes. Firstly, it was likely to engender an unsympathetic attitude from the audience towards Manning. Stealing the suitcase of a scoutmaster (seen by many as the epitome of selfless respectability) would be

regarded as reprehensible. Furthermore, the boarding house-keeper would have alerted the authorities, thereby increasing the chances of the fugitive's capture; a fugitive who now had a knife.

The story returned to the quiet countryside where Manning "stands in abstracted and silent meditation". (Although the script does not state it, the implication was that Morton's heart attack was fatal.) Snapping out of his reverie, Manning got into the car, took the ferry tickets and money from the dead man's wallet which he flung into the bushes, and drove away. Driving without incident onto the car ferry, Manning relaxed on the deck. However as he gazed "absently over the side of the ship", momentarily in the swirling waters he saw "Tom Morton's contorted death mask".

While he was on the deck, Manning was smiled at by a woman who would turn out to be Jenny Morton, the dead man's daughter. Although they do not meet, the text explained that "when the ferry arrives at Picton, Jenny is waiting in her father's car when David goes below decks to drive it off". Somewhat lamely, the synopsis went on to explain that Manning "tells her that her father was not feeling well and asked him to drive it down to Christchurch to his wife". Presumably the writers were anticipating dialogue sequences that would add credibility to this rather unconvincing sequence.

During the drive to Christchurch, warmth and understanding developed between Manning and Jenny. Obviously she had no knowledge of her father's fate or of Manning's role in it. Although wary, he "manages to be charming to her". Obviously seeking to provide a contrast between the other three unsuccessful relationships that Manning has encountered, the script described Jenny positively, emphasising that she is not a younger replica of her father. "She has cast off her father's influence and formed her own attitudes. She is gentle and considerate, especially of others' weaknesses, but worldly enough to make the most of her father's wealth."

Jenny takes over the driving until they reach Christchurch. At some stage the writers envisaged a dialogue sequence in which Manning would confide in her a wish to reach Westland. Although sharing some of the characteristics of the classic "man alone", Manning also felt the need for female company. By now he is "desperately

needing to keep [Jenny] under his control [and] urges her to steal a day with him and her father's car and drive across the mountains". Rather surprisingly, she agreed and "they stay the night at a motel". Events, however, were closing in on Manning. In the morning papers "he reads that an unidentified body has been found – it won't be long now before the car is traced". The script at this point noted, in a rather guileless fashion (representing the mores of the early 1960s), that "the previous night [at the motel], exhaustion had overtaken him and Jenny has mistaken this as chivalry."⁴⁰ They continued westwards but she was concerned that her "mother will be wondering where she has got to" and began to become increasingly suspicious of her companion. Realising this, Manning hid the car in the deserted town of Dilmanstown and set off on foot, dragging Jenny until she became exhausted. Leaving her in a bush hut, he went to visit his sister in nearby Hokitika. She knew that he was wanted for car conversion which he admitted, failing to make any mention of Morton. Somewhat reluctantly, his brother-in-law agreed to give him a haversack, sleeping bags and some food.

At this point, the synopsis gave the runaway Manning a respite. He and Jenny, having "made their way further south into the mountains and fiords" are accepted by an old fossicker who "mistakes them for a young married couple". The script described the wilderness as having "an effect on both of them. David is more of a 'made' man. Within the narrow limits of the time he knows he has left, he comes to terms with life". A crucial event interrupted his false sense of security when "Jenny falls out of the dinghy when they are fishing". The writers, keen to show that Manning's tranquillity was temporary and superficial, explained that he hesitated before hauling her in as he is "frightened by the death mask of her father he again sees in the water". Envisaging a verbal addition to the visual depiction of his troubled state of mind, the writers described how Jenny subsequently "plumbs the fear that had momentarily transfixed David".

The pace of events increased. "A float plane that had collected whitebait from the old man returns with a ranger and a policeman." (The synopsis did not explain his motivation when he then points out Manning to the two officials.) Manning fled on foot. He was on the run again, "leaving Jenny behind". However, unlike the other women with whom he has had relationships, Jenny was not about to discard him.

Although having the option of returning home on the plane, “she follows him”. They reached the foot of a glacier where Manning tried to dissuade her from following him. She was not deterred and “goes with him up the glacier face”. The two pursuing officials were armed and fired at the fleeing pair. A bullet injured Jenny. Urged on by her, Manning continued his escape towards the Pass. When the ranger and policeman caught up to the injured young woman, the ranger told everyone that “the Pass is closed by an avalanche”. Manning, not aware of the danger, pushed on. The script concluded with him as “a minute figure surrounded by mountains and snow. Jenny’s call for him to come back is slowly drowned out by the sound of the cold winds that are whipping up the snow.”⁴¹

Elements of *Man Alone* were a key feature of the synopsis, particularly in the final stages where a young man, on the run from the authorities, headed into the New Zealand wilderness. In Johnson’s case, in order to “win free of the poisoned atmosphere which is bred by the New Zealand way of life, Johnson has to undergo the testing ordeal of survival in the bush – an ordeal that clears his sight and purifies his resolve.”⁴² In Manning’s case, although his New Zealand way of life was a prosperous one, events compounded his initial restlessness and he too was on the run. However, unlike Johnson, Manning’s “testing ordeal of survival” was not the bush but the pure atmosphere of the snow-capped mountains, where however, his survival was by no means certain.

The synopsis was to form the basic outline for the film *Runaway* and to incorporate many of its key elements. At this stage the two writers had decided on the name of the central character and the series of encounters which he would have with young women in a variety of settings. These encounters, the reaction of the women to him and he to them, would obviously be crucial in showing his unhappiness and apparent lack of discretion. The synopsis did, however, contain a number of potential weaknesses. The relationship with Isobel was superficial; she displayed interest in Manning yet “keeps him at arm’s length.”⁴³ He succumbed to Laura’s offer only when “Isobel rejects him finally.”⁴⁴ Having assaulted Laura he became aware “that he has transgressed the limits of the law and that Laura’s parents will set the law onto him.”⁴⁵ Yet he stole Isobel’s car. What was unclear was whether he took her car on impulse or as an act of petty vengeance for her rejection of him. Furthermore, it was

also unclear as to why he was rejected and what he hoped to gain from a relationship with Laura, or in fact what she hoped to gain from him. Obviously his relationship with Laura was dependent upon a deeper understanding of Isobel's attitude to him. These sequences, occurring relatively early in the story, would be pivotal to an audience's understanding of Manning and his motives. However, what was apparent from the synopsis is a lack of a firm *raison d'être* for Manning's behaviour. Was he striving for any particular goal? Did he want a bush-based lifestyle and, if so, why? Was he an angst-ridden young man caught in a web of circumstances beyond his control, or simply a wimp who was incapable of seizing and enjoying the advantages that life offered?

An unsympathetic observer would see this script as merely a collection of 60s clichés – the New Zealand mood of dissatisfaction with a shallow, materialistic society, combined with the cynical, aimless behaviour of the characters in European art movies. The writers' aim seemed to be to create a New Zealand equivalent of films like *Breathless* and *L'Avventura*. The narrative ingredients included an exciting chase, some unusual scenery, and a series of sexual relationships. But these ingredients seemed tacked together rather than linked by a clear central narrative and central character with an interesting personality and credible motivation. That is probably what a script assessment by a Hollywood scriptwriter would have concluded. At the same time, a more sympathetic reader might have seen the synopsis as a brave attempt to lead New Zealand cinema into new territory in terms of themes and emotions. The project was also courageous in its refusal to adopt a simpler, “more Hollywood” approach, or a story that would flatter national feelings of pride. The project was clearly aiming to be more adult, more critical, and more closely aligned with the “festival” or “art” film.

Emerging Problems

The synopsis was indicative of a problem which the correspondence and discussions between the two men had begun to reveal. At the early stages Graham had found the theme too diverse and that there was “too much to try and grab hold of.”⁴⁶ Although they had quickly agreed on the single word title, the concept of a runaway still encompassed an endless range of possibilities. Both had wanted to use Manning's story as a way to explore the theme of contemporary New Zealand but the synopsis

was unclear as to Manning's motives, as to whether his actions were merely spontaneous responses to his circumstances at the time or motivated by particular objectives. The film might, for example, have highlighted the blind complacency of mainstream New Zealand society. Manning's restlessness would then have been a positive quality, a recognition of the need for change; but his story would have demonstrated a fatal lack of foresight and inability to define his goal. Ultimately he made one bad decision after another, and was largely reactive rather than proactive (although the script could have changed this emphasis and shown him as unlucky rather than foolish). Also in the back of O'Shea's mind was the idea of providing the film with a second layer, an allegorical representation of New Zealand's increasingly perilous economic position as Britain prepared to join the European Common Market. Graham, discussing this years later, had no recollection of the allegorical idea ever being raised. It is curious that O'Shea did not discuss this aspect with Graham.

The synopsis was an interesting combination of many of the elements of *Lest We Resemble* and O'Shea's 1952 treatment. The theme of the generation gap came from Graham's play while the name and the settings of an amateur play rehearsal, a Westland deerstalker's hut and the ending on the face of a glacier, came directly from the treatment O'Shea had written a decade earlier. However, if the film was to be a success, more attention would need to be given not only to the weak links in the plot but also to its genre. The synopsis was unclear as to whether or not the film was a romance, a thriller, a drama or an avant-garde mood piece rich in symbolism. In the final analysis, the role of David Manning, the central character, was pivotal. He was in virtually every scene and the ultimate success of the film would depend on whether audiences were able to identify with him, to feel for his predicament and to care about what happened to him when he trudged off into the frozen wastes. O'Shea and Graham had made some major advances but there was obviously still much to be done.

During a visit to Auckland when O'Shea had stayed at Graham's home in Devonport, they had discussed a number of production aspects, including Graham's concept of a Shakespearean-style play which was to be used as a recurring motif to link the plot and the narrative together. But the synopsis contained no reference to the play. At the time O'Shea pointed out this absence to Graham but did not explain what lay

behind it. Presumably it was part of a general attempt to strip the narrative back to its basics. O’Shea did comment that the synopsis “does not contain all the sequences we discussed – though most of them. By its very sparseness, it tends to tighten the narrative – and this is something that may be an advantage to you in writing the dialogue.” A considerable responsibility was going to reside with Graham. He had been given a synopsis that still included a number of areas of weakness. O’Shea had signalled this by stating that the synopsis lacked artistic flourish and moral penetration.

As the two men continued to work on the script and began to formulate production plans, they appear not to have shared their ideas with anyone else. Nowadays the proposal and script would have been discussed by a range of people. The *Runaway* project would have been viewed as a commercial undertaking and potential investors would have commissioned assessments of its characters, narrative structure, style, budget, and commercial potential. But there was no industry infrastructure in those days, and for better or worse there were no experienced script assessors. Certainly it was important for Pacific Films to show a profit. However as O’Shea was going to be putting up most of the money he was ultimately answerable only to himself.

Nevertheless O’Shea did hope to find some investors. His letter of 15 October continued with an extensive explanation regarding “cash, that awful commodity”. He wrote: “I feel we should arrive at a satisfactory arrangement between ourselves and before others – accountants, lawyers, backers – enter the fray”. During his visit to Auckland, the subject of payment to Graham for his work had been discussed and O’Shea accepted “that you had no fixed idea of what your work might be worth, that you had reposed some trust in me and that you were open to any suggestion about what I considered a fair thing”. He added that his company would be responsible for the production of *Runaway* and that he was “on the staff of that company, and … its main (but not only) shareholder. Pacific Films Ltd will, I hope, be the repository for any finance I can rake up for the film and will employ artists, crew and equipment required for the production, other than what is available”. Reinforcing his desire to keep Graham fully informed, he acknowledged that “this is all business machinery and may be tedious to you, but I thought you’d like to know how it is all worked out”. Already concerned about the difficulties of raising finance for *Runaway*, he was

obviously keen to keep expenses to a minimum. His suggestion was “that we declare a value on the finished screenplay of £100 which we share equally. As Pacific Films is going to need every penny it can rake up to meet production costs (an estimated £15,000 – whew – how can I possibly raise it?), I would also suggest that payment of the fee or part of it be deferred. But as I am in a rather different relationship to the project to you, I feel that Pacific Films Ltd, as an earnest of good faith, should offer you a cash payment of £25 and only defer the balance”. Mindful of the rather modest sum that he was asking Graham to accept, O’Shea went on to suggest that “as co-author of the screenplay, I think we should accept the offer of £100 for the film rights to *Runaway*, but that we should stipulate a further payment of £200 (£100 each) in the event of profits being made from the overseas sale of the film”. Like all New Zealand feature film-makers, O’Shea was well aware that the country’s small population base made it almost impossible to recover costs in the home territory. As he pointed out to Graham, “You can take it from me that there is absolutely no hope of profits being made from the NZ screening of the film. I will be at my wit’s end to keep production costs down, and to recoup 2/3rds of them from NZ. But please keep these figures to yourself – definitely not for publication”. O’Shea concluded with the hope that the figures were agreeable to Graham so that he could “get some sort of letter prepared that we can both sign and put it on the files”. The letter ended with a final thought on the synopsis. “You’ll notice that I’ve made Joe Morton kill a ‘small animal’. It’ll have to be a hedgehog, because the scene takes place at dawn and there’s no possums seen in daylight.”

No doubt O’Shea signed and posted the letter with a feeling of satisfaction. In spite of the major financial hurdles which he had to face in order to realise his dream of a second feature film, he could feel confident that he had at least clarified the financial arrangements with his co-writer, ensuring that their relationship continued along its positive path. And the hedgehog? A minor matter which, “like a hundred other discrepancies we’ll find as we progress”⁴⁷ - hardly something likely to cause difficulty. Unfortunately, both issues – the cash and the hedgehog – were to assume major importance in the ensuing months.

By this stage the two men had decided to set part of the film in the Hokianga. The project proceeded steadily with mutually supportive phone calls as well as letters. For

example Graham passed on praise for one of O’Shea’s road safety films: “A friend saw it and thought very highly of it.”⁴⁸ Their next scripting discussion concerned the character of Isobel, the woman Manning was attracted to in Rawene. O’Shea commented, “I still think that as a dramatic interlude it is much tidier, and the event that occurs more logically is Isobel working at the boarding house. I know that lowers her status but I think she could be acted to achieve the dignity required of her part. After all she doesn’t leave Rawene.”⁴⁹ The writers had previously considered having her working in the local post office. In agreeing to the change, Graham revealed the strong emotional link he felt with the characters: “I confess I became rather involved with her as a person during the writing; I feel something of a loss to have left her behind. It occurs to me if she did work in the Post Office David would have practically no access to her – after all he has cut himself off from communication with the outer world.”⁵⁰ In the same letter Graham agreed to accept the financial arrangements proposed earlier by O’Shea. They had already made a verbal agreement and Graham concluded his letter, “I don’t think there’s any more to add except to reiterate my answer to your question over the phone re payment, I am quite happy to accept your offer … I am afraid all the other sordid details of business machinery etc. must fall to you. It seems I cannot help there.”⁵¹ At this stage the financial arrangements had been settled amicably between the two men and they were able to concentrate on the script development.

The next character that David Manning was to meet was one called “Jenny”. There was to be no “Jenny” in the final script but at this stage John Graham imagined a first encounter that was not “too prosaically explicit”, a “chance meeting” In which “Much is left unsaid.”⁵² Graham was obviously thinking visually and demonstrated his insight into film technique when he suggested that all “the tedious preliminaries can be covered, I think, by a series of short pointed visuals After all [David and Jenny] do readily accept each other. At least that’s the way they must behave for us.”⁵³ This letter was written on 29 October 1963 by which time another draft had been exchanged and the final script was well on the way to completion. Graham remarked, “The amount of paper that is accumulating in my file becomes more impressive every day.”⁵⁴ In the same letter, Graham emphasised his desire to keep developing his understanding of the film medium: “[I have] just read the *Time* article on the Religion of the Film. I think I will have to become cinematate [sic]. I’m not

doing badly for a primitive, having seen over half of the films mentioned.”⁵⁵ The difficulties of distance were obviously felt by both men, particularly as the final details of the script began to take shape. Graham suggested that after the “motel scene”⁵⁶ (presumably the one in the South Island) the pace of the film should increase, but he wanted an opinion from O’Shea. “It’s a pity I couldn’t arrive on your doorstep occasionally for a conference. However I think that things are progressing rather well.”⁵⁷ Graham was right. At this stage they were.

¹ John Graham, letter, circa January 1963

² Ibid

³ John Graham, letter, 10 November 1994

⁴ John Graham, letter, circa January 1963

⁵ John Graham, letter, circa February 1963

⁶ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Gil Cornwall, interview, 15 August 1997

⁹ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997

¹⁰ John Graham, letter, circa Jan 1963

¹¹ Ibid

¹² John O’Shea, letter, 13 February 1963

¹³ John O’Shea, letter, circa March 1963

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ The opening scene of Antonioni’s film is set in a bleak urban building site framed by featureless apartment buildings. Two men, the developer and a construction worker, are discussing the project. The former comments that, “We’ll soon be crowded out. To think this was all woods. It’ll all be houses. I suppose it’s inevitable.” His daughter’s arrival results in a desultory dialogue sequence where the inability of either of them to communicate is enhanced by the camera which emphasises the physical distance between them. Their conversation suggests that there are unresolved issues between them that have been exhaustively and unsuccessfully discussed. The father is a successful businessman, his daughter well dressed. In spite of their prosperity, their lives are unfulfilling and as bleak as the landscape in which their conversation takes place.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² John Graham, letter, circa December 1962

²³ Ibid

²⁴ John O’Shea, letter, circa March 1963

²⁵ Dan Davin, *Cliffs of Fall*, p70

²⁶ Bruce Mason, *The End of the Golden Weather*, Wellington, Price Milburn & Victoria University Press, 1970, p37

²⁷ C.K. Stead, *A Fitting Tribute*, Longman Paul, Auckland, 1981, p62

²⁸ John O’Shea, letter, circa March 1963

²⁹ John Graham, letter, circa April 1963

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ This 1947 film was set in the back alleys of Belfast where the police are hunting Johnny McQueen, a wounded leader of a clandestine IRA group. Like Reed’s 1949 film *The Third Man* (billed as “Hunted by Man, Sought by Women!”) that also featured a man on the run through the sewers of post-war Vienna, the moral issues are blurred as the characters are befriended and betrayed.

³² John Graham, letter, 24 July 1997

³³ John O’Shea, letter, 14 October 1963

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Appendix 5

³⁸ John Graham, and John O’Shea, “Runaway: Synopsis”, circa October 1963, p1

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Paul Day, *John Mulgan*, Wellington, Oxford University Press, 1997, p23

⁴³ John Graham, John O’Shea, p4

⁴⁴ Ibid

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- ⁴⁵ Ibid
- ⁴⁶ John Graham, letter, circa November 1962
- ⁴⁷ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997
- ⁴⁸ John Graham, letter, circa September 1963
- ⁴⁹ John Graham, letter, 22 October 1963
- ⁵⁰ Ibid
- ⁵¹ Ibid
- ⁵² John Graham, letter, 29 October 1963
- ⁵³ Ibid
- ⁵⁴ Ibid
- ⁵⁵ Ibid
- ⁵⁶ Ibid
- ⁵⁷ Ibid

Chapter 9: *RUNAWAY: THE FINAL SCRIPT (I)*

The script that O’Shea would use in the film’s production was completed in February 1964 under the title “*Runaway*, Screenplay by John Graham and John O’Shea”. It included scene settings, dialogue, indications as to the mood of the scenes and actors and, occasionally, directions as to the camerawork. I have been unable to locate an unmarked copy - all the existing versions contain a variety of typed and hand-written additions, amendments, alterations or deletions. Consequently, identifying the original script sections has been a challenge. However, using clues such as handwriting, typefaces and layout I have been able, with reasonable certainty, to reconstruct the final version before filming began, (I refer to it here as “the script”).

The influence of *Lest We Resemble* still stood out clearly. As Laurence Simmons has noted: “the play like the film juxtaposes generations and new social forces; and it concerns, as *Runaway* does, the confrontation of different worlds and moralities which, in both play and film, are exemplified by the shallowness of a money-centred Auckland and nostalgia for the traditional values of manual work and family.”¹ However, once filming began, the sole responsibility for any new material was to be O’Shea’s. As Graham later recalled, “Once I handed the script over to him, that was the last I saw of anything in respect of that film and how it was to go.”²

Although the amateur theatre company had not been included in the synopsis, it re-appeared in the script. Although it is not clear, Graham was possibly the originator of the motif. While O’Shea recalled Graham as being a “pleasant collaborator”³ he was certain that although “there’s a lot of Shakespearean stuff in there”⁴ his co-writer “didn’t have anything to do with it at all.”⁵ John Graham, on the other hand recalled “There was to be a play, I can’t remember the quotations which I have used, and it was all my own work … This was to be a sort of a subplot behind the action of the film; behind and in parallel with it, to more or less illustrate the darkness of David’s situation.”⁶ This confusion over the Shakespearean-style motif is typical of the confusion regarding responsibility for many other aspects of the script.

The concept itself was relatively clear. Intercutting the rehearsing of the play with the main storyline would not only provide additional dramatic interest for the audience, it

would also enable the players' lines to serve as a kind of chorus, an additional layer of comment on the events and characters encountered by David Manning. The script opens with this scene:

A small empty theatre being used as a rehearsal room. Seats are empty and a group of actors are on stage. The scene is in dark shadows of partly used light as it FADES IN. The voice speaking the lines intones them quietly. Disembodied words.

DAVID: Diana, Diana

Let us make a beginning

DIANA: Our loves and comforts should increase

Even as our days do grow.

(O'Shea has subsequently added the note: "LS theatre, pref in silhouette".)

PROD: All right – yes – shift that side light – now let's have your other passage, Diana.

There is a long pause as the CAM[ERA] TR[ACKS] to a MCS of DIANA. She sits in rehearsal clothes looking at script.

(pause)

That I did love

My downright violence

and storms of fortune

May trumpet to the world.

The name "Diana" is written in the script by hand as are the lines, "Diana, Diana, let us make a beginning". The theatre motif, at this point in the film, is clearly designed as an unusual scene-setting device. The phrase "Let us make a beginning" suggests the commencement of a new romantic relationship, as well as the play/film itself. It

also refers symbolically to Pacific Films which, more than a decade after their last attempt, was re-inventing a New Zealand feature film industry.

The opening exterior scene is set on a sunny Auckland beach where the main character, David Manning is introduced clambering out of a luxury runabout. He is described as “lithe, bronzed, silent”. He is pre-occupied and barely acknowledges the calling of his companions. One of them, Sandra calls out from the water, “Come back in, David. Don’t be so touchy,”⁷ but he ignores her – personal tension juxtaposed with the idyllic surroundings. David stretches out on the boat deck and gazes up at the wheeling seagulls. He is thus introduced to us as unhappy and isolated (at least in his own thoughts).

His reverie is interrupted by his noisy companions, Athol, Dorothy and Sandra (his girlfriend), who clamber on board the boat. David is persuaded to water-ski back with Dorothy. They position themselves in the water, Athol starts the engine and Sandra “preens herself”. Self-absorbed, she is not really interested in David’s problems. The boat speeds away with the skiers racing behind it. Athol, turning his gaze from David to Sandra comments, ““You’re a bit bitchy to David, aren’t you, Sandra’. [She remains silent and he perseveres], ‘Why don’t you ease up on him. Let him get some fun out of life. He can, you know’.” David, meantime, has become involved in the experience of water-skiing, as “the air and water act as a tonic to him. He looks stronger, happier.”⁸

The next scene is of a typical family group on the beach. “They are enjoying the humbler, less exciting pleasure and pains of young children engulfed in sand and sandwiches. One of the children points as David and Dorothy ski up onto the beach. Athol and Sandra join David and Dorothy but Athol’s words of advice have obviously had little effect on Sandra who “looks petulant and pretty”. When the others suggest going out to a new dining room, David’s protesting response that, “I’m sick of these places. I’m not made of money. A quiet evening...” is interrupted by Sandra’s remonstration, “Oh, David, don’t be mean”. They all climb into the car – obviously David’s as it is he who “steps on the accelerator as they drive off. He is annoyed at being forced into the evening.” The scene changes to the interior of a restaurant where the tensions within the group continue. Athol and Dorothy only have eyes for

each other while Sandra remains absorbed by her own “beauty and conceit”. The script suggests a tracking shot as she rises and “walks to [the] dance floor with little regard for David, more for the impression she makes on others.”⁹ After several more quarrelsome comments, Sandra says she wants to move on to the Capri night-club.

The main cause of David’s pre-occupation becomes clearer in the next scene which describes them walking out of the club. “Sandra looks in the mirror at herself as David pays the bill … he looks worried as he fishes the last of his paper money out of his wallet.” In a clever transition the scene cuts to a hand resting on a stack of money in a cash box. “Tilt [to] show David looking at it. Girl comes up behind him.” The scene has shifted abruptly to the accountant’s office of Bellamy, Atkins & Co. The girl informs David that someone has come to see him. The audience’s suspicion that his problems may be financial are confirmed as his visitor, from the City Investment and Finance Company, is a debt collector. David’s token protest, “It’s a bit on the nose coming here – you’ve no right to come here” has little effect on the collector. Retorting that “we’ve got a right to our money” he goes on to point out that David was two weeks behind the previous month, five weeks the month before and “now it’s three weeks – I’ve got to collect the money in 24 hours.”¹⁰ David reluctantly agrees to settle the matter by the following day.

The scene cuts to a man at his desk at a different workplace. He is a school headmaster. There is a knock on the door and in response to the man’s call “the door opens and a boy enters – about 15, sturdy, short pants. He waits on the threshold of the room.” In response to the man’s order “Come over here” he walks towards the desk. The script describes a tracking shot with the camera behind the boy “looking at Alex Manning”. The headmaster is David Manning’s father. The script writers have cast him in the role of a strict disciplinarian who, rather than attempting to discuss his pupils’ problems, prefers to impose his will on them. Standing over the boy he upbraids him for his unacceptable behaviour. “Well, Crawford. What have you got to say for yourself? (No reply). Come on, speak up. (No reply). What’s this about you smoking and carrying on at the bottom of the playground? You’re old enough to know better, Crawford. We’ve got a fine new College and I won’t tolerate open defiance by you and some of your friends. Now I don’t like to do this, but you know what your punishment’s going to be.” In spite of the powerful position he is in,

Manning pauses for a moment of puzzlement and asks the boy, “Why don’t you say something?”, an indication from the script writers that headmaster Manning is aware, albeit briefly, of his inability to communicate. The boy has been punished before and consequently “looks bored and distant”¹¹ as the headmaster lifts the strap. This was an everyday scene at New Zealand boys’ schools at the time, and clearly is intended to sum up a regimented, repressed society – besides acting as an ironic comment on David’s problems in the previous scene. The strapping is neatly juxtaposed to a steak being pounded by Sarah Manning. A car is heard arriving. David enters the kitchen, greets his mother somewhat distractedly, and immediately asks to see his father.¹² Sensing her son’s unease she asks if anything is wrong. The sound of a motor mower starting up is heard and David, reassuring his mother that there is nothing wrong, goes out into the garden. He is “tense and anxious” in contrast to his father who “is intent on his mower with which he keeps fiddling”.

Motor mowers emit a noise that dominates the surroundings and the script cleverly incorporates the machine into the scene. It not only provides Manning senior with something to distract him but is also the source of his son’s increasing frustration in trying to communicate with his father while having to compete with the noise.

DAVID: Dad, there’s something I want to ask you.

ALEX: It’s still better than the new one. (He listens to its noise)

DAVID: If you’re too busy, it doesn’t matter.

ALEX: What? What doesn’t matter?

DAVID: Well, I want your help.

In spite of the noise David finally manages to explain to his father that he needs money to which the older man flippantly replies, “Don’t we all”. This is too much for his increasingly anxious son who shouts angrily, “Can’t you turn the damned thing off. Listen to me.” A little reluctantly his father complies and asks, “How much money?”¹³ When David explains that he needs £150 his father immediately jumps to

the wrong conclusion. In a reference to the responsibility a man has to his pregnant girlfriend he angrily responds, “Is it Sandra? (No reply) I’ve never thought she was the girl for you but now (heatedly) if you’ve got her into trouble , you’ll have to face up to it.” At this point in the script “David turns so the shot now favours him, – he smiles icily at the unlikely implication” by responding “No, Dad, it’s not Sandra. Precious little chance of that” and continues by explaining that he’s borrowed some money and has to pay it back. Displaying scant sympathy, the father continues to upbraid his son:

ALEX: I’ve told you ages ago you couldn’t go on like this – your car, you’re always out with Sandra, ‘living it up’, drinking

DAVID: Oh Dad, look I’m sorry I’m in a jam. I come to you … to help me out.

ALEX: Where do you think I can lay my hands on that sort of money. It doesn’t grow on trees.

DAVID: Couldn’t you raise it for me?¹⁴

The older man angrily assumes that David wants the money so that he can “keep his car and his precious friends.”¹⁵ Pointing out that David has been given everything he could have wished and now has a good job with a good salary he adds the comment typical of his generation, that the young man has “better prospects than I had at your age.”¹⁶

The *Runaway* script at this point neatly encapsulates the unprecedented prosperity of the country and the generation gap which this had created. David, although barely in his twenties, does indeed have what most young men of the previous generation could only dream about; a steady, well-paid job with excellent prospects. His father’s generation had suffered through a depression and a war, and this had clearly taken its toll in emotional terms. However, many members of David’s generation were not impressed by their parents’ fierce work ethic and dream of upward mobility. Dan Davin neatly summed up the ambitions many post-war New Zealand parents had for

their sons' careers: "In New Zealand, according to such notions, the only possible career could be the professions; for those compromised between comfort and culture ... he [the professional] was able to obtain a lucrative income from his learning. He was a pillar of the community, a member of an aristocracy which, in the absence of criteria of ancestry, only wealth or the professions could supply."¹⁷ The way in which Manning and his son talk past each other typifies the clash of values and assumptions that was developing in the early 60s (and would reach its climax in New Zealand in the early 70s).

This conversation is the catalyst for David to leave home, exclaiming, "Just forget I ever asked for your help!" Alex splutters: "What are you going to do? I want to know. Don't just walk away." David does, however, leave – the first of his "runaway" decisions – leaving his father to shout futilely, "Blast you, stay bloody well here where I can talk to you!" And, as if addressing a child, "David, you come back here. I want to know what you're going to do!"

The Second Theatre Scene

The scene changes to an MLS of David driving away in his sports car and from there to a night scene which shows "the exterior of a shabby country hall". A tracking shot shows a knife on the window ledge and a man, silhouetted against the window, who picks up the knife. While the camera holds on the man with the knife, an off screen voice is heard

These sentences, to sugar or to gall,
Being strong on both sides are equivocal.
But words are words: ... I never did hear
That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear.

As the last two lines are spoken, the actor is shown as part of a group of people rehearsing a play reading. As he finishes the line he "looks up from the book" and asks, "What does that... (i.e. what does it mean)... Oh, I see, I see."¹⁸

It is Jim, David's brother in law, who holds the knife. He ambles over to the group of actors and comments, "Yes, it means you can talk till the cows come home and it

won't make any difference to some people". Turning to the props girl he hands back the knife saying, "This knife'll never do". His wife Julia takes the knife and they both walk away from the group. In the ensuing conversation they discuss the problem of David – we are out of the world of the play and back into the world of the previous scenes. Julia is keen to help David but Jim is reluctant to accept any more than a marginal responsibility, telling his wife that, "He can stay here, perhaps, but not the money, hell, we can't afford 150 quid—even if I could rake it up." (Silence from Julia) "What does he think I am? – he's so proud of being an accountant." Julia looks mortified as her husband concludes with, "Young fool—and he was such a success story". David is obviously in regular contact with his sister and will be phoning her that evening. When she asks her husband what she should say to him he replies tersely: "He's your brother. You can handle him. Tell him we're sorry but---."¹⁹ The scene serves a useful purpose in showing that although David Manning has other family members, they will be of little real assistance to him. Even his sister, the most sympathetic of all the women in his life, can only provide a limited amount of assistance without incurring her husband's displeasure.

At this point the ringing of a phone interrupts his comments. Meanwhile, Ryan, one of the actors, has asked the producer to clarify the meaning of the play they are rehearsing. Jim joins the group as the producer explains that "admittedly the language doesn't make it obvious ... but, well, this is not just poetry, that's why it's such a great play. It's about passion, murder, and disaster ... it should remind us of the great depth within us all."²⁰ Even at this stage in the script it is apparent that there is uncertainty about the rehearsal scenes as several sequences have been crossed out on the script. The original concept had presumably two functions. First, it provides a more in-depth comment on the film's plot, through the medium of the words of the rehearsed play. It provides relief from the "kitchen sink realism" of other scenes, adding stylistic variety and a teasing sense of different levels of reality. Second, it adds a small sub-plot involving David's sister and her husband and their contrasting reactions to his situation. However, the effect is complex and the subtle implications are likely to be lost on most members of the audience. A reader of the script has opportunity to re-read and reflect on the lines and to understand their oblique connections with the main plot, but a cinema audience has only one opportunity to

hear lines of dialogue. Consequently the many changes that the writers were making to these scenes suggested that the eventual fate of the theatre motif was uncertain.

The next scene in the script rejoins David who is about to have a difficult interview with his boss, Mr Bellamy. He knocks on the door and enters in response to Bellamy's invitation. The script at this point is cleverly designed to show a parallel between David's entrance into his boss's office and Crawford's previous entry into the office of the headmaster - "CAM[ERA] reiterates TR[ACK] and set-up of Shot 71 (Alex and Crawford)."²¹ David's state of mind contrasts with Bellamy's assurance: "He is suave and punctilious in the conduct of his business, the disposition of his desk."²² David commences a hesitant explanation. However, "as he speaks his distress is a little balanced by a sense of not really caring, as if he already knows the outcome of the discussion."²³ Initially Bellamy assumes that David has simply overdrawn on his cheque account and makes a tentative offer to assist. However, when the young man explains, "It's not the Bank – it's one of the firm's cheques" his employer is described as being "mortally but invisibly wounded."²⁴ He angrily informs David that he has compromised his position in the office irretrievably. (A reaction shot for David is described as "i.e. 'Oh my God'") In a repeat of the earlier garden scene David reacts by walking out of the office, ignoring Bellamy's orders to "Come back!" and slams the door on his employer's final phrase, "you'll have to pay back every penny."²⁵ David has again been unable to communicate effectively with an older man and responds by walking away, ignoring an angry call for him to return.

The scene changes to a conversation between David and his mother. He is packing a suitcase with the intention of leaving home. Unlike the two older men with whom David has had a confrontation, his mother Sarah's attitude is one of hurt bewilderment. She cannot understand why he is throwing away his career over a matter which could be fixed by his father. However her son is adamant. "Don't try to stop me. I'll let you know where I am. This might be (laughs hollowly) the turning point in my life."²⁶ Her final comment neatly sums up the wife and mother role she has dutifully played all her married life. When her son says, "Come on, we mustn't be sad because I've found my wings"²⁷ she reprimands him mildly with, "David ... that's not the way to fold a shirt."²⁸

Communication between mother and son is no easier than between father and son. This was a common theme in post-war fiction. For example, in *Cliffs of Fall* Dan Davin has an agonising scene between a mother and her university student son. “She saw the grim setness of his face, she could speak no more. It was no use. She could not come near him, breach the wall of his uncommunicativeness. Sorrow filled her eyes with tears. But she had the wisdom to be silent. In a life of struggle she had learnt that questions were of little use.”²⁹

The next two scenes of the script have no dialogue and are designed to move the story forward as well as visually represent David’s state of mind. He returns the car to the dealer Driscoll and the scene then moves to the Auckland waterfront where a slow montage sequence shows David on the ferry watching the receding city. He “rather wistfully thinks about the life he has left, the opportunities he has foregone for a life of opulence represented by … a well fitted keeler which sails past the ferry … [its] billowing free sails … represent to David the idea of expansive freedom”. The writers are clearly interested in the symbolic meanings of their images – in this a keeler representing a different kind of freedom (the freedom of “opulence”).

The scene changes abruptly with a “wham pan” to a country road. David is being dropped from a car by a farmer whose line, “You’re lucky I was coming this far north … you’re sure to get a ride through the forest” cues the audience to the fact that David is heading north, far from Auckland. He reaches the kauri forest and after he has made several unsuccessful attempts to hitch a ride, a close up shows him turning as another vehicle approaches. In matching close up the new character of Laura is introduced, driving through the forest in a late model Ford Thunderbird convertible with the hood down.

At this point in the development of the script, the writers were aware from production assistant Oliver Fleming that his car would be available for the film. In 1963 a car of this type would have attracted a great deal of attention in a country where severe fiscal restriction made the purchase of a new or imported vehicle virtually impossible for most New Zealanders. The Thunderbird also served to enhance the role of Laura as *femme fatale*. At this point, the script describes her as being “elegant, beautiful”, with a spectacular and sensual dissatisfaction that could come as a reaction to the boredom

of her wealthy life or from the breakdown of any genuine affection she has ever felt for anyone. In response to David's hitchhiking signal she pulls up and he gets in. The script notes that as he looks at the car "his regard and covetousness of the apparel of wealth is rekindled."³⁰ Obviously the writers were developing a character who, throughout the film, would be torn between his old city values and his search for an alternative. He is attracted to Laura and as the car drives away "rather stealthily studies her" as they continue down the hill towards the Hokianga township. A series of shots, with no dialogue, depict David's arrival in the small slow-paced town (an opportunity for some vivid documentary detail). Maori children wave as the car goes by and, when it stops to let him out, an old man regards him "with that suspicious but not necessarily unfriendly curiosity a stranger arouses in a small village". In an ECU a county clerk "watches him similarly" although the script neglects to explain how the film will show that the person is in fact a "county clerk". David walks along the waterfront, past a jetty, and towards a boarding house which the script describes in detail: "Long hall passage of dreary boarding house. Rooms lead off passage. It has many boarders, all with small rooms. One imagines the doily covered tea wagon in the dining room which may have a pot plant on an old fashioned sideboard. The dinner plates are clean but slightly chipped. An old man walks out of hall onto veranda ... David walks along dusty road up steps and knocks hesitantly on door."³¹ The whole sequence is typical of the writers' interest in the down-to-earth details of local life. The town is certainly no tourist idyll.

In response to David's knock, a young woman, Isobel, appears at the door. He asks her if he is at Mrs Milligan's place (there is no explanation in the script as to how he knows the name) and explains that he's looking for somewhere to stay. Mrs Milligan is sketched in vivid detail in the script. "About 55, colourful, stout, still showing the midday remnants of a sketchy morning makeup that will be greatly augmented in the late afternoon. She makes no bones about her questions to the prospective boarder."³² David is evasive when she asks where he is from, simply stating that he is going to live in the town for a while. Mrs Milligan, in keeping with her business-like character, "shoves David past her"³³ into the hall and, shouting for Isobel to bring linen, continues with a description of the establishment's rules. "No boozing in your room and you can please yourself about anything else."³⁴ The veteran landlady obviously regards herself as a woman of the world.

The change in location at this point in the script accomplishes several aims. Firstly it places David Manning in a new setting; removed both geographically and in lifestyle from his hedonistic city existence. Secondly it sets up the potential for conflict – or growth – as he meets the challenge of a new environment.

David enters a small dark room and appraises it resignedly. Opening the window he looks out past the veranda to the mudflats. Here Isobel is re-introduced. She enters the room, saying to David, “I’ll do this now, OK?” This is crossed out but then reinstated with a hand written ‘STET’. In spite of the changes suggesting uncertainty, a full scene unfolds:

DAVID: My name’s David Manning.

ISOBEL: Yes, Mr Manning.

DAVID: And you’re Isobel.

ISOBEL: That’s my name.

DAVID: You don’t say much, do you?

ISOBEL: What would you like me to say, Mr Manning?

He is curious, she evasive. Embarrassed by his failed attempt to gain any personal information from her, he looks out the window at the tidal flats. In response to his negative comment she says, “Don’t let it get you down. The tide comes in every twelve hours.”

The scene changes to a subsequent day, introducing a new character, Joe Wharewera, who is attaching wires to a new power pole. “He and a gang of linesmen, David among them, are working at the end of a long beach.” David is described as labouring “energetically but clumsily” presumably because he is trying to succeed in the eyes of his new workmates but is not accustomed to physical labour. At this point, Laura is re-introduced. “In the corner of the f/g [foreground] is detail of expensive summer house. Laura is lying in sun in f/g lawn. She sits up and puts on dark glasses as she

looks at linesmen working. Her Thunderbird is in driveway of house.”³⁵ The scene cuts back to David who is getting tired. Joe shows his good nature by offering to lend a hand.

JOE: Give you a spell, eh. Tired.

DAVID: No, I’m alright.

Joe’s next line is to Hank, a character based on the wave of Dutch immigrants who came to New Zealand in the post-war period, who is preparing tea beside a chip heater: “How’s the billy, Hank?” He replies in accented English, “Waarn’t be loung.” After this folksy detail, the ensuing conversation explores what is to become a recurring theme - contrasting attitudes towards country and city.

JOE: You from Auckland, eh? What you come here for?

Joe’s ungrammatical English presumably indicates he is a young Maori with a limited education.

DAVID: Just for a change. Wanted to get away for a while.

JOE: I been up there too. This is my place for good now.

DAVID: You’d rather be living here.

JOE: Better for me to be here. Crazy up there, man. No troubles here ... I’d like to live in Auckland if there was no trouble for me. Here there’s no trouble. I stay here, but boy she’s a dead bloody hole sometimes.

These are clearly the tensions that David must come to terms with, and they are familiar New Zealand tensions – in this case the difficult period of urban migration that the Maori people were coming to terms with.

Laura, who is about to go out for a drive in her Thunderbird, pulls up alongside David and Joe. In response to her inquiry as to when the phone will be on, Joe offers the teasing reply, "Next week. You can ring us when you want a party." Laura, eyeing David, responds, "OK man, it's a date – you can come suck some sea eggs with me, eh. And bring your friend."³⁶ It is obvious from this suggestive reference that Laura has her eye on David. The description of the subsequent series of shots shows that the attraction is reciprocated.

"She starts to move the car forward, looks calculatingly back at David. David stands out from group as CAM pulls away (with car) from them and dust swirls round the men. MS Laura – on the move – she adjusts rear vision mirror, the better to see them."³⁷ David asks Joe who she is, as he apparently never asked during their car ride together, and Joe replies that her name is "Laura Kingston". Joe informs David that Laura's husband, who has lots of money, has been coming to the area for years for the fishing. He warns David that Laura is "crazy, though. Lots of trouble."³⁸

Two Women

The next two sequences, without dialogue, are designed to contrast the wealthy and calculating Laura Kingston with the innocence of Isobel. The older woman, with her flash car, stylish clothes and suggestive comments, represents the hedonism of city life which, although he has rejected it, still retains an allure for David. Isobel, by contrast, personifies the relative simplicity of a rural life style in which status and consumer goods are of limited significance. As John Graham recalled, "She [Isobel] was the antithesis of Laura in David's mind, and there was a conflict in David's mind as to where he really belonged and what he really sought. The flamboyant selfish Laura represented where he'd come from really and what was essentially part of himself."³⁹

The contrast between the two women is developed in the next scene. "Laura's car hurtling along beach road. Laura driving – spoiled, petulant, provocative. Laura – lights cigarette as she drives. LS beach and rocks. Isobel in f/g is gathering shell fish. Has a flax kit. Sound of car. She looks up at it. No reaction – quietly returns to gathering shell fish. Isobel – in shorts and shirt, hair pulled back, smart and sophisticated. Yet, by her actions and in the location, she also makes a thoroughly

Polynesian cameo. With the somnolent attention of a Polynesian she pries shell fish (rock oyster) loose from rocks and puts them into her flax kit. Isobel opens one delectable titbit.” It is interesting that Isobel is given her own kind of sophistication, and her own sensuality – she is not exactly a naive innocent. The script, describes in sensuous detail her consumption of the “delectable titbit”: “The live morsel wriggles – her fingers pry it out of the shell. Her fingers pop the morsel between her straight, firm white teeth.” The contrast between “good girl and bad girl” was a common aspect of films prior to the 1960s, but O’Shea and Graham are evidently trying to give Isobel more complexity. With her initial air of shyness, Isobel does suggest “dusky maiden” stereotypes, but has the potential to be a more complex character than the “femme fatale” Laura.

The scene shifts back to David, having completed the day’s work, being dropped off at the boarding house by Joe. He idly watches a launch approaching the jetty. Driving the vessel is Tana, described as having “the same Polynesian somnolence as Isobel. He is big, powerful, silent and as his actions show, resourceful. He is a complete and intelligent Polynesian man, but the Pakeha world is still largely foreign to him.” The antithesis set up here is between “Polynesian” (associated with Isobel) and “Pakeha”, seen as different “worlds” and different personal styles. The writers risk stereotyping but seek to add complexity by words such as “intelligent” and “complete”.

David is pulling on a clean shirt as he sees Isobel approaching. In spite of her earlier indifference to him, he again attempts to establish contact. He asks if she had been fishing. Isobel, who is scripted as moving forward in a tracking shot up the veranda, keeps walking, replying perfunctorily to his questions. She pauses when David speaks her name. The script specifies a close-up which shows her as “disturbed, but resentful and aloof” as she replies: “Yes, Mr Manning”. He then pushes his luck: “My name’s David, Call me that,”⁴⁰ and asks her if she would like to go with him to “the pictures”. She replies, “No thank you. You find someone else, eh. What you want to take me for?” (Like Joe, Isobel speaks in a somewhat colloquial or “ungrammatical” way, which is no doubt designed to emphasise the class and ethnic differences between them.) David persists but she walks away telling him to “find yourself another girl.”⁴¹

The scene shifts to Tana:

He has seen their exchange but is too distant to have heard it clearly. In the b/g Isobel walks away from David's window and round the back of the boarding house. Tana turns an aware face to CAM and continues with what he's doing – beheading and filleting a white fish.

CS [CU] fish head being severed – eyes open and helpless. Tana's hand throws it into the water.

Long shadows of approaching sunset. Through them, David walks along street. He is melancholy, brooding.

Isobel watches him—there is some sort of longing in her eyes. Half forgotten memories are stirred.⁴²

This sequence, although relatively brief, is stylistically interesting. In terms of theme it suggests that Tana has an interest, or possibly an existing relationship with Isobel. It hints at conflict and also shows David's disappointment at being rejected by her. Finally, and most revealingly, it suggests that Isobel could be attracted to David. All of this is conveyed visually, in a sequence that toys with symbolism (the fish head, the sunset) in a way that could lead to Hollywood melodrama (if it were treated broadly) or to an Antonioni-style art film (if it were presented in a cryptic, staccato way).

The script then takes us to the vicinity of the local cinema. Joe and David are discussing the forthcoming dance. Originally “a group of Maori youths”⁴³ was added but this phrase has been crossed out. All the dialogue is confined to Joe and David. They discuss the fact that Joe’s brother Simon is to be the featured artist. The pair walk towards the cinema in a tracking shot as Joe explains that Simon is “a big deal now. Been on TV, too.”⁴⁴ He then surprises David with the information that Isobel is his sister. When David replies that he has asked her to the pictures, Joe responds, “She wouldn’t, eh. No one does any good with Isobel. She had trouble in Auckland. Oh boy what happens to the Maori in that big city of yours. It’s a funny story, I tell you. This is one Maori joker who won’t go back there.”⁴⁵ This is another indication

that Isobel is not simply an innocent rural Maori woman but has experienced the troubles of the city. Is the Hokianga without trouble of its own, or will the city/country contrast also get complicated? An interesting detail here is Joe's phrase "that big city of yours", which aligns race with place. David, having declined his friend's invitation to the pictures, walks, in the fading light, along the street to the jetty. He leans on the edge of the rail and sees Isobel rowing out to Tana's launch and being assisted aboard. A close up of David shows him looking "down in the water reflectively . Water laps edge of jetty. Into it floats the severed head of the fish."⁴⁶ At the risk of overdoing the symbolism, the writers are continuing to proceed as visually as possible.

The next scene shows Laura in her car. It is daytime and she is parked outside the Opononi Hotel. She has a man with her. In the script he is originally described as a "middle aged smoothie" who is "not old enough to be mistaken for her father, but not a young man, fairly run of the mill". "Fairly run of the mill" is crossed out, then "man of the world" has been written by hand, then crossed out also. This is Laura's husband Geoffrey, and since it is a non-speaking part, his appearance, dress and body language are the only way to convey his character. The script-writers were obviously struggling to provide clear guidelines. The ensuing sequence, with no dialogue represents another step in the development of a relationship between David and Laura. Laura's husband goes into the hotel as Joe, David and Hank emerge from the bottle store carrying a carton of beer. "Laura waves at David. He starts to walk towards her, but signals that he's first going to put beer in Joe's old car ... Joe observes his interest and Laura's excitement. But as David starts back to Laura's car the smooth gent comes out of bottle store with one neatly wrapped bottle. He gets into Laura's car. David stops midway across the road. Without a look at him, Laura drives off." The sequence finishes on two close ups. The first is of a frustrated David, the second is of Laura who "turns around and looks after David – she is cunning, sadistic and purposeful. Quietly she turns to the man beside her, putting her arm on his shoulder." Creating scenes without dialogue served the double purpose of simplifying the filming (as it had done for *Broken Barrier*) and also ensuring that the film had strong visual interest. Certainly these scenes manage to imply a number of emotional nuances in a few shots. For example, the images of Laura suggest that she is bored by her lifestyle

but enjoying the danger inherent in her flirtation with David. They also emphasise her game-playing tendencies.

The scene shifts to water swirling round a rock as Joe and David gather crayfish. The scene is set for David's first assignation with Laura, a crucial scene which again dispenses with dialogue.

Laura's car drives up, jerks to a halt.

Laura gets out of her car and leans over bonnet of Joe's car, looking out at rocks.

CS Laura – she waits.

While Joe works on cray sacks at edge of rocks David goes up beach to Laura's car. Joe watches as David gets into Laura's car and drives away with her. CAM pans round with Joe as he looks down at cray – a claw is sticking to his hand.⁴⁷

In a clever transition the scene cuts to a matching close up of Laura's hand which “rests on David's chest” – a third example of seafood symbolism! Time has passed and David is now “looking distantly at sky darkening. Laura regards him with cold and demanding passion. She grabs his hair with her hand and pulls him down to attend her. Behind him, the darkening sky is pierced by spikes of silhouetted marram grass.” The reference to grass is reminiscent of one of the most vivid scenes of *Broken Barrier*, Tom and Rawi's tryst in the long grass. To an audience in the early 1960s, accustomed to implied rather than explicit sex scenes, it would be clear from the details above that David and Laura had already made love. The lack of tenderness also fitted Laura's role as lustful female fatale. Taking the initiative was not something that “nice girls” did. In a poignant touch the scene shifts to where “a street light pierces the sky. It shines on corner of boarding house which is roughly and vaguely illuminated by its sudden light. Slowly, Isobel rests her head against the veranda post. She look out at the dusk, the still warm night. Water laps the mud flats.”

The dance sequence follows next, returning us from a somewhat melodramatic style to a down-to-earth documentary treatment of small town life. O'Shea had made

extensive use of a rural dance setting in *Broken Barrier* and no doubt considered that he could develop it in an interesting way for *Runaway*. With a large crowd, and a band, such a scene poses complex problems not only in terms of extras but in terms of sound and lighting. But every film needs a few “big scenes” and it is possible to stage such an event cheaply with community co-operation. The script starts the sequence with a cymbal clash in close up. The camera pulls back to show the dance band and announcer who introduces “our own Simon Wharewera. Well, the rest of the country knows him as Simon Rangi – but he’s old Sy Wharewera to us.” During the applause from the crowded dance floor “David enters and looks around – not at Simon but for Isobel. He is shamefaced and a little distressed but not obviously so”. The sexual relationship he has established with Laura has not diminished his strong feelings for Isobel. (The image of David “looking distantly” at the darkening sky had echoed his unsatisfied look at the beginning of the film.) While David is standing on the edge of the dance floor, Simon begins singing the theme song

Runaway

Drift away like a bird

Drift away

Wing away like a bird.

Winging over tide and land

Drift away above the sand

Runaway.

During the song, David looks around the dance hall. His eyes light up as he sees Isobel among the group. This shot cuts back to a close up of David but the following shot shows Tana standing beside her. The song finishes and the band changes to a livelier number. Dancers, including Isobel and Tana take to the floor. Joe comes to talk to David who, during the conversation, catches Isobel’s eye. The ensuing sequence shows that a definite rapport is developing between them.

David watching her.

Isobel lowers her eyes.

David is in some sort of inner desperation. Then, after hesitation and a false start – he moves forward.

Isobel and Tana dancing. David approaches. Excuses Tana – who reluctantly complies at Isobel’s signal. David starts dancing with Isobel. She looks resentful, longing at him. They remain separated as they dance.⁴⁸

Tana leaves the dance floor and stands watching the pair. Isobel relaxes and is soon laughing and joking with her new dance partner to the discomfiture of Tana who eventually leaves the hall. The music re-commences and Isobel “clicks her fingers and starts to dance with David … Isobel and David are no longer separated in mood as they dance … Isobel’s sensuality has emerged. The voluptuousness that has been hinted at before breaks out in her every movement and gesture. About them there is also an indulgence (it has probably led her into trouble before). She is tender and languorous as she dances with David.” The word “trouble” echoes Joe’s cryptic reference to Isobel’s time in the city.

Having left the hall Tana is next seen drinking beer outside the dance hall. With the implication that time has passed, the scene then moves to the environs of the boarding house where Tana, very drunk, staggers to a stop as he hears Isobel’s laugh. She is being escorted home by David. Lurching towards them Tana confronts David with the drunken speech: “Hey, Pakeha boy – wha’ you mean – eh Pakeha – Ishabel not your girl – what you mean Pakeha.” Isobel, guilty, annoyed and tearful, runs to house.” Tana attempts to hit David who easily pushes him away. He tries again but falls into the mudflats. “He is not so drunk he cannot realise he looks pathetic and slightly ridiculous.” David, having left his drunken assailant, enters the boarding house, but rather surprisingly makes no attempt to contact Isobel, and instead lies thoughtfully on his bed. His state of mind is unclear. “In CS, he lights cigarette, puts out light in room. Street light shines in. Street lights shine on corner of house. Mud flats glisten in moonlight.”

The script has set up plenty of potential for conflict at this stage, but clearly the time has come for those conflicts to be articulated — Maori versus Pakeha and city versus country. We need to know more about Isobel and what’s at stake for her. The scene shifts to a hangi being prepared in the “morning light” by a group of men, women and children. Joe brings David into the group and they walk towards Bella (Joe and Isobel’s mother). David is introduced to Bella who tells Joe to look after his guest

and to “help with the kai.”⁴⁹ As Bella moves away, Isobel comes towards the table. She is surprised to see David.

ISOBEL: Why are you here?

DAVID: Isobel.

ISOBEL: Joe bring you, I suppose.

DAVID: Isobel, I ...

ISOBEL: Yes, Mr Manning (laughs gently)

DAVID: It’s good to see you.

ISOBEL: David, I want to tell you ...

DAVID: What

ISOBEL: Here today ... it’s a Maori do. You won’t seem to be, but you will be on the outside.

DAVID: How?

ISOBEL: (she pauses-turns to CAM): I don’t know. I can’t be with you. Back in town – later ... you understand, don’t you.

DAVID: I’ll try.⁵⁰

David’s position is now the reverse of the earlier description of Tana, as a “Polynesian man” to whom “the Pakeha world is still largely foreign to him.”⁵¹

Joe enters with cartons of beer to “Help wash the kai down.”⁵² He leaves David and Isobel to continue their conversation. David asks her if she likes living in the area and she responds that, “You don’t get hurt here.”⁵³ (This idea is now less than

convincing, for both David and Isobel.) As she looks down a hedgehog timidly scurries a couple of steps, stops, and as Isobel's hand comes down to touch it, rolls itself into a ball. Isobel picks up the hedgehog [and remarks] "If we had to come back and live again as something else I'd like to come back as a hedgehog". When David laughingly asks why she replies, "They are clever, cleverer than we are. When they're frightened of getting hurt, they just pull their heads in, and roll up into a prickly little ball. (pause) I wish I could do that."⁵⁴ Isobel, too has her uncertainties, qualities that probably increase her attractiveness to David, particularly when contrasted with the calculating self assurance of Laura Kosavitch. Once again the writers have used a detail from the natural world to convey a state of mind — a runaway bird, a crab, a hedgehog.

Bella has observed the young couple talking and deliberately comes over to break up the conversation. Instructing Isobel to get some more sausages from Joe's car she then tells her son to take David and show him the new church. Joe protests that his friend doesn't want to see the church but David, a little embarrassed, expresses an interest in viewing it. As they walk towards the church the script lists a series of shots designed to show the marae and the surroundings. Describing it as somewhat shabby in appearance, the script once again refuses to romanticise rural life. Glamour seems to be the (suspect) preserve of the big city, which is not to say there are not other kinds of beauty.

The conversation in the vicinity of the church between the two young men is an important one as it shows that Joe sees the futility of David's attempt to find contentment in a rural community.

JOE: Mum, she's very keen on the Church, eh. Thinks it's good for the Maori.

DAVID: You, too?

JOE: Dunno—sometimes.

DAVID: Be allright if you didn't want anything else.

JOE: What do you want?

DAVID: You ---- well ... you and Isobel, you don't seem to worry.

JOE: No point in worrying.

DAVID: While I'm with you I don't --- not so much—what I am – what to do with my life. I'd like to be ... I mean I could fit into this place here. Have a small boat – go fishing. I could live me whole life like that.

JOE: (unbelieving): You like things too much.⁵⁵

Joe's final line neatly encapsulates one of the key elements in the dilemma that faces David Manning. As his new Maori acquaintance had recognised, this young Pakeha is still wedded to creature comforts, he wants too much, despite his scorn for the city. The dialogue is not very articulate – in a classic Sargeson-esque style – but the conflict has resonances for any New Zealander. Indeed, one can see in such scenes why O'Shea spoke of an allegory of New Zealand facing the end of its links with England and the likely end of its prosperity. The complicating factor here is the Maori/Pakeha antithesis, which hovers on the brink of stereotypes but manages to keep complicating the characters so that everyone displays conflicting impulses.

The next scene marks another turning point.⁵⁶ David is seen at the window of his bedroom. He is speaking to someone who is there with him. "The tide's low. Low's I've seen it." He then turns from the window to the interior of the bedroom. The next line in the script is startling: "Isobel sits up in bed". David suggests they go for a walk. She replies, "Another time", to which he responds, "Another country". She asks what he means and he says, "Nothing". For a viewer in 1963 with an interest in literature, this would be a reference to the famous lines from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (also used by T.S. Eliot as the motto to his well known poem, 'Portrait of a Lady': "Thou has committed – Fornication: but that was in another country, And besides, the wench is dead.") This allusion gives a sinister tone to the lines, and the conversation as a whole takes on an Eliot-esque mood. She then asks, "When are you

going away from here?” a surprising comment as they have presumably spent the night together. Laura, the “bad girl” had furtive sex with David outdoors. Isobel has done so in a bedroom and they have spent the night together as new young lovers. The scene continues as, in an MCU, he sits down beside her and “caresses her skin”. He replies, “I’m not [going away]. I like it here.” The phrase, “caresses her skin” is crossed out as are the next two lines.

ISOBEL: You must go away. Don’t you see.

DAVID: I don’t see and I don’t understand you.⁵⁷

The remaining dialogue is chiefly concerned with Isobel trying to persuade David that he doesn’t belong. (It is worth recording in its entirety, together with some later amendments.) At first Isobel’s rationale seems confused and illogical.

ISOBEL: You should go back – to the city.

DAVID: Why do you think I came here in the first place.

ISOBEL: I don’t know (wearily).

DAVID: I can’t go back.

ISOBEL: You left trouble behind you?

DAVID: Not only that. I’d only go back if you came with me.

ISOBEL: You just get that idea right out of your head, David.

DAVID: Well stop telling me to go back. I’ve always thought of places like this – freer than the cities. I tossed up whether I came up here or went down south to the West Coast ... I was there when I was a kid (pauses) I had to get out and go somewhere.

ISOBEL: You should have gone down to your West Coast.

DAVID: Why? Aren't you pleased I'm here.

ISOBEL: I want you to go away while I can still be happy with you, before I feel sorry for you—the way I feel for most white people.

DAVID: Isobel ... perhaps ... with me ... you.

ISOBEL: David (pauses compassionately) ... I'm going to marry Tana.⁵⁸

The finality of the line triggers an understandable reaction in David. "He is strained, hurt, lost. He moves forward into deep shadow."⁵⁹

The scene is a powerful and significant one though 1960s censorship restrictions have kept us from seeing the earlier scenes which would have clarified the emotional situation. David's implied post-coital sadness seems to undermine the expected contrast between his sex with Isobel and his sex with Laura. One would have liked a few happier scenes before reality returned and David was reminded that he didn't fit in here either. Nonetheless, it is a dramatic scene. It stresses David Manning's isolation and inability to make emotional contact with people who really matter to him. Having found a woman for whom he cares deeply, she too rejects him. The power of the scene derives from the tensions of race and community that the film has established, and the difficulty the characters have in articulating and negotiating them.

From Isobel's powerful line the scene reverts to the rehearsal room.⁶⁰ An actor is seen in close up. Then the camera pans slowly to show "shadows of others in drama group and Julia reading letter."⁶¹ This is followed by a lengthy dialogue sequence between Jim and Julia. David has written to Julia asking her for help and advice. Although her husband Jim believes that David has brought his troubles on himself, his wife still wants to help.

JULIA: If he'd come down and stayed with us – he was happy down here ...

JIM: Look Julia as I've told you before we just ...

JULIA: Oh, shut up. You're as bad as my father.⁶²

Jim then makes negative comments regarding their life on the West Coast. "These decaying mine shafts, bloody bushland the mountains aren't hallowed childhood memories for me."⁶³ Julia responds, "David and I were happy down here. If he came down here, he might get himself out of the mess he's in."⁶⁴

After this somewhat inconsequential scene, we return to the Hokianga, to a scene which highlights the "subtropical beauty of the beach, sky and headland."⁶⁵ The camera pans to the exterior mirror of Laura Kosavitch's convertible which shows her reflection as she preens herself. David, standing behind her, reaches out to grasp her shoulder (presumably a gesture of affection and reassurance after a sexual assignation on the beach). Her response is, however, simply one of annoyance. Complaining that it's too hot, she shakes his hand free and when he again tries to touch her, angrily orders him to desist. David responds with, "Do you think I'm a toy – you can wind me up, then stop and start me whenever you want to?". Her response is cynical and callous. "David, you're like a good car—and I know where the starter is." Interrupting his attempted response she chastises him with, "Now, now – let's not talk about love and all that rubbish". They get in the car where David angrily calls her a "provocative little bitch ... as cold as a dead frog." Goading him she responds vindictively, "We can't all be as warm-blooded as your Maori tart – Isobel, isn't that her name." When David threatens to shut her up she starts the engine, teasing him for his lack of strength. He switches off the engine and "sits back indecisively in his seat". Laura continues taunting him while running her nails across his chest. "Oooer – so strong, so silent. You're really weak. You must be – the way you hang round these lazy Maoris up here ...". David remains silent as Laura warms to her theme. "You're frightened to face yourself, lover boy – beachcombing with your brown brothers ... and sisters – that Isobel. I could tell you something about her that'd"⁶⁶ David's response is swift. Seizing her he "drags her roughly out of the car. He forces her down to the mudflats. She screams protests but he pays no attention to them."⁶⁷ His action is cold, calculated and clinical. Here is an opportunity to release his accumulated anger and confusion. Pulling her down into the mud he tells her, "You drag everything down into the mud. Well, I'm not too weak to give you a taste of real mud. This is where our little love affair should end."⁶⁸ She struggles free but he

grabs her and she falls over in the mud. Her threat to have him up for assault only results in his laughing response as he rolls her in the mud, taunting her with, “Let’s rub it in a little – for your beauty.”⁶⁹ By now she is screaming and threatening him while trying to rub the mud out of her eyes. At this point David makes for her car and shouting, “Walk back, it’ll do you good!”⁷⁰ He drives away revelling in the sight of his mud-spattered former lover.

At this point the script is continuing to barrel along at speed. It is not altogether clear whether Isobel’s rejection has driven David back to Laura, or whether he has simply been unable to give Laura up. Nor do her comments about Isobel resolve that issue. Nonetheless, the scene is certainly dramatic, a symbolic payoff for all the references in the film to mud. Interestingly it is the Maori/Pakeha tension that drives this scene, whereas it is the city/country tension that dominated the conflict with Isobel.

The script, at this point, suggests a change in David’s mood and attitude. He has been rejected or treated condescendingly once too often. For him the mud episode has not only been therapeutic but also a turning point because his anger motivated him to seize the initiative. “As he drives off, David is laughing exultantly. He has enjoyed the basically comic fight, despite the bitterness and truth of the accusations both have made. Gradually he realises the seriousness of what he’s done. But he is given resolution and more determination … more than he has really evidenced before in the film. He settles down with some disdain for events as he drives away.”⁷¹ David’s triumph is obviously going to be short lived for Laura is not a woman to be scorned. The script is quite specific on this point, for picking up a stick she looks at it with “a sadistic, sensual smile of revenge … she lashes her legs and shoulders with stick, inflicting incriminating injuries on herself Satisfied with the welts of the blows to her legs and shoulders, [she] plasters them over with mud again and starts walking jauntily along beach.”⁷²

The final Hokianga scene involving Laura and the local constable, is a short but important one. In essence, Laura tells the constable that David had assaulted her and stolen her car. After initial incredulity, the constable believes her and proceeds to circulate a description of the vehicle. Thus the concept of a “runaway” now takes on an additional dimension. Presumably he still commands some audience sympathy

despite his foolish behaviour and seemingly permanent melancholy. His actions are those of a tragic hero – a man whose mistakes are at least understandable. He is not exactly Hamlet, but at least he gets angry about the right things (selfishness and racism).

Looking back at the Hokianga sequences, we may see them as a strong development of the central character and the basic themes of the film. By the time David breaks with Laura, the concept of a runaway has been well established. The Hokianga sequence is like a “film within a film”, establishing dramatic conflicts between two women who represent “city” and “country”; though not in a simplistic way. This section of the script is eventful and fast-moving (indeed, too fast-moving at times), with a rich combination of documentary-style small town details and heightened emotional drama. It is like a new version of *Broken Barrier* in miniature. It is unlikely that any more could be trimmed from this sequence, and indeed the script would probably benefit from some expansion, particularly in the characterisation of Isobel whose motivations are not altogether clear. Laura seems condemned to be merely a two-dimensional stereotype for the purposes of the script, but Isobel has the potential to be developed a lot more fully.

The challenge that the writers face at this point is to avoid giving the impression that another film is about to begin. David has left Auckland and is now leaving Hokianga. Why not stay and develop those interesting conflicts more fully? But the writers are determined to re-focus attention on David and to propel him onwards. Certainly there is a feeling that the stakes have been raised. (Soon, life and death will hang in the balance.) The themes most strongly established in the Hokianga have been country versus city and Maori versus Pakeha – the two sets interacting in complex ways – and we wait to see how they are to be developed further.

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- ¹ Laurence Simmons, "Scenes of Origin: The Genesis of John O'Shea's *Runaway*", *The Big Picture*, No. 8, Autumn, 1996, p13
- ² John Graham, interview, 24 August 1997
- ³ John O'Shea, interview, 5 February 1998
- ⁴ Ibid
- ⁵ Ibid
- ⁶ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997
- ⁷ "Runaway: The Script", Wellington, Pacific Films, February 1964, p1
- ⁸ Ibid, p2
- ⁹ Ibid, p3
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p4
- ¹¹ Ibid, p6
- ¹² Appendix 6
- ¹³ "Runaway: The Script", p7
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p8
- ¹⁵ Ibid, p9
- ¹⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁷ Dan Davin, *Cliffs of Fall*, p102
- ¹⁸ "Runaway: The Script", p9
- ¹⁹ Ibid, p10
- ²⁰ Ibid, p11
- ²¹ Ibid
- ²² Ibid
- ²³ Ibid, p12
- ²⁴ Ibid
- ²⁵ Ibid
- ²⁶ Ibid, p13
- ²⁷ Ibid
- ²⁸ Ibid
- ²⁹ Dan Davin, *Cliffs of Fall*, p71
- ³⁰ "Runaway: The Script", p14
- ³¹ Ibid, p15
- ³² Ibid, p16
- ³³ Ibid
- ³⁴ Ibid
- ³⁵ Ibid, p17
- ³⁶ Ibid, p18
- ³⁷ Ibid, p19
- ³⁸ Ibid, p18a
- ³⁹ John Graham, interview, 24 July 1997
- ⁴⁰ "Runaway: The Script", p19
- ⁴¹ Ibid, p21
- ⁴² Ibid
- ⁴³ Ibid, p22
- ⁴⁴ Ibid
- ⁴⁵ Ibid
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, p23
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, p24
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, p25
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, p26
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, p27
- ⁵¹ Ibid
- ⁵² Ibid
- ⁵³ Ibid, p28
- ⁵⁴ Ibid
- ⁵⁵ Ibid, p29

⁵⁶ Appendix 7

⁵⁷ “Runaway: The Script”, p29

⁵⁸ Ibid, p30

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Appendix 8

⁶¹ “Runaway: The Script”, p30

⁶² Ibid, p31

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid, p32

⁶⁶ Ibid p33

⁶⁷ Ibid p34

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Ibid, p53

⁷² Ibid

Chapter 10: RUNAWAY THE FINAL SCRIPT (II)

David Manning is now officially on the run. He had converted an expensive car, assaulted its female owner and is now a wanted man. From the constable's comment that he will be phoning through a description of the car, the script jumps to a brief shot of David stopping the car at a point overlooking the Hokianga, to be followed by a tracking shot "from behind David as he drives over Auckland Harbour Bridge and into the city". However, it quickly becomes obvious that he will not be seeking solutions at home as the script hurries on to a sign indicating the By Pass South ("pan to road as David drives past").

We now move to the interior of the Auckland Police Station where a constable is on the phone acknowledging the report of the missing car's licence number and David's name. From here the scene cuts to a traffic officer seated at the wheel of his car as David's convertible speeds by. The traffic officer takes off after the Thunderbird and David spots him in the rear vision mirror. He has "a moment of panic – then controls himself". The traffic officer first pulls alongside the convertible and then in front of it and both cars stop. The officer walks back to where David is sitting calmly. The police station scene has ensured that the first words the traffic officer speaks to David will be crucial. "Do you know what speed you were travelling back there?" is his opening question. David is evasive and when the officer informs him that he was doing over 70 mph he replies that "convertibles ... often look as if they're going faster than they really are."¹ Obviously not aware yet of David's runaway status, the officer indicates that he is prepared to let him off with a warning. The scene cuts to "Aerial of T.O.'s [Traffic Officer's] car in f/g. We see David and T.O. in b/g. Zip pan down aerial [and] zip pan to speaker in T.O. car". All officers are being instructed to, "watch all highways in North Island for a Ford Thunderbird convertible registered number ... which was stolen from ... ". Back to the traffic officer who is admiring the big Ford. He asks David his destination and when informed that he is heading south, warns him to keep his speed down and heads back to his car. As the officer approaches the police radio message ends with, "this missing car notice will be repeated every half hour". We return to an obviously relieved David Manning and, as the Traffic Officer reaches his car, the message has finished. The script has already worked out this intercut sequence as one that would require clever editing.

The description of the next scene, set at the Frankton Railway Station on a late afternoon, is noteworthy for the final sentence, which presumably is included not only for its local colour but also for its symbolism. “One platform is empty. An air of waiting fills the station. On the other platform, or on a siding, is a goods train of farm animals silently being shipped to slaughter.”² A tracking shot shows David walking “unconcernedly” to the ticket office to inquire how soon the Southern express is due. Having been told it will be arriving in half an hour he books a single, second class ticket to Wellington. Obviously he has decided he is too vulnerable in the Thunderbird, and none too soon, for in the main street of Hamilton the Traffic Officer’s car is seen stopping beside the convertible. Having inspected it he returns to his own car and “picks up the radio hand piece.”³ In a neat transition the next shot features the “shriek of a whistle [as a] train hurtles past.”⁴

David is in the carriage and beside him is a Pacific Islander (presumably scripted to represent the wave of Polynesian immigrants who began arriving in New Zealand during the late 1950s). David watches the man, Edward – described as “resembling Tana, but is younger and happier. He speaks very slowly, his unfamiliarity with English an obvious handicap.”⁵ The scene is apparently intended to provide David with a fresh perspective on what motivates people to move from their homes, particularly when they come from a tropical environment like the Pacific Islands. When Edward explains to David that he has been in New Zealand for three years, David probes further:

DAVID: You live in Auckland.

EDWARD: We shift to Wellington.

DAVID: It’ll be cold for you.

EDWARD: More jobs there – more pay.

DAVID: You want the money to go back to Samoa.

EDWARD: No – my father and mother and my other brother – they come here – they live Wellington, so we all live Wellington now.

DAVID: Don't you want to go back to Samoa?

EDWARD: No.

DAVID: I'd like to go there – all those palm trees and fishing and swimming in the reef and the sun.

EDWARD: It's dead there. Nothing happen.

(long pause)⁶

These lines have subsequently been deleted, though the final two lines remain intact.

DAVID: Why'd you come to New Zealand.

EDWARD: More job – more money. Good pay in the meat works. I like killing things. Good job I get.⁷

The scene echoes previous values espoused by those David encountered at the Hokianga. Joe Wharewera had left the city and returned to the quietness of his hometown but had a perspective like Edward's. His criticism – “Boy, she's a bloody dead hole sometimes”⁸ – echoes Edward's “It's dead there. Nothing happen.”⁹ However, the two men represent different perspectives on city life. For Joe the city represents trouble, for Edward it's a place with “More jobs there – more pay.”¹⁰ Meanwhile David continues to fantasise about the good place which makes no demands on him. In the Hokianga, he briefly fantasised. “I could have a little boat – go fishing – [and] live my whole life like that.”¹¹ Unable to find satisfaction in his own Pakeha world, he seeks a Pacific paradise. The scene is an example of the script's continuous interest in exploring New Zealand dreams and realities; it also suggests that David is still a daydreamer.

The animals trapped in the railway wagons make another appearance in the next scene. The train stops and David stretching his legs on the platform and, lighting a cigarette, “looks across at [the] farm animals.”¹² Several close ups of David’s face and the faces of two farm animals are to be intercut. His freedom is only temporary and the animals’ situation can be seen as a portent of things to come. Heavy symbolism perhaps, but it would have been a familiar New Zealand sight. At this point there is a curious voice-over passage. As David is looking at the trapped animals, on the soundtrack is heard *his* voice intoning:

Thou cunningest pattern of excelling nature....
 Once put out thy light....
 When I have plucked the rose I cannot give it vital growth again;
 It needs must wither.¹³

The return to the Elizabethan play rehearsal seems somewhat contrived, and inconsistent in its use of David’s voice. The next scene is of Julia on the phone. She then “walks away to edge of group and stands waiting for Jim who is engrossed with directing, conducting actors.”¹⁴ The ensuing conversation between Julia and her husband echoes earlier ones. Her mother, who was on the phone, has informed her that the police are looking for David. Julia is concerned, Jim angry. This kind of complex shifting between realities suggests the influence of French films such as those of Alain Resnais.

The following page of script, which returns to the railway station has no dialogue. Well written, it evokes a series of visuals designed to create an increasingly tense situation in which David Manning manages to elude two police officers who have boarded the train to look for him. The following excerpt shows the writers’ skill and understanding of the dramatic potential inherent in intercutting.

MLS a Policeman and a plain clothes man look along station platform. The plain clothes man indicates he’s going to board train and search it – the policeman walks to David’s end of platform.

David is on guard – he steps further back into shadows.

Bell is rung – announcement about departures as last people leave refreshment rooms.

David watches.

Plain clothesman leaves train and confers with policeman. They look along platform. Plain clothesman boards train as it pulls out.

David keeps in shadows as train leaves. A beam of light passes his face.

Edward has cleared a mist from window and is looking out. He sees David and waves.

David in beam of light tries to conceal face.

LS Platform – train pulls out – it is soon deserted.¹⁵

David waits until the policeman rides his bicycle away from the station. He then goes into the left luggage room and steals some clothing and a razor from a man's suitcase. The scene returns to the interior of the train carriage.

Plain clothesman is walking through with guard. When they reach Edward's seat, one of the children has come to sleep beside him. The guard hesitates a moment, but as Edward is asleep, walks on with plain clothesman.¹⁶

It is now dawn on a deserted country road. Symbolically, a "hedgehog saunters across the road"¹⁷ where David is seen hitchhiking, having washed and shaved in a bush stream. At this point a new character, Tom Morton, is introduced at the wheel of his car. He sees David hitchhiking and pulls up alongside him. David gets in and Morton, having checked his briefcase for his ferry tickets, tosses them in the glove box while informing David that they'll be in Wellington in time for the South Island ferry. In one of several references to his car he explains that arriving on time will be "easy in a car like this". Morton is a self made man and proud of it. As the car drives away the ensuing dialogue sequence demonstrates his attitude to life.

MORTON: We can push it along in a bus like this.

DAVID: I can give you a spell at driving if you like.

MORTON: Not necessary, son. I do this every week or so. Live at the wheel. I've opened up shops right through the Island—all supplied from my own factories.

He looks at David but there is no question to cue him to a life history — disappointing. Tries again.

MORTON: Ever driven a car like this.

DAVID: Not this model. I'd like to though.

MORTON: Keep working hard like I have if you want a car like this. One day you'll get there. It takes a bit of doing these days with taxes and controls everywhere, but I've done it ... You need money to get the good things in this world, son—you've got to be tough.

DAVID: Is that what you are?

MORTON: It's the only way if you want to get ahead. Grind the other bloke down before he gets you.

DAVID: (after pause): The main thing in life, eh?

MORTON: What else?

DAVID: (diffidently): Other things besides money.

MORTON: Name them – nothing that counts. Money – the power it gives you, the things it can buy. Everything else is a lot of fancy nonsense.¹⁸

In introducing Morton, the script returns to the theme of contemporary New Zealand values and morals. Each of the string of characters encountered by David Manning has in some way commented on or challenged his uncertain values, Morton is the least

attractive. Driving a flash car, boasting about his business success, and espousing a shallow philosophy based on money, power and the ability to always beat the other fellow to the punch, he epitomises all the worst features of the business environment from which David escaped. John Graham recalled that his intention was to “strike a contrast, [showing a man that] represented the worst [and was] a pretty nasty piece of work.”¹⁹ Gil Cornwall, who played the part of Tom Morton, saw the character as being a “man who was the antithesis of what John Graham himself dislikes, and therefore he would also be the sort of man that Colin [David Manning] dislikes. Therefore I had to give him something to dislike.”²⁰ There seems a strong danger of stereotype in this character, yet he does represent a familiar type of the period, the *nouveau riche* businessman who has made the most of post-war prosperity.

As the journey continues Morton²¹ “leans over and takes packet of pills from dashboard pocket. Takes one pill and swallows it. Looks apologetically at David.”²² Explaining that he has a bad heart as a result of his wartime experiences in the desert which nearly “euchered” him. (The term “euchered” comes from a game that Gil Cornwall remembered as being “a sort of derivative of 500 or Whist [which] was played by oldies at country dances. My uncles and people like that would gather out there, but they wouldn’t bother to even take their wives for a dance unless it was the last waltz or something [as] they would be playing Euchre.”²³) Although the mention of his heart condition was scripted as a prelude to his heart attack, it was also an attempt by the writers to create a moment’s sympathy for a man who, in spite of his crassness, had suffered in serving his country. As Graham commented: “The biggest bastards in the world have got some redeeming features.”²⁴ Morton then goes on to tell the young man a little of his family.

MORTON: I’ve a daughter about your age. Couldn’t advise her anything, though. Doesn’t think much of her old man (laughs) ... only his money. Not that I see much of her, though --- she prefers living with her mother in Christchurch (mimics with Christchurch an upper bracket attitude)²⁵

Morton, although rich, is obviously unhappy – estranged from his wife and not close to his daughter. However, if David felt a momentary sympathy for him it is soon

eliminated by two subsequent events. “Through the car window can be seen a youth standing beside road as they approach. He is also thumbing a ride.”²⁶ The youth is a Maori. Morton drives straight past. When David points out that there is room in the car, Morton responds that, “You’ve got to draw the line somewhere.”²⁷ As David pointedly looks away Morton explains that, “I’ve got nothing against Maoris but they’re not like us. He wouldn’t even thank me for giving him a lift.”²⁸

The next event immediately follows the older man’s disparaging comments on the Maori race. It is scripted as a montage sequence:

CS hedgehog pokes its nose out of bushes and quietly waddles forward to edge of seal.

M2S Morton and David.

CS hedgehog moves across road.

MS hedgehog in f/g on screen left. Car coming forward on screen right.

CS Morton – his eyes light up briefly – killing a hedgehog will appease his boredom, even if conversation won’t.

CS Morton’s hands on wheel – he pulls car to right of road

CS hedgehog with animal intuition, pulls its head in.

LS Hedgehog in f/g, car swerving across to screen left too

M2S fav. David – he starts forward as car swerves to the right hand side of road.

CS Morton

MORTON: Got ‘im!

CS splattered hedgehog on road.²⁹

David reacts instantly, demanding that Morton stop the car and let him out. This angry reaction bewilders Morton, who laughs and refuses. David reaches for the keys, Morton tries to stop him and in the ensuing tussle, the older man clutches at his heart and slumps over the wheel as the car slithers to a stop. Obviously the hedgehog is scripted to link directly back to Isobel and her comment to David that when hedgehogs “are frightened they just pull their heads in, roll up in a prickly little ball. I wish I could do that.”³⁰ The deliberate killing of such a creature is a clever piece of symbolism, and again in a familiar local detail. But the symbolism of the sequence is

not the only reason for its inclusion. The consequences are momentous. Morton was in the throes of a heart attack and, although ashen faced, is still able to order David from his car. David's response is to put his hand in his pocket. Morton picks up a spanner and David's hand remains in his pocket, but moves slightly. In close-up a knife is shown being drawn from the pocket. Morton slumps forward. (In spite of the linking of the knife with Morton's slumping forward there is no suggestion in the script that David has stabbed him.)

Morton is dead and the mood changes. "MS of car in f/g. Eroded hill valley in b/g. All is quiet and tranquillity of an early morning in country. Slowly David gets out of car in f/g. He is weary, but not from tiredness. His nervous tension has been abated. He stands still and statuesque. Morton's body in car."³¹ David then drags Morton's body to a concealed area under some bushes and stands looking down at him. At this point in the script David's voice is heard as a v/o repeating the line: "When I have plucked the rose, I cannot give it vital growth again. It needs must wither."³²

David's reaction to the death of Morton appears to be one of quiet indifference, even though his association with a dead man has the potential for further complicating his predicament. There is an odd matter-of-factness in his attitude, recalling European precedents such as Belmondo's killing of a cop in *Breathless*, or Meursault's lack of feeling in *The Outsider*. Re-entering the car "he thinks – decides – fishes in pocket – finds what he wants – ferry tickets". In a clever visual transition he then "hands open ferry tickets and pulls slip out. Pull away to show wharf officer signalling car onto ferry."³³ David has hidden the body of a dead man, stolen his car and used his tickets to cross Cook Strait and yet has shown no concern. However, once he has parked the car in the hold and gone on deck, the events of the previous hours overwhelm him. He stands at the rail and lights a cigarette.

Smoking, brooding, [he] tosses the empty packet in the water. Pack hits water. It is whisked away. Water rushes past side of ship and now in foam is formed the death mask of Tom Morton.

CS David, startled – terror fills his eyes – he tears his eyes away from water, blinks, looks down at water.

A young woman, Celia Morton, is on the ship. She goes down into the hold and looks at Morton's car. "In LS she talks to ship's officer. He comes with her to companionway to go up on deck." In the meantime David is still reacting to the death mask he has imagined in the surging waters. As he turns away he sees "Celia, with the deck officer standing at entrance (or exit) from vehicle hold. The officer is pointing at David". He is gripped by panic as Celia comes up to him and says, "You won't know me but you must be Philip Russell. I'm Celia Morton. Daddy told me he might send his right hand man down with the car and fly down himself."³⁴ This somewhat contrived exposition is then followed by a long dialogue sequence in which Celia becomes puzzled and David evasive as he had obviously not counted on meeting the daughter of the man in whose death he had been so closely involved. To gather his thoughts and to buy time, he suggests coffee. Seated opposite each other they continue the conversation.

CELIA: I confess I'm surprised.

DAVID: Are you?

CELIA: Yes ... I'd expect you to be – well, different – I mean, working for Daddy ... well, dressed differently ... We'll be in Christchurch by – what time?

DAVID: (thwarted): You really want to go there.

CELIA: That's where I live—you are taking the car right through aren't you.

DAVID: That's what your Father wanted.

CELIA: You've got other plans.

DAVID: Yes – in a way. Now it's a question of ... how.

CELIA: Are you always so serious? Is this what comes of being a right hand man?

DAVID: I suppose a price has to be paid – one way or the other.³⁵

In trying yet again to run away from the events in his life, David has become further entangled. David's meeting with the daughter of Morton (a young woman of his own age) has the potential to be very interesting provided a sense of contrivance is avoided. Morton has described her as not respecting her father except for his money, and we wait to see what she is really like. Meanwhile David is deliberately evasive in a way we have not seen him before.

The ferry, having crossed Cook Strait, steams through the Marlborough Sounds. The conversation between the two continues on deck. Referring to the scenery of the Sounds, Celia comments, "Sometimes I think it would be wonderful to live in a lonely place like that". The line was presumably designed to echo David Manning's own yearning for a place of escape. When he replies non-committally she goes on to say, "I suppose you're too much in the rat race" to which he responds, "I spent most of my childhood in the country – the rat race came later".

A short scene with the potential for drama occurs as the ferry pulls into Picton.

On deck of ferry – Celia leans on rail. David is sitting on deck seat, studying map. She walks across to him.

CELIA: Don't you know the road?

DAVID: Oh, yes—just looking.

- points to Fiordland

That's ...

CS his finger on Fiordland

where I lived ...

MS2 ... as a kid.

CS Celia – she studies map

CELIA: I've always wanted to go over to the West Coast – never have though.

CS David – he looks calculatingly at her.

After this concise exchange, there is a sudden close-up of a growling dog. In the distance are what the script terms “eroded hills” last seen in the sequence where David ditched Morton’s body. “Across the screen comes a farmer. He points in front of him. Uniformed constable walks up and stands beside him. Both look serious and interested.” A close-up of the dog is juxtaposed with Morton’s face. Morton has been found – the net is closing in on David.

The script returns to the ship which is docking. “David’s eyes search wharf and look reassured.” Celia remarks off screen that they’re in the South Island (a helpful comment for overseas viewers) and he responds, now reassured, “Yes, let’s go.” The car comes off the ferry and David and his companion drive away. The next scene opens on a river bed at the side of the road where David has stopped the Ford. He walks over to the river and splashes water on his face. In a sequence later cut, Celia joins him, commenting that he is tired. His reply is a thinly veiled reference to his faint hope that the South Island will provide him with an opportunity for a fresh start.

DAVID: It’s alright. I like the cold clean water down here. That’s what the Westland’s like. Clear water off the mountains – streams run down to the sea. (looks at her) You’ve never been there?

CELIA: (cs): No.

DAVID: It’s all over there – mountains, rivers, sea...peace. Peace and freedom. Where you can do what you like and no one gives a damn. No one pretends over there – that’s where I belong ... and that’s where I’m going.

CELIA: What about that right hand man?

DAVID: He’s dead. From this moment on he’s dead.

CELIA: He looks wonderfully alive to me, Philip.

DAVID: Philip? ... ah ... call me David – that's my other name. Think of me as David – the left hand man. The right hand man's decided to give the other bloke a chance. He deserves it. Let's get going.

CELIA: I like the left hand man, David.

With her last line, Celia indicates that she is prepared to accept David Manning at face value and that her connection with his father was, for the moment at least, of little consequence. Just what is going on in Celia's mind is not entirely clear, but we can treat this as the kind of scene in an Antonioni movie where a man and a woman are exchanging cryptic dialogue with a subtext of sexual attraction. David's dream of the good place has resurfaced in a new form. The next scene, in a Christchurch street, involves Celia driving up and the car stopping outside a shop. David wakes and asks, fearfully, where they are. She replies that she just wants to get some cigarettes and gets out of the car.

David moves over to driver's seat. He starts engine – looks after her intending to leave her.

MS Celia in shop – she looks around as car engine starts. Startled, she takes her cigarettes and hurries out ... David is in driver's seat.

CELIA: I don't mind driving.

DAVID: I'll drive.

CELIA: Seriously, I like driving.

DAVID: So do I.

CELIA: Whose car is this?

DAVID: The firm's ... your father's. And I'm looking after it.

CELIA: The right hand man again.

DAVID: If you like.

She walks around car. He is again tempted to drive off without her ...

CS Puts car into gear, again decides to wait for her.

Celia gets into car. – she is aloof, annoyed.

DAVID (tenderly) Celia ... I suppose I won't be seeing you again, after this.

CELIA: I suppose not.

DAVID: Come over to the West Coast with me. Just for a day. I'll show you what it's like.

CELIA: Do you always get your own way.

DAVID: Most times.

CELIA: I don't believe you. You don't always get your own way do you, David?

After a brief discussion on the role of fate, she agrees to go with him. Since Celia is the only person who knows of his link to her father, viewers at this point will almost certainly start to wonder whether an increasingly-pressured David Manning may eventually be tempted to do away with her.

Unresolved Tension

The next sequence is set in a Christchurch motel. The motel owner, “a slick tweedy man”, accompanies David to the motel room. They have a fairly desultory conversation about the weather and, as he is about to leave the proprietor says to

David, “I hope you and your wife will be comfortable. It’s warmer here than in Dunedin.” He then leaves and Celia regards him curiously.

CELIA: Did you say we were from Dunedin?

DAVID: Believe I did (off hand)

CELIA: Why?

DAVID: I don’t know. What does it matter?

CELIA: It doesn’t I suppose. It just seems unnecessary to lie.

DAVID: Should I have said you weren’t my wife?

CELIA: He took it for granted.

DAVID: Well, he’s a bloody fool.

CELIA: Don’t I look wifely enough?

The sequence shows that David is keen to cover his tracks. She appears mildly curious as to his motives, but in her final line seems to be adopting a coquettish attitude. After all, she has agreed to spend the night in a motel with him, a man she hardly knows.

The next sequence, later cut, has Celia going for some food at a nearby store. David “slumps on bed, immediately exhausted and worried. But he cannot rest.”³⁶ Celia meantime, leaves the store with a bag of food and enters a phone box. She makes a call while looking in the direction of the motel unit. David looks out the window and sees her. There is a suggestion that he is not simply alarmed but is suddenly struck by her resemblance to someone he knows. “Celia, in a manner reminiscent of Isobel, walks back across the concrete court to cabin with food. David stands in reverie at window, looking out. He hears Celia come into room, but does not react.”³⁷ Such scenes are ambitious in the way they seek to convey an emotional subtext visually.

This part of the film could have the subtlety of a European art film – or a Hitchcock sequence – combining sexual tension with dramatic suspense – but it will require good acting and direction to succeed. The girl explains that she has rung her mother and told her not to worry. When David seizes her arm and angrily asks why, she hastily reassures him that he was not mentioned and that her mother could expect her when she saw her. David then apologises. She responds, “Daddy was flying down later – when is he coming today or tomorrow.”³⁸ The grammatical construction is peculiar but serves to keep things up in the air. The sequence continues with a fairly lengthy television news scene. Although subsequently deleted, one item, although of no direct relevance to the plot, is of historical interest, reminding us of the on-going nature of a particular news story in our region of the world.

There has been no response from the French government to the [nuclear testing] protests presented to it yesterday. While informed sources in Paris state that no reply is likely to be made officially, the growing dissatisfaction with France’s refusal to receive or consider protests seems likely to lead to further and more vehement criticism.³⁹

As the news item ends, Celia comes out of the shower wrapped in a towel. In spite of the erotic potential of the situation (relatively daring for a film in the early 1960s) the scene ends lamely. David has fallen asleep watching television. He wakes and she suggests he has a shower while she clears the dishes. The conclusion of the scene is amusingly naive.

David comes out of the shower wrapped in towel. Stops, looks at Celia.

DAVID: You staying there?

CELIA: I am (pauses) I’m tired. Aren’t you—and anyway----

CS Celia – she looks up at him, takes and kisses his hand.

CELIA: I’ll see you in the morning ---- early start.

CS David – he watches her quietly and tenderly.

DAVID: Yes, early start.⁴⁰

One can only speculate on why the script-writers had devoted so much time to a sequence in which David Manning and the new woman in his life spend the night in a motel but show virtually no physical interest in each other. Was this a necessary nod to the film censorship of the period? A fear that the two characters might have seemed “cheap” (too casual about sex)? Or – perhaps most likely – a desire to build up the sexual tension further.

The final motel scene shows that events are closing in on David Manning, and increases the conflict between his attraction to Celia and the danger she potentially represents.

Sandshoes on gravel. Early morning. A youth has a bunch of newspapers. He puts one under the door of Cabin 5 and walks towards Cabin 6.

CS David wakes fearfully. He hears pad of footsteps on gravel. His eyes look to the door.

Paper is slid under door.

David silently hurries out of bed – picks up paper. He studies it – sees item.

CS Item ‘BODY FOUND The body of an unidentified middle aged man was found near the roadside today by ... etc’. David looks up slowly from newspaper. The chips are down. No path is open except flight. But fear is not his dominant emotion. No longer exhausted, he now faces the day with more resolution and clear-headedness than he has hitherto been able to summon up. He stands. He folds paper and puts it under mattress. He walks over to settee.

CS Celia is still sleeping.

CS he looks down at her.

MS the same – There is no hint of menace or aggression in his attitude.

Later in the sequence the girl wakes and comes out to the kitchen, where David is making coffee. The following dialogue sequence is notable for its attempt to show that their romantic relationship is developing, in spite of his personal dilemmas.

DAVID: You're awake ... Coffee madame.

CELIA: I feel so good this morning.

DAVID: It's all the purity.

CELIA: It must be the southern air. [At this point, inexplicably, a hand-written “DIANA” appears.] Did you sleep well?

DAVID: Yes, I slept.

The next two lines hint at the possibility that they may have made love at some stage during the night. Equally it could also mean that they had not because he had behaved “like a gentleman”. Much would depend on the way in which they were spoken, the expressions on the actor’s faces and the camera position. A curious feature of this page of the script is the fact that Celia’s name has for the first time been written as “Diana”.

CELIA: Thank you for last night.

DAVID: There's nothing to thank me for.

The scene continues with Celia kissing him on the cheek

CELIA: You're very nice.

DAVID: That's what you think. But thanks for saying it.

CELIA: I mean it.

She attempts to kiss him but he turns away distractedly. She perseveres and he “returns her embrace. They could be lovers – but now his thoughts plague him as he looks at her. She separates himself from her embrace.”⁴¹ A little hurt, she offers to make more coffee but he insists that it is time to go. Telling her to get dressed he says that he will go and get some petrol.

The next sequence takes place at a petrol station. The detailed references to the car may not be unrelated to the fact that John O’Shea has obtained sponsorship from the Ford Motor Company and consequently may have needed to include positive comments about the Fairlane in the script. Drawing attention to the car also creates more pressure for David Manning as the service station attendant will be likely to remember it if questioned by the police.

Attendant: Beautiful car these. How’s you find it?

DAVID: It’s alright.

Attendant: Alright! You’re lucky to have one like this. Yours? (David nods “no”). The old man’s, eh. My old man had an early ... wouldn’t let me touch it. I was thirty before I drove a car. Your old man must be pretty good to you. You must feel proud in a beauty like this ... A car like this stands out. It’s got real class ... and you get the birds too, eh?⁴²

David pays him (£1 18s 4d for over ten gallons of petrol) and the attendant adds a final comment as he begins to pull away.

Attendant: Well, take it easy. Look after the old man’s car. You mightn’t get it again if you don’t.⁴³

David returns to the motel. As he comes into the room, Celia is pulling on her blouse. He tells her it’s a beautiful morning. David asks if she is sure that she wants to come with him and she replies, “I do like you very much; very much, left hand man”. They get into the car where “she nestles close to him”. She is in a carefree mood. When

David, who obviously had ulterior motives says, “We may not be back tonight. I may never come back”, she responds, “No – let’s never come back. Let’s go wild like everyone else over there”.

At this point in the script, David’s sister and brother in law re-appear, in a rather bland discussion about him: “You’re still not worrying about David, are you? Look, no news is good news. I hate to see you worrying—especially about him.”⁴⁴ This scene has, not surprisingly, been cut, though there is relevance in the fact that David is getting physically closer to his relatives on the West Coast. The script moves to a series of interior and exterior shots which depict David and Celia in the car, heading westward. David’s urgency, and the rapport that is developing between them, are encapsulated in one detail:

Interior car. Celia looks at speedo as she is rocked from side to side. She touches David’s arm. He looks down at speedo.

CS David – smiles at her and nods apologetically.⁴⁵

The writers presumably considered it important at this point to include a specific romantic scene to clear up the likely confusion in the audience’s mind regarding the relationship between the young couple. The car stops near the top of a hill, and they get out and climb up a knoll to the summit.

Standing on the top. Celia sits down. She looks up at David.

MS David – the wind blows romantically in his hair as he is lost in a nostalgic reverie.

Celia, looking up, puts her hand in his.

David looks down at her.

Celia pulls him down beside her. They embrace. CAM tilts down as the ferns are disturbed.⁴⁶

Later, at the top of the knoll the couple encounter a family in a scene designed to bring David firmly back to reality. The family is picnicking and the young boy Tommy notices the Ford and goes over to it.

WOMAN: Come back here, Tommy, don't go over to that car.

MAN: Funny place to leave a car.

WOMAN: They won't have left it there, stupid—they'll be tourists looking at the view.

David and Celia come back over the knoll. Man and woman look at them.

MAN: Young fella to have a car like that.

WOMAN: It's nice to be some people.

David and Celia near car. Tommy has wandered over beside car.

TOMMY: Beaut car, mister.

DAVID: Yes.

TOMMY: Youse not from the Coast are you.

CS David, again apprehensive as he glances down at Tommy.

Man has walked over too.

MAN: Everything alright.

DAVID: Yes, thank you.

MAN: Great day.

DAVID: (David and Celia getting into car.) Great.

David is in car and starting it when he hears child speak. David reacts and drives away quickly.

TOMMY: (c/s) Hey Dad isn't that the sort of car they were talking about on the wireless?

Man looks keenly after David, – as usual he hasn't really listened to what his son has said. But he will remember it – in the pub – afterwards.⁴⁷

In a contemporary film there would have been a more protracted and sensuous love scene, suggesting, for a brief time that David had been able to forget his troubles, only to have them surge back in the scene with the family. Yet, even with this brief love scene, the mood of his relationship with Celia has changed. The scene is a necessary prelude to the next stage in the narrative where Celia's loyalty to David will be put to the test.

In David's nostalgic perspective Westland has been a wild yet beautiful place where one could escape reality. But, as circumstances close in on the runaway, the script symbolically represents his deteriorating situation.

Car speeds down back road. Derelict remnants of settlement. Corrugated iron sheets no longer even protect the sides of abandoned shops and dwellings. Vestigial remains of man's despoiling habits. Scars on the landscape from dredge tailings.⁴⁸

Knowing that the car is liable to be his undoing, David decides to abandon it by veering off the road and stopping in thick undergrowth beside a dilapidated hut. When his companion asks him what he is doing he admits, as he begins to cover the car with bushes, that "The car'll soon be an embarrassment to me over here". He then half drags her through the scrub with him, making for dense bush. In the course of this tracking shot:

She is just able to keep up with him. Though not rough with her, he is nonetheless taking her unmistakably by force ...

Gathering all her strength, she stops and makes David face her.

CELIA: Tell me. You're in trouble. Why did you abandon the car.

DAVID: I had to.

CELIA: Where's my father's then?

David's response is evasive, stating that he's "quitting the whole set-up [and] going bush". Dragging her on further he explains that he wants to get to Hokitika before dark to meet his sister. He then stops and turning to her says, "Celia, why did I have to run into you? It would have been so much easier for both of us. Now I have to take you with me."⁴⁹ The pair then press on and eventually emerge from the bush to an uninhabited hut in a clearing. As they enter it starts to rain. Celia stretches out on a bunk and falls asleep. David makes a fire. "It is darkening. He looks at Celia. MS Celia sleeps. David leaves hut."⁵⁰

The next sequence brings the two storylines together for the first time. It has considerable dramatic potential, particularly juxtaposed with the shot of David looking at the sleeping girl.

CS knife. It is in a man's hand. He fingers it gingerly – rehearsing motion of stabbing. CAM pulls away and David is looking through window. He moves from window to door.⁵¹

The scene continues with David stealthily pushing the door open and, through a chink, seeing Julia who is at the kitchen sink watching the rehearsal. He signals to her and, surprised, she comes over to him. In the ensuing conversation he asks for her help, including some tramping gear, food and money. She informs him that the police had called at her home. The scene then cuts to Julia's home where David, wearing tramping boots, is stuffing clothes into a pack. He also asks for some of her old clothes, explaining that he has a girl with him. She shrugs and goes to get some more clothing. His brother in law Jim then appears at the doorway.

JIM: On the run. You'll end up in real trouble some day.

MCS DAVID: I suppose I should have played it safe like you -

JIM: You choose to be different.

DAVID: I choose nothing. Things happen. Now I must accept what comes along. Even the kind of assistance you're giving.⁵²

David's comment seems a fair summary of his inability to take control of his life. Such a reactive attitude will make it difficult for viewers to sympathise with him, and seems to make him an unlikely candidate as hero of a film, unless the writers are exploring some notion of fate, or see David as a character who will eventually be brought to self-awareness.

The tense dialogue between the two men continues. Julia then hands David some money, though her husband voices his protest.

DAVID: Thanks, Julia. (to Jim) It really hurts doesn't it?

JIM: You're just not good. And I'm sorry for you.

DAVID: Save your tears. You'll need them for yourself one day.⁵³

Buoyed up by his sister's unquestioning kindness and assistance, his proud rejoinder to his brother in law's criticism shows that he is not merely a sorry victim of circumstances but still has spirit.

The Bush Hut

This sense of David being energised helps the script-writers to overcome their procrastination and finally write a love scene. The setting is certainly appropriate – the isolated hut located deep in a rain-soaked bush setting, lit by a lantern and warmed by a flickering fire. David enters. His companion is awake and runs forward and embraces him. She is relieved, and he is uncharacteristically confident.

CELIA: You came back.

CS David – he touches her hair, almost protectively.

CS CELIA: There's no reason why you should've come back.

M2S fav. David – he brushes the scene away lightly.

DAVID: Had you forgotten so soon – I'm your guide – for a conducted tour of Westland.⁵⁴

As the fire burns low, David begins an edited explanation of the events which lead up to their present circumstances. Concluding his explanation he tells her that he spent a month or two in the far North and “tried to go native in a way. That didn't work either. Another myth. The rest you know.” The next line originally was, “I stole the car and your father's ferry tickets”. Celia's response of “But my father?” is ignored by David who tells her that they are to stay in the hut for the night and push off in the morning. Celia again asks about her father and David's response is, “Oh … he's resting up. He did have a bit of a turn – heart, I think … so there you are. You're alone on the wild west coast with a criminal.” In a close up Celia thinks about her father then after a moment dismisses the thought.

CELIA: I didn't think you'd show up again.

DAVID: You sorry I did.

CELIA: I'm glad, David.⁵⁵

David has revealed the true situation – or at least some of it – and is rewarded by Celia's loyalty. The strength of her attraction to David could remain something of a mystery to the audience, and her character is generally under-developed in a way feminist critics would later find unsatisfactory. The focus is certainly on David's steps towards self-awareness rather than hers.

After making it clear that she wants to stay, Celia suggests that she could help him face his problems. Sitting down beside her he comments:

DAVID: No matter what happens you're not the same person again – it's as if a ... (struggles for image) a wind blows you along the beach – you're free, but only so long as you can stop yourself hurting others. It mightn't be so easy to survive without hurting people. Anyway you've got to let the winds carry you along.

Fated, aimless or devil-may-care? The sequence seems to be designed to convey all of those messages. The speech has a philosophical tone, as though the writers are defining a particular sense of life's "absurdity". So far as David is concerned, he is at least displaying a new articulateness, a new clarity and control. The sequence, therefore, comes to a natural conclusion when he "pulls her head down and kisses her passionately". At last he is the one taking the initiative.

The script moves to next day at a shingle river where Clarrie, "a grizzled ... rough outback character, with vitality" is whitebaiting. This is revised to Clarrie hunting as he "sights another deer". Nearby David and Celia are walking towards a hut at the mouth of the river. The interior, which they enter, contrasts with the sparseness of the previous hut. Signs of human habitation are evident from the "ash and part burnt logs in fireplace. Camp oven, old cups and mugs, crude furniture, old wirewoves and disintegrating mattress. A pair of oars, old fishing nets – no personal belongings – a magazine or two."

Clarrie suddenly appears and, taking the presence of Celia and David for granted, "drops his swag on the floor."⁵⁶ The ensuing dialogue again raises the issue of values, ownership and belonging. In the wilds of Westland, the contrasts are much starker than in Auckland or the Hokianga.

DAVID: This your place?

CS Clarrie – he goes about getting food from his gladstone bag.

CLARRIE: No. Nobody's place.

DAVID: I thought it might belong to someone.

CLARRIE: Nothin' belongs to no one round 'ere. Some jokers think things belong to them. But they don't.

DAVID: It's alright if we stay then.

CLARRIE: No one owns nothin' round these parts I know of. Least not in my way of thinking. Them oars over there now was put there by a bloke's drowned last year. He don't need them now.

David and Celia are eating. They offer some to Clarrie who refuses and takes out his own.⁵⁷

The sight of a young woman is a novelty for Clarrie.

[He] looks with increasing lechery at Celia, casting occasional appraising glances towards David.

David stands and looks out window. Again it's raining. He speaks to break the mood of lechery.

DAVID: It's raining.

Exterior hut. Rain is pelting down again. Three people are imprisoned by the rain inside the hut.

MCS Clarrie and Celia – he almost ogles her – he casts a glance at David.

CLARRIE: Lot of rain here. Don't mind me. Pretend I'm not here. Do what you'd do if I wasn't here.⁵⁸

His coarse comment is followed by a leeringly ambiguous, “We’re in for a wet night”, spoken as he leans forward and puts his hand on Celia’s. David’s reaction is in keeping with a man who is increasingly striving to maintain the initiative – he curtly tells Clarrie to “Beat it”. The old man’s mood of lechery immediately is replaced by one of pleading.

CLARRIE: Here’ll do me for the night.

DAVID: Find yourself another hole. We were here first.

CLARRIE: You wouldn’t be pushing an old man out on a night like this.

In spite of his crude advances to her, Celia feels sorry for the man.

CELIA: You can’t, David.

CLARRIE: Thanks lady. Your heart’s in the right place, but I wouldn’t be knowing where his is, even if he’s got one. Thanks lady … It’s a long time since I seen a young one like you.⁵⁹

Although David has been over-ruled by Celia, he has made his point strongly and the man backs off. He “turns, sadly, morosely and looks into [the] fire. A lonely man, half mad, isolated, but aware of the situation. Silence. Sound of rain.” Clarrie illustrates the negative aspects of the “man alone” role – this is the sad reality.

Taking a bottle of whisky from his bag Clarrie offers it to Celia and David. They both take a swig and a relieved Clarrie then takes a mouth organ from his bag and commences playing. His final comment shows that in spite of the poverty of his lifestyle, he can claim to identify with the wilderness.

CLARRIE: You might belong here and you might not. Seems like you don’t.

DAVID: We’re here, aren’t we.

The script cuts back to Jim and Julia in their home, being asked by a policeman when they last saw David. Jim replies, “He was here a week ago”. In an effect reminiscent of the fish head floating in the Hokianga harbour, Jim’s statement is juxtaposed with a close up of a “kahawhai gasping in bottom of boat” in which David and Celia are fishing. A plane flies overhead and lands on the lake edge where Clarrie hands over venison to the pilot. David comments that, “Clarrie’s very modern – flies his venison out”. Clarrie is shown pointing out the fishing pair to the pilot. David continues “unconcernedly fishing” but he is obviously aware that the arrival of the plane has increased the likelihood of his discovery.

The next sequence is a crucial one. The story, which has centred around David Manning, is drawing to a close. His character has been shown as complex and his motivation difficult to fathom. At this point the writers obviously considered it important to consolidate some of the story’s key elements by confronting David with a crisis so that his reactions would help to clarify the character and his psychology. The scene raises the stakes in forcing David to make a direct choice between life and death, yet it leaves some aspects of his motivation as puzzling as ever. As the plane flies away David suggests they return to shore. The girl agrees and they begin to change positions in the dinghy. As they do so she loses her balance and falls in the lake.

One oar goes overboard too. David retrieves it.

Celia struggling in the water.

David laughs at her – his expression changes to concern, then immobile fascination. Sinister interior absorption.

Celia’s face is washed with water – she almost goes under. And then it is the death mask of her father in the water ...

David is paralysed at the sight.

CS Celia struggling in water—and for a moment, she looks alarmed at David.

CELIA: David!

David is galvanised into action. He swings boat round takes hold of her hair as she struggles to surface and drags her on board. Gives her his jersey to ... warm up.

David rows them ashore. To underscore the menacing nature of the sequence, there is a cutaway where a “seagull picks eyes out of fish-head” (later dropped from the script).⁶⁰

There follows a dialogue sequence in which Celia probes him for an explanation, and he attempts, with limited success, to respond.

CELIA: Why did you wait? Your face when you looked at me ... I saw you ...

DAVID: I must have ... shock I guess. Anyhow it's alright.

CELIA: Is it? Is it David?

DAVID: What do you mean. You didn't drown.

CELIA: But I might have. You were waiting, weren't you? You nearly let me drown.

DAVID: What the hell are you saying.

CELIA: I was so frightened.

DAVID: You'll be alright in a while – it's shock.

CELIA: David, what is it?

DAVID: What's what?

CELIA: Yes ... it's shock (pauses) David – Why?

David has no answer and he walks away to the water's edge. Again there is some scripted symbolism as the camera "follows his feet on sand – empty shells – fish head with eyes picked out – grains of sand move in wind". Diana is confused rather than angry. She comes up behind him and asks

CELIA: David ... why?

DAVID: (finally): I don't know. I don't know. If I knew, if I'd ever really known, I wouldn't be here.

His foot nudges deer head.

DAVID: (o/s): Is that all I am? It's getting cold.

CELIA: The snows'll come down soon – you should go back and face it all.

[The following three lines are deleted:]

DAVID: I can't. Leave me.

CELIA: We'll go back together.

DAVID: I've told you – there's nothing back there.

The three lines are significant, particularly Celia's offer to accompany and support him. In spite of his inexplicable behaviour when she was in the water, in spite of his being wanted by the police, Celia was prepared to go back with him and stand beside him as he dealt with his difficulties. David has not previously met anyone so supportive. However, in spite of her offer, he is adamant:

DAVID: I've told you – there's nothing back there. I've chosen to face whatever I have to face – here.⁶¹

The motivation remains obscure. The most positive aspect of David's decision is his conscious commitment to facing the consequences. But he seems also wedded to some kind of romantic form of existentialism where living in the here and now is the only authentic option. The sound of a plane is heard off screen and David realises that the authorities have caught up with him. He watches the plane land in the estuary and Clarrie walking out towards it where he points out the young fugitive to the constable and ranger. Entering the hut he quickly packs a few essentials and starts to leave. Celia is determined to accompany him.

CELIA: I'm coming with you.

DAVID: You can't. I'm on my own now. I'll try and cross the Pass at the top of the Glacier.

CELIA: Don't leave me, David.

DAVID: It's me they're after alright.

David leaves the hut, and (rather too quickly) reaches the foot of the glacier leaving the pursuers well behind. Celia, who "tags along" is near exhaustion and as he clammers up the slope she calls in vain, "Come back, David, come back." He continues to scramble up the icy slope as she attempts to follow him. The pursuers, in a brief dialogue sequence point out to each other that there is no way out for their quarry, "Just mountains and snow". The runaway meanwhile has reached the top of a ridge and the camera shows an "exultant shot of David – stopping to look below at masses of ice he has covered. [In a close-up he looks] confident, resolved, somewhat purified."⁶² The pursuers catch up with Celia, who lacks the stamina to follow her lover. David is now a distant figure. She addresses the constable and the ranger.

CELIA: Let him go, let him go.

David, an even smaller figure, in snowfield.

RANGER: There's no sense in chasing him. He's had it. Young fool.

Constable: No more'n he deserved.

Celia turns on him slowly, looking for some compassion from him.

CELIA: How can you say that ...

CS Celia – tears

CELIA: You never knew him.⁶³

The final shot of Celia, intercut with a low angle shot of David walking forward to an unknown fate shows her resting in distress against the snow.

CELIA: (a whisper) : David, oh David.⁶⁴

From a final tracking shot of David Manning heading into the icy wilderness the film jumps abruptly to a close-up of hands drawn across a chest, revealing his former girlfriend Sandra, who speaks to Athol:

SANDRA: You're still thinking about David.

Athol turns his head to side.

ATHOL: Uh huh.

SANDRA: It's so sad about David.

ATHOL: Who knows.

He turns over and as he does so his eyes are attracted to.....

ECS Seagull. It looks plaintive then startled flies off with loud beating of close-up wings and flies away to a speck on which is supered 'END'.⁶⁵